SLOW-BURN JOURNAL: IN THE TENDERLOIN

BOOK V

Jan. 12, 1994 – April 17, 1994

Wednesday, Jan. 12, 1994

I went to work in the afternoon, after typing in the morning. Then I walked it off by walking home.

There was a manila envelope in the mail – a paper from the moderator of the CHAOS IN HISTORY session, Michael Shermer. It was on "THE ROLE OF CONTINGENCY AND NECESSITY IN HISTORICAL SEQUENCES," along with a pamphlet for *Skeptic Magazine*, complete with diagrams on "bifurcating historical sequences – complex."

Also a flyer for a play, *WHOSE LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?* It was from the Actress, who is in it – the one I was kissing on New Year's Eve. I may have overdone it, seeing as how we're old friends, and not sure if I stirred up something. She called last night and asked, "How was your weekend?" I started telling her and she said, "I only have five minutes." There was a comment on how I take her literally. Anyhow, she wants me to see the play next week. I've been hearing how difficult the rehearsals have been, and there were problems with the woman director. When we were off the phone I paced around for a while with a vague sense of the mood having altered between us, picking up signals as

subtle as a virus (only more positive) of a possible romance. Maybe it was my imagination. I'm being careful as a few wrong moves and I would no longer be friends with her (or her with me), this being a headstrong and emotional woman, an actress with some bitter resentments against men, and any involvement would be a big production, if not operatic. I'm not sure I'm in the mood for that.

9 p.m. The last installment of *Tales of the City*. I had a waning interest, coinciding with the requirements of the plot, and when it ended I didn't know what to think. A hodge-podge of the sentimental and sardonic with some kitsch contrivances. There was an effect which I can't stand where the characters are being emotional and sincere with each other (on Christmas Eve), but in a way that was unearned by the drama. What can you expect from a writer whose "observation of the Safeway social scene launched his career…"? Maybe he's the Neil Simon of the 1970's with a few better lines in a largely homosexual milieu. He was honest about it, especially when dealing with class conflicts in the gay community. There was an unsympathetic portrayal of rich older gay men with a condescending attitude.

There was a plot device which leaves you groaning: one of the main characters, the older woman who runs the rooming house, used to be a man (the part is played by Olympia Dukakis). Hardly anyone is untouched by homosexuality in this story, including the young socialite wife whose gynecologist has been sleeping with her rake of a husband, and whose dying father (a businessman with six months to live) is having an affair with a transsexual. He didn't know it at first, but later didn't mind (he was stoned). Anna Madrigal's tenants include a young cruising homosexual (Michael). He lives with a woman who had a lesbian affair with a black model. There is a handsome straight

neighbor, looking for women, who ends up friends with Michael and they go out cruising together. “Let’s break up a couple.” And the straight girl from the Midwest, Maryann, finds out the shy and lonely man on the top floor is into child pornography and blackmail.

There is a curious mix in Maupin’s head of the romantic and the sordid, and you wonder how weak the marijuana was back then. Some of the characters have a perpetual joint in their mouth as if it was a cigarette, and to not much effect. There was a cameo by Country Joe, a brief appearance by Rod Steiger, and even Karen Black, passing reminders of what relatively thin material it is. There was a reference to *Vertigo*, which was shot here. I took it as an allusion to the vertigo of cruising. And when it comes to est[1] or TM, I prefer *The Tempest*.

I was underwhelmed by this view of San Francisco as a place of unreal release which people come to from real places, living out their fading fantasies. With some you wouldn’t know it, their wildest fantasy being to hold down a job and fit in. With others it is more apparent, living in an “enchanted” cul-de-sac for the marginalized. It is becoming even more peripheral and irrelevant, like a charming tangent or an offshoot to the main power axis of New York – Los Angeles. You can do anything you want here, mainly because it doesn’t matter. It’s like you’re operating in a vacuum, or one of those offshore resorts. Maybe I’ve been here too long.

There was a letter to the editor in the *Chronicle*, comparing *Tales of the City* to *Remembrance of Things Past* by Proust. That’s like comparing a Victorian apartment to Chartres. It’s an unfair comparison as Maupin knew his limits and stuck to those, and if

[1] Erhard Seminars Training

the message was sugar coated, or had some other white powder, it was still shown that homosexuals look for love and work like anyone else**.**

Thursday, Jan. 13, 1994

10 a.m. A phone call from B. which went on for nearly two hours. She had somehow gotten into the sold-out show at the Berkeley Rep of Anna Deavere Smith, and was slightly deflated when I told her I saw it on Channel 9 a while back (*Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* (1992)). The caricature of a dead Jewish man's brother was a bit much, but I have a lot of respect for what she does with "verbatim theater."[2] B. went with our friend Phoebe, who tends to view things from a victimological standpoint (which B. has little patience with), but the show was more realistic than that, so she wasn't sure what to think.

More talk about the other woman (I wrote room). She finally discussed it with Phoebe, who was so preoccupied with her own problems with a man that B. said, "You like to be miserable." She ran me through it again, how she took my advice about leaving Ilsa a message. The latter was conciliatory and called back, leaving a message. I told B. that compared to some women I've known this is a form of integrity. It's nicer than a disappearing act.

There was some mention of New Year's Eve and the Actress, who B. is worried might be after me. I told her we were kissing for a while and she nearly had a fit. "I knew it! She has you in her clutches!" An odd response, but she admits she doesn't like it when other women latch on to her men friends, taking them out of circulation as it were.

[2] Verbatim theater is a form of theater in which plays are constructed from the "words spoken by people interviewed about a particular event or topic."

She mentioned something at the Saloon on Sunday afternoon with Perkoff, the sax player. He went to Germany with a ballerina, but has returned for a while (he was at one of my parties a couple of years ago). A bunch of people are going to hear him, and I think Johnny Nitro and the Doorslammers will be there later. I haven't seen them since the oldest dive in town closed down near the waterfront, Bouncer's Bar (with the dollar bills on the ceiling - a low overhead). It should have been declared a cultural landmark, but was canceled by a condo that went up next door with thin-skin occupants who didn't like the bands. Or maybe all that authenticity in close proximity made them nervous.

An old friend of hers, a hulking bear of a man who is a stoner with long hair (I call him Stone), lives in a funky house stuffed with things he picks up – from car parts to amplifiers. It seems he is becoming a paranoid survivalist, stockpiling things for the Apocalypse or a government takeover. He showed her his latest acquisitions, several AK-47's with hundreds of rounds of ammunition. He is concerned about the gun laws which might start being effective. Stone is in his early forties, works at the hospital repairing wheelchairs and other equipment, and has been carrying a depressing torch for her for years. She feels a little guilty for leading him on – give these men an inch and they will dream a mile - but he was useful as a driver, escort, and equipment man. A good drug connection too. However, she doesn't like guns and neither do I.

I'm not sure who he thinks he can hold off with automatic rifles in his house. The authorities could sit back at a distance and lob mortar shells through his ceiling if it comes to that.[3]

[3] As noted in a previous journal, he died a few years later while camping with friends at Clear Lake. There was probably some drinking. During the night he got up to take a leak on the edge of the lake, slipped on the rocks, and they found him floating in the water the next morning.

Around noon I was off the phone and ready to hit the typewriter. There was no work with the Attorney in court (Latino juveniles with a police brutality complaint). I thought I might do the laundry and catch the evening news which I never see – a video package wound tight with glittering commercials.

A few minutes later the phone rang. It was Ming downstairs. We talked for a bit, forgetting she was at the door. I rang her up, but she hung up too fast and called back a minute later. I rang her up again. She walked in with her mountain bike, wearing black shorts, a T-shirt from Thailand (Thai dye), and was exuberant. "We're going to be neighbors!" She was excited about having found a studio on the 7th floor not far from here for her and the recycled boyfriend.

She pulled out a map of the city and peered at it, got it wrong, but finally marked with a pen where I am and where she will be. There was an agenda – she needed to type out a job application, and wanted to use the typewriter. So rather than my using it I sat on the side with her using it, and ended up answering her questions. I was on a wooden guitar for a while, the sunlight flickering through the windows on a warm afternoon.

Somehow we were together for the next twelve hours. I didn't accomplish much and neither did she (who wanted to attend a small business seminar that evening in Berkeley), but we have one of the deeper force fields I know of, and that's not chopped liver. It has the makings of a domestic continuum and there's a fine line here, what with her living with someone else, but we generate a clearing when we're together. It's a comfort zone with our antennae out, the signals going back and forth. I think sometimes we neutralize each other's plans because it is so edifying just to hang out - nothing else is

worth the effort. It feels like we inhabit each other, so we stay in and the hours pass with little effort.

The afternoon and evening went by in one or two-hour segments. Talking for an hour, throwing together a lunch, working on her resume application while I was on the guitar. I took a shower and lay on the bed by the window in dark briefs until the light was waning and I put some clothes on. She decided at the last minute she didn't feel like going to the East Bay, my having expressed no interest in it, and it was getting dark.

The conversation was a tour de force, another woman whose life or nervous system isn't organized in such a way as to lend itself to writing. That doesn't mean there isn't an awareness being vocalized. We bounce ideas off each other, being mildly insulting at times, and then go off into the esoteric. There can be erotic interludes because we have erotic bodies which affect the mind. Related subjects come up spontaneously. At some point I was riffing off the historical model of contingency-necessity, describing a man and woman: he touches her bifurcation trigger point gently and she moans… eventually leading to a butterfly trigger effect, or is it flutterbutt (she laughed), with "cascading consequences." Their "competing necessities" cause an interaction which may stimulate or inhibit… the "varying degrees of impact…."

We found an article in the paper about a garage sale in the Haight. A man was selling human fetuses in jars. I'm not sure if they were $10 or $50 each (there were five). Technically there are no laws against it, but they were confiscated by the police.

I told her about Sylvia Plath, and what seems like the bell jar effect of some women's writing. It's like they view things from inside a semi-precious vacuum for better or worse, until death do they fall apart.

I sometimes get that feeling from Maxine Hong Kingston, a writer of Chinese descent who grew up in California. Half an hour later Ming and I were sitting at her feet, my foot almost touching hers in black boots, a black velvet outfit, and long silver-grey hair which Ming said she would like to have someday. The woman is less than five feet tall, with the gravity, poise, and humor of an expanded mind.

How did this transpire? Around seven we walked a few blocks to the bookstore for a reading I had read about, and made the fortuitous decision to move to the front on the side. It was crowded, no empty chairs, so we sat on the floor, leaning against the books near a table. Three women walked in and sat behind it. Maxine was so close I could have kicked her (she smiled at us).

One by one they rose to read selections from an anthology, *Growing Up Asian American*. The first woman was tall and regal with short white hair. She was a girl in India and was married at sixteen in 1932 – not showing her age except in her hands. I think she was of mixed race.

An hour later, with each woman reading fifteen to twenty minutes, it was opened to questions from the audience (less than half of which was Asian). Most of them were women and constituted such a reverent feminine hush that no one had anything to say. Finally a woman asked the standard question about how to get started as a writer. There were responses about using one's own experiences, and the universality of being unique. It's your business to get it out there, it will find an audience (or not). MHK threw out a line from Cocteau, that if you survive to twelve you will have enough material to write for the rest of your life.

People lined up for the book signing, a signature performance, and we left. Ming was in a hurry, “I have to pee,” and disappeared while I flipped through the book. Surprised to find there were some male writers in it.

We went to Max’s Opera Café next door, with me having a glass of wine and her having tea. I was a little wound up, having felt restless or trapped in there, a little bored at times with the ordinary prose, except for MHK. The first two readers were informative if only in showing how a woman’s mind works, getting inside her head and looking out. On the other hand, they seemed to have an air of inherent faultlessness, and even Ming was put off by that. A self-congratulatory woman in her seventies was living in this area in her late twenties with a couple of kids and a husband of eleven years. She more or less dropped him and he faded out of the story like a dead leaf. She said it was just one of those things, and didn’t tell him she was feeling disenchanted or resentful. His wife wasn’t able to put it into words, so it caught him by surprise. It got me how discardable he was, and she continued with the kids.

The second woman, about thirty (half-Japanese, half-white), with one of those traumatic first date stories where she ends up in a parked car at night with her “new breasts” and an older Japanese fellow. He is allegedly some kind of jerk, who is twenty-two and she is around fifteen. She finds her shirt and bra coming off like a dream with no resistance. Then her pants are off as well, as if dissolving in the dim glow of a street light. Her “pale” body lies on the seat while the man gets familiar in a “disgusting” manner, even pulling out something from his pants and she doesn’t know how to hold it. Then I think her father showed up. At any rate, the man gave up and suggested a book for her, *The Sensuous Woman*.

It was curious how her resentment lingered years later. She was so passive that a man could remove her clothes and she would just sit there and not mind it, or she wanted him to and she resented that he didn't follow through. A month later he was going out with someone else. The mood of the story, with an audience of mostly women, was of innocence and the beast.

I talked about it with Ming, getting her perspective. We wondered if she should have asked some questions, like where does one find a bra that comes off so easily. And if Ming should have mentioned one of her professors, the Chinese lesbian Marxist who thought that Asian women writers in this country are ignoring the plight of the masses. I'm not sure how that would have gone over or how relevant it was. MHK, reading from her first book, *Woman Warrior* (which I read a long time ago), had a constant emphasis on feeling worthless or second-rate as a girl. That hit close to home with Ming, it being a common belief in China that girls are a waste of time and effort since they marry and go to someone else's family. Where's the profit? You're better off raising geese.

The American part of being Asian-American was not the worst of their concerns. The first woman had a domineering mother while struggling against the constricting customs of her own ethnic background, as did MHK, while the second woman showed her resentment against a Japanese man.

Meanwhile, we were in Max's with a singing waitress next to the piano. Ming didn't like her voice. I was ready for some Russian cabbage soup and bread, but she didn't know what she wanted and went through an indecisive interlude which eventually led us across the street, then back to Max's on the dinner side. We left and walked to Bull's, which was closed, and over to Zim's which didn't look too interesting, and finally

walked back, negotiating along the way. We ended up with takeout from a Vietnamese place - the one with a fishpond and murals of palm trees and the TV news interviewing a "flu victim." We wondered if we would be on Channel 5 if one of us got a cold.

10:30 p.m. Back at my place at the round wooden table with a couple of Bass ales and bebop on the radio.

Earlier there was some discussion about her relations with the recycled boyfriend. She characterizes herself as being "unmarriageable," or is it unmanageable, and takes a certain pride in that (she is also unclear on the concept of being a "girlfriend"). So it was with wonder and ambiguity that she heard him float the idea of their getting married. She didn't know what to think, but was noncommittal - nothing that would transpire within a year's time anyhow. I started to say that anyone who marries her would be… "Excuse me?!"

A little after midnight I walked her downstairs with the bike and out the door and across the street. She rode by the hookers strolling in the shadows.

I made coffee and read.

Friday, Jan. 14, 1994

Typing in the morning, dreary outside.

2 p.m. Phone call from Ming at City Hall, could I meet her at the library?

3 p.m. The Attorney was not in the office, so I walked to the library, paid some fines, and found her in the business room. She looked different from yesterday, a different mood if not persona, more serious and mature. Her mood swings from one day to the next, depending on what she's wearing, can gravitate a good six years in either

direction. Yesterday she could have been sixteen or eighteen, now more like thirty, in a white blouse, suede coat, tight jeans, boots, and lipstick, her long black hair tied with a bow, looking more womanly and determined.

She had a pile of small business reference material. Her long-term plans are to make a lot of money, acquire some sort of mansion, and install a few men friends who would be kept. She has said she will "keep" me, but it doesn't appeal to me. Get rid of the others and we'll talk.

Went upstairs and returned an hour later with an armful of books and three on reserve. She was finishing up and flipped through the selection. It ran the gamut of the random and the planned, which is how I end up with an eclectic array. I found a couple of books by the professor of history at U.C. Berkeley, Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (1973) – he was born in 1944 - and *Adorno*. We looked at chapter titles which conveyed some relevance for one or both of us. "Culture as Manipulation" and "Fractured Tonality."

"That's for you."
"No, that's for you."
"'Atonal philosophy'."
"Sounds like you."
"No it doesn't."
"Here we go, 'A Damaged Life.' I'd better read this."

There was *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson. I'd been looking for it for a long time.

A couple of novels by Toni Morrison – I can't say much if I don't read her books.

Homeboy, by Seth Morgan, which I heard about and came across by accident and liked, if only in juxtaposition to the more academic works.

Empire of the Senseless, by Kathy Acker - another form of juxtaposition, in the sense of being nearly unreadable. It's a fragmentary mess, so flat and unrewarding, and a telling comment on our times.

I put a few books on reserve, including essays by Greg Tate, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison ("Whiteness and the Literary Imagination"). The librarians never heard of James Baldwin. We took a bus downtown, with her applying for a position at a warehouse.

4:30 p.m. In the office, where the Attorney had left a lot of work. A little after five V. wanted to know if I was leaving so I could walk her to the underground station. She looked small and slender in tight black jeans, a turquoise shirt, black T-shirt, black men's shoes, and red lipstick. We walked a few blocks. There was some mention of her going back to school, part-time. I said she wouldn't be the oldest one in the class.

"Don't say that… I'm twenty-six, how old do I look to you?"
"Twenty-one."
"Good. That's why I like you."

I returned to the office and was swamped, putting together a Declaration of Witness for Probation Report for a couple of Latino juveniles. Four witnesses said they hadn't done anything, or at the most they "politely" asked what the police were doing arresting one of their friends.

The police report had a different story, and the credibility of the juveniles is not so good. The reason the police were there in the first place was practically a non-event. A few juveniles went into a 7-11 store and one of them put some chewing gum in his pocket without paying. A customer saw it and told the manager or called the police, like this was a big deal. The police arrived, not knowing what the circumstances were – I don't think

they would bother showing up over chewing gum. On the other hand, they are duty bound to respond to a situation if a store manager reports a theft, however minor. So a couple of police arrive, question the juveniles in front of the store, and find one fellow (fourteen I think) with the gum in his pocket. You might think they were underwhelmed by the magnitude of the crime. At any rate, they didn't yell, DROP THE GUM! (This is all about gum control.) They said something like, "How about if you go into the store, give it back and apologize, and we'll let you go." It was either that or they would have to take him in. The Latino kid had an attitude and said he'd rather go to jail than apologize.[4] The police were accommodating and said, "Okay then, jail."

You might suppose the police were not in a violent mood, given the situation, but according to the blurred reports of the witnesses, and the lousy writing of the Attorney, it suddenly transpires that there are eight or ten patrol cars and the same two policemen are throwing to the ground and trying to handcuff one or two innocent bystanders, including our client, who were just standing there doing nothing – like the police are going to start clubbing people over stolen chewing gum. In the police report our client is not quite the disinterested and polite gentleman you would think he is. Seventeen years old with four or five prior arrests, including one felony, possession of a weapon, and who, according to the police, walked up belligerent and swearing, saying they couldn't arrest his friend and jumped one of the cops, which led to the escape of one of the suspects. There was some mention of a bicycle flying through the air and landing on a patrol car (a small crowd had gathered by then).

[4] Real men don't apologize? The gum is free in Mexico? Being arrested is a rite of passage for some guys. They're resisting an oppressive system which forces them to pay for oral gratification.

I'm trying to figure out why the Attorney took the case. Are the parents of the juvenile delinquent paying $150 an hour for him to represent their son in a police brutality case? Given the time and effort he has put in, the cost is $1500 and it's not over.

8 p.m. I was in the office, about to leave, when Ming called, surprised I was still there. A few of them were going out for drinks in the Haight. Did I want to go? No. I walked home.

I arrived in the lobby and found the manager, a friendly woman in her sixties, standing behind the wooden counter of her office. There is wrought iron in the door and windows, old wood, brass mailboxes, and art nouveau light fixtures – it was built in the 1920's when people knew how. There are chandeliers in the lobby, dense clusters of cut glass. A man who lives on the top floor is a chandelier maker.

In the evening I read *Neuromancer* and couldn't put it down, adjusting to the writing style. Sci-fi often has a psychologically constricted feel, like it's more about machinery and settings, so it feels like you're putting your mind into a vise with clamps of technical jargon and two-dimensional characters. I'm not wound too tight when it comes to books.

On cyber punks:

> The Moderns, he'd decided, were a contemporary version of the Big Scientists of his own late teens. There was a kind of ghostly teenage DNA at work in the Sprawl, something that carried the coded precepts of various short-lived subcults and replicated them at odd intervals.
>
> [Sounds like he could be talking about musicians.]
>
> The Panther Moderns were a softhead variant on the Scientists. If the technology had been available, the Big Scientists would all have had sockets stuffed with microsofts. It was the style that mattered and the style was the same. The Moderns were mercenaries, practical jokers, nihilistic technofetishists.

[One of them arrived with some stolen diskettes.]

> His face was a simple graft grown on collagen and shark-cartilage polysaccharides, smooth and hideous. It was one of the nastiest pieces of elective surgery Case had ever seen. When Angelo smiled, revealing the razor-sharp canines of some large animal, Case was actually relieved. Toothbud transplants. He'd seen that before. "You can't let the little pricks generation-gap you," Molly said. Case nodded, absorbed in the patterns of the Sense/Net ice.

There is much ado about a matrix of the collective unconscious, or electrified information spreading to the horizon like a sprawling grid. It is a century into the future, where humans are biomechanical hybrids with the means to combine robotic machine parts with the human body. The main character exists in an underground black market with body organs, chemicals, and illicit powerful computer equipment. The latter can be plugged into your head. Vast dimensions of knowledge are being stolen and fenced.

When you log on to computerized information you are in a dimension of cyberspace because your head is wired to the computer with electrodes in a headband. You are mentally immersed and floating in those artificial constructs. There are walls of "ice" which protect the corporate vaults. ICE = INTRUSION COUNTERMEASURES ELECTRONICS. Those who crack it are icebreakers. The m.c. (main character) thinks that people are "meat" when disconnected from those mental information fields where the disembodied roam at will. There were echoes of Thomas Pynchon and William Burroughs in the story.

Around midnight the phone rang, the Phantom of the sound room. I hadn't talked to him in a while, being elusive and neurotic about Ming. He had just been to a bar with her and a couple of others and left early. We talked about having a session in the sound room, but he is so erratic it often doesn't amount to much.

I had a recent conversation with Ming about him and she was worried. He sounded depressed with his life going nowhere. He's twenty-nine. I said maybe he has gravitated to a level of formless chaos that is reflected in his music, having been led there by acid, pot, and gallons of beer. What you end up with is a man unraveled – often what his music sounds like when he's around the bend. He is unstructured, unable to make a move. It reminds me of how things are said to appear at the speed of light: "An undulating electromagnetic field at rest." A nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there, having connotations of a permanent condition.

Having arrived at a timeless non-evolving state, he tends to dwell on things and doesn't get over them, imagining paranoiac intrigues involving Ming. The impact she had on him, pulling away a year ago, has only diminished a little. A linear outlook would be useful here, like throwing a lifeline to someone stuck in psychosomatic quicksand.

There was some mention that he used to ride snowmobiles in North Dakota. Someone told him it was killing the little grey mice beneath the ice, so he stopped. He mentioned how cold it was, going from town to town with his band in sub-zero degree weather.

He said he will drive to St. Helena on Sunday night to visit Jon, do I want to go? No. (He didn't go.)

Typing until two in the morning.

Saturday, Jan. 15, 1994

Every time I am reminded it is 1994 I have a positive feeling about it. Not sure why. It's like things are more in sync, picking up a familiar echo of something. Maybe it's my old apartment on the mend.

The telephone eclipsed the typewriter for a while. B. called with more worries and concerns about the other woman. There was a phone call from Ming which went on for a while. She wants to go to the cliffs in the afternoon. We knocked it around, wondering where to rendezvous. She finally got exasperated and said she would come over, but I'd better be ready. She has a sense of having to drag me out of the house. It was unseasonably warm out.

3:30 p.m. She arrived with a box she had mailed to herself from Thailand, and pulled out a silk sarong, a quilted bag, and sandals. We didn't go anywhere. It often happens where the mood between us is so engrossing it's enough to sit around and talk. I said when we get together there's a psychochemical reaction that fills up the room and we can't get out the door.

In no time we were on a wavelength of profound communication - she goes there with a telepathic ease. It was about the journal and to what extent it involves my friends, including her. It's something I've been meaning to talk to her about, wondering how she felt about it, given the long odds of it ever being published. She said if it was anonymous, no names, the only ones who would recognize her or themselves would be people she doesn't have many secrets from. As far as the general public goes, they wouldn't know who this woman was a few years down the road.[5]

[5] Make that a few decades.

I mentioned Lucien Freud with his portraits, using as models his own daughters or girlfriends or men he knew, and often in a not very complimentary light. They might be sprawling on the floor or bed like naked lumpy mortals, and yet infused with his (if not their own) humanity. The medium he works in has a life of its own. Some have questioned the detachment of a composition, but that doesn't mean he was like that off the canvas.

There was something similar operating here. I said I have a lot of material involving her, including conversations and half-baked analyses of character and motivation. She wanted to know if she would be surprised at what I wrote. I thought about it and said maybe when it's going to extremes. It might appear that she means more to me than what I convey on a daily basis. On the other hand, I might pursue a tangent based on circumstances or what other people have said, where I see her in a bad light (like a bad photo), whether or not I believe it.

And no, I didn't think she was phony, more like someone with multiple personalities. Her relationships with men are cut up by the interaction of her different sides. It may seem like a deception, but it's not her fault. She thought about it, calling a quick private meeting of her various selves to mull it over and weigh the possibility of verisimilitude in that assessment.

Another topic which saturated the evening and came mostly from her was sex. It is on her mind and she was being pretty blunt, talking about herself, her past experiences and current curiosities, admitting she has voyeuristic tendencies. Have I ever seen two people making love? She would like to. I thought she meant sitting in a chair with two people on a bed, which would feel like the odd man out. She meant without their

knowing. How do I feel about being watched myself? Some people get off on it. I said it didn't do much for me.

She mentioned her difficulties with having an orgasm, and that masturbating never appealed to her. Anyhow, men are usually available if she is pent up, which led to some mention of her using or misleading men. But they should know better, right? The question of being bisexual was lurking in the back of her mind, having had a few encounters. Her relations with men are tenuous, what with her being headstrong and unromantic. However, she is repelled by the thought of women using artificial appendages on each other.

Ming floated some suggestions and inquiries about my love life, thinking I need someone to take care of me. I said I can take care of myself, and felt like I had outgrown this romantic stuff. That isn't true, but it sounded good. She has a hard time with the concept of being romantic, but thought she was becoming more open to it.[6]

6 p.m. We went out, walking near the Federal courthouse, and then up Polk Street, passing a used bookstore with a huge selection (Acorn). It's one of the anomalies of this neighborhood. Within two or three blocks you can find the Mitchell Brothers strip joint, a few low dives (wrote love dives), and an old bookstore next to the Sierra Club.

We went in and it swallowed an hour or more. I guess she does have bookish tendencies, while being particular about what she reads. We stood in the aisles and I recommended something she found halfway interesting, *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing, which I read a long time ago. We ended up sitting on stools and looking at art books. I had a heavy book of da Vinci's sketches and notes, going from gears to the

[6] On a less romantic note, she wondered what I think of people who pee on each other. Ever do it? No. It sounds like you would need a bathtub.

dissection of bodies, while she flipped through the bone-floral works of Georgia O'Keefe.

On the way home we walked among the usual down-and-out characters and I picked up a bottle of wine.

8 p.m. She had an idea for a picture and brought out the watercolors: "A dead wall with an opening in the middle and blue sky on the other side." She sat at the wooden table and started painting stones. After a while it was my turn. My stones were different than hers, which tended to be jagged and flat, while mine were round and varied. There was a wall between us, although it had an opening with a vine hanging down. I said it reminded me of our conversations in their differing magnitudes, with some more flat than others.

10 p.m. We ordered an Italian concoction delivered to the door – her side of it with artichoke hearts and garlic, mine with everything. I put a tape in, *Transfer Station Blue*, which sounded good.[7] Most of my tapes are related to a previous life and I don't listen to them very often. She didn't want to hear an opera.

During the last hour she was here the wine was nearly gone and I was subdued. She ran through a list of her old fuck buddies and boyfriends. Some of those encounters were gymnastic and impersonal. She thinks that women are capable of being emotionally detached from sex and using men accordingly. I heard a lot about the subject, from "hard sex" with a man she didn't know very well, to when she was eleven or twelve and would experiment with her female friends, using whatever objects they thought would fit.

---

[7] "A cult classic Berlin School style album" from 1984. It was a collaboration with Michael Shrieve, the drummer for Santana, his brother Kevin (guitar/piano), and "legendary German electronic composer Klaus Schulz." "Communique: 'Approach Spiral'" is 13:28.

With respect to the “hard sex” incident, a girlfriend thought she should have redefined it as sexual assault since it left her bleeding, but Ming had to admit that wasn’t the case. She is a curious mixture of the oblivious and the conscientious, as she gets into ambiguous situations but has the backbone to deal with them.

She borrowed a small book I had on the shelf, a Victorian erotic work called *The Whip Angels*.

Midnight: I walked her a few blocks and waited for a bus, talking under bare branches like two people who love each other and find it an endless source of amusement – partly in its being hard to categorize. A few derelicts, burnouts, panhandlers, and ordinary strangers were hanging out. The bus pulled up, I kissed her and walked home.

Sunday, Jan. 16, 1994

11 a.m. The phone rang. It was Ming. She was at someone’s house for brunch, friends of her boyfriend, and sounded bored. She said, “Let’s definitely go to the cliffs,” and will come over early in the afternoon. She didn’t sleep well last night, tossing and turning for hours. I wondered if she was pent-up and eroticized from everything we talked about.

Phone call from B. She was dropped off after spending the night with the other woman and did not feel good about it. Ilsa makes her feel evasive or deficient when she doesn’t arrive at the “desired response” within “fifteen or twenty minutes.” In the morning they drove to the Russian River, with Ilsa in a hot tub with a woman who was after her. B. wondered what she was supposed to think. It feels like she is being tested.

This went on for a while, with B. apologizing for being a relentless bore, or however she put it, and said she would go out of her mind without someone to talk to. We managed to change the subject for a while. Some people are getting together at the Saloon in North Beach at five, and did I hear about the earthquake in L.A.?

Typing for a couple of hours.

3:30 p.m. Ming showed up late, pushing her mountain bike into the hall. Edgy and exuberant and complaining – "What am I doing having a Bloody Mary so early in the day?" She had dropped into a store for cigarettes and a black woman wanted some ID. Ming said, "I'm twenty-four." It's not often she uses the word "cunt" in reference to a woman.

We went out and caught a bus and rode to Ocean Beach, ending up a few blocks south of where we wanted to be, feeling hijacked by the public transportation as we rode through a vacant part of town. It turned out well, walking up a sandy trail to an overlook across the road from the Cliff House, a vast perspective on the coastline to the south with the ocean in a huge and placid mood, the swells and shadow-breakers rolling in at a distance. There were some raggedy musicians beating on drums and blowing instruments on the sand.

In half an hour or so the sun was going down, clear and calm on a January afternoon with no wind. At other times of the year the inland heats up, but it's cooler on the coast and the rising warm air pulls the cooler coastal air which in its rush to go there is felt as wind to those of us who're stuck on the end of a windblown peninsula.[8] We lay

[8] As for the fog: there is a lot of hot air in this town, and when it hits the cold air off the ocean it condenses into fog.

on the sand and ice plants on the hill, having a beer, pineapple coconut juice, and an orange. When the sun went down it left the horizon on fire for a while.

We were relaxed, almost sleepy, and it was getting dark. The trail was hard to see, walking through the trees to a promontory with a small park and an overlook with low walls, looking like the ruins of a small castle. It was Sutro's old house.[9] Far below us were overlapping lacy currents and waves, an undulating hypnotic sight, with her talking about seeing this on hallucinogenic mushrooms. We made our way down to the Cliff House in the dark and sat at a round table next to a picture window. She had chamomile tea while I had coffee and whiskey. A rock out in the water looked ghostly in its bird shit.

She had a slight headache from the Bloody Mary earlier, and asked if I would rub a pressure point in her hand.

An hour later we walked up the road to the bus stop, the end of the line on a quiet side street next to some eucalyptus trees. We knocked on the door of an empty bus that was waiting there. A black woman driver opened the door by some mechanical means and demanded to know what we wanted. So imperious, like the bus was hers. Ming wondered what we had done to offend her.

We had a cigarette while waiting. Ming had to pee and disappeared behind a tree, returning with a branch of sweet-smelling eucalyptus leaves. The ride back felt smoother and shorter for some reason, sitting alone in back, shoulder to shoulder in a good mood. I said, "Do Chinese opera." She tried, but was laughing too much.

---

[9] Adolph Sutro (1830-1898) was a German Jew who came to San Francisco in 1851 and made a fortune, but it took many years. He went to Virginia City, Nevada, for the silver rush (which also attracted Mark Twain), planning to sell cigars. The mines had a problem with flooding and he figured out a way to drain the water with a tunnel. When it was finally built it made him rich. He returned to San Francisco and went into real estate, building the Cliff House and the Sutro Baths.

8:30 p.m. at my place. It didn't look like I would make it to North Beach. We threw together a meal – tuna on toast and soup.

Back into our discussion of racial politics. Is it fair if people are wary or suspicious of black people on the basis of empirical evidence? For example, her brother runs a construction company and his experience with black workers has been mostly negative.[10] Does that warrant his reluctance to hire more? What about the general public if they go by what they see and hear on a daily basis? What if their encounters with black people fall somewhere in the range of neutral to worse? Ming said that when she worked at Headlines in the East Bay and would close the store at night she was worried about black guys in the area, even though her racial politics were leftwing.

10 p.m. I walked her outside on her mountain bike, a hustler on us the second we were out the door (a black man trying to unload a jacket). Across the street the hookers showed off their ambulatory skills. I kissed her, had a few words, then she kissed me and rode off.

---

[10] This is a random example, but I've heard similar stories from Jon about the company he works for, which is also small. And then there is the current situation with the Post Office in Chicago. It has over 10,000 black employees (male and female), who constitute 80 to 90 percent of the work force, including the managers. The mail service has deteriorated so badly over the last few years it prompted a long-overdue investigation: "… mounds of mail were found at several stations – including one pile 800 feet long… mail deliveries frequently were late or were skipped…lobbies were dingy and filthy… clerks were surly and unhelpful… one carrier was found with 40,000 pieces of undelivered mail – some more than two months old – stashed in the back of his delivery truck. Another 20,000 pieces, some 11 years old, were found in the basement… Nearly 200 pounds of commercial mail was found burning… more than a ton of undelivered mail… fifteen hundred pieces of mail…" And here's the punchline: "NAACP SEES BIAS IN POST OFFICE PROBE." "The Chicago post office scandal," thefreelibrary.com, July 1, 1994

In the apartment I was thinking about her for a while. The last few days it felt like being under a pleasant siege, what with the onslaught of attention and her presence. I couldn't remember when we had spent so much time together, one day after another. Four days in a row, sometimes eight hours at a stretch. She may have been testing the bonds and pushing the limits, even in herself, and finding out she wasn't tired of it and neither was I. I wondered if I could keep it up. It's one thing to generate a fine rapport when you see someone once a week, but every day is something else. Maybe she wants to see how real it is and if we're always like that.

On the other hand – there's always another hand with her (like a goddess with six arms) - it may have something to do with the current circumstances, being out of work, the boyfriend working on the weekends, and hardly any women friends. There was some mention of her having matured or become more careful with men. She was tired of those entanglements she had in the past, and seems to have more respect for our connection since it isn't sexual. I haven't made any overtures in that direction. Maybe she has been evolving, and so have I, so we see each other with familiar seasoned eyes but with a fresh perspective.

We're so close we share our chewing gum. She has no sense of germs, and was amused when I dropped a cigarette I was rolling on the floor and rolled another one. For that matter, she was intrigued by a scene in *Neuromancer*. The guy was hooked up to a computer which had a remote connection to a woman (simstim) who was out on the street. He could look at the street through her eyes and feel what she felt. Being coy, she reached a hand into her shirt and touched one of her nipples and he felt it. Ming liked that.

The information being exchanged, the questions being asked, and the candor about her body and mind are making us familiar and transparent. We are close to each other's being-in-the-world, all of which sounds like love to me. Where there's smoke there's fire, and this constitutes a smoky situation, but the fire is on a backburner where she is less likely to put it out.

Reading *Neuromancer*, followed by the typewriter. I avoided my journal-beaten prose, riffing off the letters in a word, HISTORIOGRAPHIC. I'm a man of letters.

Monday, Jan. 17, 1994

Phone call from B. "Where were you last night?" "Sorry, I blew it." She said she had too much to drink – a lot of brandy – with the usual entourage of mostly male acquaintances. There were not enough women at the Saloon. The men who hang around her don't know she is having an affair with a woman.

There was some mention of getting stoned in an alley in North Beach. She said the sax player, Ben "King" Perkoff**,** looked tired. Maybe his ballerina wore him out, or was it jet lag? She thinks her girlfriend has a drinking problem and hopes it isn't contagious. Did I hear about the earthquake in Los Angeles? At four in the morning her mother called her from New York and told her about it. 6.6 on the seismic dial. Massive destruction.

I got off the phone and typed for hours, though it took a while getting started. There was something Ming said a couple of days ago, wondering if her constant presence was disrupting my routine. She relished the possibility of that. I said it was okay, after a

good night's sleep I'm usually back on track. Not sure if that is why I was thrown off this morning. Futility, fatigue, or bored with my own reflection.

I wonder if reality is diffracted when it goes into her mind, making for a watery view of things, including me. Our conversations run the gamut with whatever heightens the situation, and she likes it when I throw a change-up.

"Where's Palo Alto?"
"In your butt."

I forgot to mention that her and B. look with scorn at the feminist groups that support Lorena Bobbitt. The Lesbian Avengers, for example, have an "avenge Lorena" attitude. Ming and B. wonder what busybody lesbians have to do with the case, and why anyone would have a political position on it. Neither one of the people involved are worth the effort. I told B. about a feminist group in Ecuador which vowed to castrate a hundred American men if Lorena went to prison. She thought that was barbaric and said, "What now, men will talk about cutting off women's breasts?!" It shakes her up how crude people are.

I'm still trying to figure out the woman attorney for Lorena, who said in court, "A life is worth more than a penis." Lorena would have died if she hadn't cut it off? I don't think it was one or the other, that's a false dilemma. How was her life in danger? Her peace of mind was worth a mutilated man. Another woman with a selective memory - she said in the first trial (of him), "I lifted the sheet and I cut it." In her trial she said she didn't remember doing it. She just remembers seeing "the organ in her hand as she drove away." Maybe she thought it was a cigarette lighter.

Oddly enough, the more testimony she gives as to his being an abusive jerk (during a four-year marriage), the more you wonder why she didn't remove her presence

rather than his organ. What better way to tell a man that what he's doing is wrong and she won't have it? What about the men who have endured years of psychological abuse and insults from a woman (including infidelity)? What can they cut off while she's sleeping? Her hair? Her credit cards?

3 p.m. Phone call from Ming, who went through one of her multi-track alterations on the phone, being at first in a hurry, getting ready for a job interview downtown, and then in the course of the conversation she decided against it and relaxed. We talked for two hours. The interview would have been coincidental, like real life was becoming another *Tales of the City*. In this case, there's an opening for a "hostess" at an "upscale men's club" on Broadway, which is where my friend Michael is the head chef. An elegant venue where nearly-naked women polish the brass poles with their tits. I told her what it is like and that she might not like the atmosphere, although she wouldn't have to wear anything revealing.

She thought about it, sort of intrigued. She is getting desperate, not having a job, and it is stressing her out. There was some discussion of her looks, with her being self-deprecating. I said she would be fine, having a knockout figure. It's odd how that embarrasses her, a liberated woman who is more comfortable in flannel shirts.

I was going to call Michael and put in a good word for her if she was interested. The conversation drifted, going on at such length that at one point I was compelled to haul the phone into the bathroom, connected by a spiral cord, having to urinate and she heard it over the phone. "You're peeing!" It's not like we haven't done it before on the phone. She has an undying curiosity about the ways and means of a phallus, and what it's like to wake up with an erection. I told her the other morning I was pulled out of sleep

during the REM phrase, having to urinate, but with a hard-on like a crow-bar. I had to stand near one end of the bathtub (with an open robe) and it made for an "arc of transcendence" from one end of the tub to the other, which she thought was amusing. At the moment I said, "I'm not aroused," so it was okay.

There was a recent conversation where she considered an ad to work on "an adult phone line." We knocked that idea around. She was interested and maybe wouldn't mind, thinking it would be a sociological diversion. It brought up a woman I was sleeping with in 1985, a student at the University of San Francisco (a Catholic school). She was luscious, not very tall, with black hair, and was breaking out of her sexual repression by various means, including phone sex. She had a low opinion of the men who paid for it, but would call me up and demonstrate her technique, which was professional and convincing, having a soft voice and a sensual manner (this was the math major). Once or twice I thought the moans were real on the phone, describing what she was doing to herself and then doing it I suppose. Ming was curious. Did I think she could do it? Maybe not – she doesn't have the right attitude, and I don't think she wants to make a living with strange men jacking off on the phone. We agreed that her aptitude is more in the way of a dial-up dominatrix, but I'm not sure how that would work. Tell a guy to tie himself up with the cord and hit himself with the receiver?

The current conversation had its twists and turns until we were talking about the word "reactionary" and why she is unclear on the definition. She didn't know it meant someone who is non-progressive and conservative. There was some mention of how shallow and two-dimensional it is to label people by their political beliefs, as if that's all there is to them. The psychology of those beliefs is something to consider, with

reactionaries known for being sexually repressed. I had a feeling that some mean and edgy women might be like that, not having had an orgasm for a long time or it's difficult. This is not an original observation, and I've heard a woman say of another woman, "She needs to get laid." But Ming was surprised and said, "If you're angry it means you haven't masturbated?" I thought of her preoccupation with masturbating men. It's a subject dear to her heart, either the strangeness of it or the ease at which the act is accomplished. There remains the implication that I should pull it out some evening. She has just enough discretion to not put it in those terms, and I have just enough discretion to not do it.

Sometimes the conversation is saturated with sexual topics, and those come from her more often than not. Some women set a mood with their comments until a man is engulfed with a suggestive atmosphere, like a cloud of perfume called SEX. The woman maintains a certain detachment. If and when he makes a move, she can act like it was his idea and she had nothing to do with it, whether or not she follows through. She was testing his reflexes or her powers of suggestion.[11]

5 p.m. We got off the phone and I turned on the news. Fallen freeways in Los Angeles. Collapsed structures, broken gas mains which exploded in flames taking homes and cars with them. Estimates of thirty dead, hundreds hurt, hundreds of thousands without water or electricity. 6.6 on the Richter scale. The one here in 1989 was 7.1, but the epicenter was further away, and the terrain in Los Angeles is worse, being more sedimentary than bedrock.

[11] Some women go to bed with a man like it's a horizontal competition, and the first one to succumb to a climax is the loser. This came up in the conversation, and I think it hit a nerve. She is often tense, and sexual release does not come easy for her.

8 p.m. I was not inclined to go out and the evening drifted into a long phase of the reading-intensive. On rare occasions my attention span holds up and the absorption in a book – *Neuromancer* – takes on symphonic proportions. It may have helped that the radio was on the classical station, and an undulating counterpoint to *Neuromancer* was the voices in a Bach Cantata No. 198, *Trauerode*. It was 1727 vs. 2127, and I'm not sure which one was more present (probably the former since the past is always with us). The next selection was the "Trio Sonata No. #4 in E Minor. Butt, organ."

10:30 p.m. I was absorbed in the book when the phone rang. I heard an odd noise and then a girl laughing. It was the ten-year old daughter of the Actress. I left a message earlier and Maya returned the call. She told me the noise was a "tube of gloom," and did it again. We talked for a few minutes, with her sounding alert and friendly. There was some mention of having had a cold. I said I was immune, but she didn't believe me. She has a morbid imagination when it comes to what she can do over the phone. I said, "Do little girls have big germs?" She said, "Size five," and went on to explain that mine are size eleven. "Like my feet." "That's right."

She had to go to bed so she handed the phone to her mother. They went to an improv workshop that evening. Maya was bored or reluctant, but blossomed after a while. She is a positive note for her mother, who is feeling less than positive when it comes to a lack of romance, no acting roles, and few funds. But there is an evolving slender entity who lives in her house and constantly surprises her with questions and debates. Her daughter's intelligence has a life of its own.

The Actress said she wants to have an affair with someone. She doesn't like going it alone, and wants a man to wipe out the memory of the last one while occupying her mind as well as bed. She may have had me in mind.

Tuesday, Jan. 18, 1994

Typing in the morning. There was a phone call from Ming, who sounded surprised to hear me. She meant to dial someone else, but we talked for a while.

12:30 p.m. I brought four loads of laundry downstairs and read the paper: "KILLER QUAKE IN L.A. 30 DEAD, MAJOR HIGHWAYS COLLAPSE." (The next day it was updated to 40 dead, 15,000 homeless, over $7 billion in damage (similar to the 1989 earthquake here), and 100,000 homes without power or water.) I wondered how my friends are doing.

Went to work in the afternoon. The Attorney handed me a hundred and is now caught up on my wages for the first time in months. No mention of a year-end bonus or being compensated for his stiffing me through the holidays. He may have caught on to my outlook, that time is more valuable than money, so I'm compensated with a looser schedule and time off.

The case of the adulterous woman: forty, loud, and overweight, if not prone to hysteria, which is evident in her handwritten letters – a large, extravagant, loopy script with lots of exclamation marks. The latest drama in her life was bringing domestic violence charges against the married man that she's been having an affair with for years. There were allegations of his pushing her against the wall. I doubt if he picked her up. There were a couple of photos of her with small bruises on her arm which the Attorney

forgot to bring to the court this morning. I was surprised to find that though the restraining order was granted – the man has to remain fifty yards away from her residence, her place of work, and her - she wasn't awarded attorney's fees, costs of suit, or medical costs (which were very little).

I figured the judge was not impressed with either one of them, the Attorney or his client. She brought rape charges against the same man two or three years ago which were subsequently dropped when she submitted a letter to the effect that she had lied. I didn't know it was a lie, or was she lying about it having been a lie in order to rescind the restraining order so they could get back together (true love)? I wondered why the wife of the man has had no voice in any of this. It's like she is irrelevant.

I worked a few hours and left. Before long I was walking up the hill to the Ritz Carlton with its white columns, having looked at a place across the street. An old apartment with a walkway, roses, palm tree, and a lot of atmosphere. The manager called and said a studio was available. I thought about it, but it's too close for comfort to the financial district.

I like the structural location of my studio – it's on the corner of the building with a southern and eastern exposure and is flooded with sunlight in the morning. It is fine when I'm inside (except for the noise). I live among an older density of buildings with a lot of character, wrought iron gates, and there are changes from one block to the next. Sometimes the people on the street get on my nerves, making for unnerving or depressing encounters. I'm okay with it generally, but my friends want me to move, and I have to consider some of the facts of life when it comes to living here. There is a trade-off when

things are edgy and intensified, but it prolongs your isolation. My detachment is eroding into cynicism.

All of which may be beside the point. I could stay here indefinitely, but my old place near Russian Hill will be ready soon and I have to make a decision. It has twice as much room for the same rent. I'm not so interested in the neighborhood, a relatively safe and sane dimension, while here it vibrates with the otherwise.

I walked home, and finished *Neuromancer* with a momentary letdown after being in the grip of a virtual reality construct. I sometimes thought the author was under the influence while he sat at his computer, but it's quite a book. Do you "read" a mind or "access" the memory? Time will tell if this is a bad metaphor. A human being rendered in techno-chemical terms as a collection of tapes that can be accessed.

I wonder if video/computer metaphors are valid for the younger generation if they're less imbued with a linear absorption of written information. What does that do to the old assumption that growing up involves a slow and linear process? You hear that kids mature so fast these days, being exposed to instant information with more connotations than meet the eye (someone mentioned a false sophistication from watching television). The mother of the ten-year-old is constantly amazed at how much her daughter seems to know. Misandry, seduction, and divorce are in the air she breathes.

Maybe it's accelerated in the immodesties of an electro-immediate culture. Kids are far along in their development by the time they're seven, at which point they have barely learned to read but have been watching television for years. However, in the old days, kids matured fast because they had to, especially if they couldn't afford books and had to work.

Having finished the book, and since I write in a quasi-journal mode, I redefined the latter with the blurbs for a sci-fi novel (with the altered words capitalized):

> SLOW-BURN JOURNAL (also known as EUROMANCER) is freshly imagined, compellingly detailed and chilling…
>
> … GRAY has FATHOMED a rich… and vivid PRESENT populated with uncomfortably realistic characters… an amazingly complex JOURNAL… some will enjoy it as a fast-paced, exciting VANTAGE; others will claim it's actually a very subtle, clever mystery; still others will see it as a thought-provoking social discourse… EUROMANCER is a major BOOK, difficult to compare with other works…
>
> … maybe the only JOURNAL which has combined hard science… and a well-developed sensibility…
>
> a mindbender of a read… fully realized in its geopolitical, technological, and psychosexual dimensions…
>
> … brings an entirely new TONIC ECLECTIC sensibility to SF [SAN FRANCISCO], both in content and prose style… an unusual voice… this degree of strength and surety [as opposed to the insecurity of surly shirts in a hurry]…
>
> A debut JOURNAL set for brain stun! Streetwise SAN FRANCISCO, one of the most unusual and involving [or evolving and dissolving] narratives to be read in many an artificially induced blue moon [or realist blue Monday]!

Typing until two in the morning.

I lay on the bed and started reading *Homeboy* by an ex-con and former drug addict who was brought up in private schools back east. It's a strong drink, and hits with an impact that takes your breath away, or maybe you don't want to breathe those atmospheres. A dense and intricate text, like it was pressed into an iron plate. It's hard and flat and vulgar. Rim-shot stuff, as imagined by a man in prison.

It reminded me of something in *Neuromancer* where he says the brain has no feeling, there are no nerves in it, which hit me with a shock of recognition. The anesthetic aspects of the intellect.

Homeboy (1990) "sends the reader rocking through San Francisco's drug underworld." Also, the California prison system and some hookers in the Tenderloin. Not to say it's hitting close to home, or that I have much in common with a writer who has been a strip show barker and an ironworker, but I might learn something from his brutal shortcuts.

Wednesday, Jan. 19, 1994

9 a.m. Not enough sleep as Ming walked in to the accompaniment of jackhammers, bulldozers, and the occasional siren. I lay there in a bathrobe, half asleep, while she peeled an orange and handed me some. "Get up, sleepy head."

She looked nice, on her way to an interview in a wrap-around skirt, cowboy boots, dark green blouse, a dark men's coat, and long black hair in a ponytail. We had the newspaper spread on the bed. I was on one end and her on the other, with photos of collapse and ruin between us.

The phone rang, the Professor in Santa Monica. He told me about it while Ming was on the typewriter, redoing her resume (historical revisionism). He said the effects and damages are more widespread than the news implied. The Santa Monica Freeway was a far cry from the epicenter up north, but sections of it had collapsed. He was woken at 4:30 in the morning and got out of there, being on the ground floor. The freeways could take a year to repair, and the commuters are in for some misery.

I told him about the sessions he missed at the historical convention on Sunday, including the one on chaos. I ran some of the terminology by him and he was interested at first, but has no patience with obscurant esoteric jargon. He said he has been reading

Gore Vidal's collected essays, a man who isn't impressed with academics who fling their specialized linguistic nets in a high arc, hoping they come down with something. It often isn't much, with their nets evaporating in the process of being flung beyond the reach of meaning or a tangible connection.

So he wasn't interested in bifurcating trigger points or cascading consequences. We talked about the essay on a fake president (an actor), who is at home with anything but the facts. I brought up the recent trial of one of the Menendez brothers. The first one ended in a hung jury. An article in the paper said the jurors found him believable, as if the hard cold facts of what he did are less significant than his presence. A columnist said it's called acting. You might suppose that actions speak louder than words and poses, whether or not he was abused for years. Being over eighteen he could move out, rather than using a shotgun on his parents while they're watching television.

We talked until the workmen arrived at his apartment to repair some cracks.

I took a shower, put some clothes on, and eventually Ming and I took a bus downtown. I walked her to the interview, then went to an art supplies store for a sketch pad (which I use for taking notes). I dropped into a gallery and had a showdown with an eight-foot-high metal sculpture. There were arcs of brightly painted metal. On the lower end a black radiator hung from a short chain. On the high end was the blue antler of a deer. In between were some spirals. *Blue Antler, Red Ranch, Radiator* (1987) by Robert Hudson.

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office who looked up from her desk and smiled, "You remembered." We walked to the Hunan place with her in a good mood, having a lighter

schedule, phasing out of the office and beginning classes at a college (managerial accounting and law).

Smoked ham and garlic, rice and tea. She said when she was eighteen she would go to a disco with friends until two in the morning, and later to a diner for breakfast. Now feeling old at twenty-six. Her situation with the fiancé is not exciting, and something has to change. We got on the subject of girls who "do it" rather young, and she asked how old I was the first time I "did it." She said she was talking recently with a man who was really old, "just like you."

Walked back to the office with her usual hurried pace, and worked for a couple of hours. On a newsstand: "LA IN SHOCK".

5 p.m. We were waiting for the elevator when Ming stepped out. She had been doing job interviews. I introduced the two of them and we rode down together and walked a few blocks. Ming wanted a drink, so we ended up at a place on Mason, a piano bar on the second floor with a table by the window. There were a few men by the piano who were about to break into some Broadway show tunes, a little camp.

She had a cranberry and vodka, and I had a glass of wine. The next round she had the same, while I had coffee and whiskey. She said she hadn't slept well last night, and at some point was lying there with tears in her eyes. She doesn't like that sort of thing, like it's a weakness when she "saps," getting depressed about not having a job. No way she wants to depend on her boyfriend. Relations between them are rough, and the role of a girlfriend is a little beyond her.

When the subject comes around to myself and what I'm doing with women she gets alarmed, depending on my mood, and will insist, "Not all women are like that." I

may have said that I associate women with a mirage, an adding machine, and quicksand. However, she will admit it's not a bad thing being alone, since she tends to go "soft" with a man, losing an edge. I said I'm often on edge, it just depends how you use it.

I asked if she was crying because she had excess water, but she didn't like the sound of that. "Are you saying I'm bloated?!"

I have been through full-blown love affairs in the past, and having that experience makes it hard to settle for a half-assed situation. I was also going through an adjustment, or "correction," which the Professor warned me about a few years ago when he thought I was too comfortable with a younger woman, saying, "Wait until you're over forty, they won't be around anymore." A half-truth maybe, but there's something to it.

I told Ming it's odd to be in circumstances where you think you should be lonely and miserable but you're not. I'm not sure when I've felt more alive. That's kind of vague and may rely on not having a good memory, but if you're being productive – [something just broke outside, 1:30 a.m.] – it shows that you're alive, and the caliber of your continuum. I'm under the influence of the writing, a demanding muse that determines my living conditions and my life and who is in it. It makes sure the typewriter has a permanent place in my day-to-day routine. I keep it going and it keeps me going. Turn it on and feel the current running through my mind.

I realized how much I have relied on women in the past. I still do, but at a certain distance. It is something how uncompromised your life can be without a girlfriend. You may not realize how much you give up when you're with somebody, as accommodating them becomes a way of life.

We left around seven, walking a few blocks past the derelicts and the big hotels to the main drag and waited for the bus. There was a curious exchange regarding love and romance. I said I am becoming more like her, who is known for being difficult and independent. She said she thought she was becoming more like me. I said, “We’ll have to get you a guitar in that case, or some bongos at least.”

I walked home and read the paper for a while. It’s 65 degrees here, and 10 degrees in New York City.

An article on the Lorena Bobbitt trial. A woman psychiatrist had an argument that Lorena “acted uncontrollably through an ‘irresistible impulse’.” What an interesting legal concept that would be. It’s very close to, “The devil made me do it.” Even worse, “Her husband psychologically cut off every avenue of escape for her.” Well then, why didn’t she psychologically cut his cock off?

Some mention of her having suffered “three traumas” that day. One was “a rape.” Seeing as how it involved her husband of four years, I don’t think they should use the same word, as if it involved an attack by a stranger and has the same felony status. The other two traumas are more tenuous, especially when mentioned in the same breath as sexual assault. “A flood of emotions about past abuse.” Is a flood of emotions as traumatic as an assault? And the third trauma: “The mutilation itself.” I think it may have been traumatic for him as well, and something she could have avoided by, for example, not doing it. She could have taken the knife and stabbed a note on the door, saying she’s leaving and he can look forward to a restraining order and spousal support.

I later read some damning evidence from a woman who knew her. They had a discussion two or three years ago about what she would do if her husband was unfaithful.

She said she would cut his penis off – that would hurt him more than killing him. How sadistic. His life is worth less than her self-esteem.

10 p.m. Horizontal, giving up the ghost.

Thursday, Jan. 20, 1994

A lot of sleep, and I woke up from a long dream which I could barely remember. The remnants of a line were floating in the air, something about "a persona with the sonic for a backbone."

With respect to Ming, her constant presence leaves me thinking about her when she's gone. She can be intense, and when she's absent I feel it, like a strong drug. She has a tangible presence in the world, but it comes with stumbling blocks, the torque of a solidified existence.

I told her recently that I am home-erotic when it comes to my libido. It functions better with someone I live with or am seeing constantly, with whom there is a telepathic connection and finesse. It functions less well on a hit and run basis, especially if marijuana is involved. Men are often accused of having a libido for the hit and run approach, and some lose interest after sleeping with the same woman for a while. Others walk away without looking back because they know the woman wasn't satisfied.

Typing for a few hours on a dreary afternoon.

2:30 p.m. Went to work, reading the paper on the bus. The news is still catching up to the reality of what hit the greater L.A. basin. Not $7 billion in damages, more like $15 to $30 billion. Over 40 dead, with 530 serious injuries and 4500 other injuries. Thousands of people in shelters, with the homeless camping out. 400 buildings damaged

or destroyed. 150 of 750 schools were damaged. The aftershocks include a difficult commute.

In the office the Attorney was in the conference room with a new client – a dispute about motorcycle repair and a worker's comp case. There was not much work. I went out and walked around downtown. Picked up a phone cord, paid some of the phone bill, and bought an object for my parents' anniversary.

I went to the Goethe-Institut on Bush. They had a schedule of events including a German choreographer from the 1920's when there was a "cult of the body." *Ausdruckstanz* = expression dance. "The beginnings of New Age spiritualism strangely blended with nudity, nature worship, and eroticism." Sounds familiar.

I returned to the office. Ming dropped by later having finished with her interviews. We talked a few minutes with Ami, the receptionist, who said she is going to law school three nights a week. She is fresh out of college with a BA in political science and a minor in criminal law. Her family is from India and she has no time for stereotypic associations. She is outspoken, saying how awful one of the attorneys is, and quietly swearing when she has too many calls.

I had a cigarette on the balcony with Ming who said she had another sleepless night. Insomnia and tension, things are out of sync with the boyfriend. She is worried about being out of work, but is getting used to the idea of working downtown. She talked me into walking with her to an interview six blocks away, but it didn't amount to much. On the way back we walked by Channel 5. She has an odd way of announcing one thing and doing another, saying she wanted to go home and sleep. I assumed that was the plan.

A few minutes later her mood changed, a shift in her body chemistry perhaps. She said she would come back in an hour.

I finished what work there was and found her sitting in the lobby at six. We walked to the Hunan place for dinner. Kung pao chicken, tea, and Tsingtao beer, and her with some awful tofu. There was the usual engaging conversation, including something about Chinese movies.

Afterward we walked through Chinatown and felt like we were cut loose on the town, the mood having altered. We dropped in on the Hotel Triton with its lobby designed by an artist on hallucinogens. Further on there was a window full of diamonds, but she wasn't interested. I said, "I want a drink," and she replied, "I'll have a drink with you," so we crossed Union Square and went into the renovated St. Francis.

We ended up in a fine old lounge, quiet, dark and plush, and so was the wine, a quiet jazz combo on the other side of the room. We sat by a window, the atmosphere a bit stuffy, but we managed. There was a long meandering conversation, going from the aristocracy to multiplying fractions, and she said she's seeing more of me than her boyfriend these days.

It's curious how I tend to view things from a fixed and permanent perspective, whether or not that applies. It reminds me of the Professor who took his relationship with his grown daughters for granted – assuming his unchanging status as their father – but relationships are organic.[12] They can wither and die without being watered. In my case, people are evolving, but I may not know it. I assume that if I'm friends with someone we'll remain friends, and if I'm with a woman that will continue indefinitely. The fact

[12] He couldn't believe it when a girl said she loved her cat more than her father. His lack of communication with his daughters when they grew up and moved away has not had good results.

that it doesn't has been demonstrated in recent years, but it goes both ways. Women I thought were close have faded away. Women I thought were merely friends are coming closer all the time. It makes me feel like a blockhead, but I think the notion of long-lasting relationships is ingrained at a young age, going by your parents (if they're still together).

When you view things from a permanent perspective you are in for a few surprises. It feels like things are evolving with Ming, which would make sense, her being young and not exactly in a state of arrested development. I think our relationship is one of the longest most intensive near misses I have ever known.

If I view things from a fixed perspective, it might explain how I could live in one apartment for so long, while not putting much effort into upward mobility. This could be a Buddhist outlook, or maybe I'm lazy.

Where was I, in the permanent cocktail lounge of the St. Francis. We talked about her sending telepathic signals of insomnia to me tonight - the idea being that if she can't sleep I shouldn't either (all things being equal). I think some women want to balance things out, and if they're tense and miserable a man should be as well (unless that gets in the way of a massage).

Also: I'm not supposed to call her tubular, as in, "You're tubular."

With respect to her being tested by employment agencies, she said she is good at spelling, then proceeded to get compatible, sincerely, and lysergic acid diethylamide wrong. I was going to say there might be a Freudian explanation for that, but I didn't. We knocked around the subject of her psychology, as to whether it is deep and convoluted, nearly unfathomable, or non-existent.

We went through an interlude where I was going to hypnotize her, waving a pen slowly in front of her eyes, making for an undulating optical illusion (it turns to rubber). "When I snap my fingers you will become…. a Chinese opera." She started making those high squeaky sounds which she says are between a whine and a cat, but couldn't keep it going, she was laughing too much. She kept it hidden for so long, growing up with Chinese opera in her home and hating every minute of it. I should also note she doesn't like Puccini or Verdi (but I do).

I had the program about a choreographer from the 1920's on the glass table. We covered it with multiplications of fractions, with her having been tested and forgotten some of it. She said she was stoned through much of her tender and impressionable years in high school, and then leaned over. "I've never seen you do numbers…." Wouldn't that be typical if nothing else I do, from writing to music, would impress a woman as much as multiplying fractions? A few years ago some women were impressed with my parallel parking (they were in an altered state). Which is to say, you might as well assume that much of your dimension is irrelevant or invisible to women. It doesn't matter outside their frame of reference, which can be a little narrow. Your literacy is less significant than the suit you're wearing, and men don't always know what women notice, like their butts.

10 p.m. We walked through the lobby with a floor of black marble squares, a pale point at each corner. It was the sort of thing you might find in an old Italian mansion. There was a rug with flamboyant floral patterns. She noted how the patterns seemed to clash on the floor and the stairs, and how a heavy chandelier hung over a large bouquet

on the table. I said they were about to get involved. She said the chandelier was trying to retreat. I said its gravity wouldn't let it. She said, "Let's go."

We walked up Geary, turned left, and passed a wine bar with a torch singer and a small combo. It was only a few blocks to Market Street, but we were hustled and panhandled half a dozen times by black men who were low on funds. When we walked by the Hilton she noticed a young woman with long legs and a tight short skirt, a little precarious in spike heels, who a minute later got into a low Mercedes coupe and rode off. Ming speculated as to what was going on, wondering if she would "give him head" while he drove around, running a stoplight at the wrong moment.

We waited for the bus near Powell Street amongst the litter and destitution. She tried to remember the word for a procedure that flushes nicotine and dependency out of the body. Ten minutes later the bus to the Haight pulled up. There was a quick kiss and it felt a little different, being soft with no resistance.

11 p.m. I found a few messages at home, including one from my brother in Los Angeles. His wife is going to the hospital tomorrow. She is overdue and they will induce labor. I called him and got her on the phone and we talked a while - a Latina woman in her early thirties. She said she is nervous and was candid about knowing what to expect. This is her second child. The first one was induced, and she mentioned the injection, the pain, and then "the madness." Maybe the tiny girl inside her was too comfortable to come out. However, if her mother is getting nervous, she might want to get out of there.

Then my brother was on the line. We talked about inducing labor, the earthquake, and genital mutilation (by way of the Lorena Bobbitt case). I recommended *Neuromancer*, then had to explain where I was this evening. I did that for her as well,

who said it must be nice to be single and have spontaneous evenings on the town. I didn't know they thought in those terms – like a dimension missing from their lives.

I said, "Good luck," and was on a wooden instrument for a while with the tube on.

12 p.m. the phone rang. I had a feeling it was the Czech woman and it was. A quiet voice, a few drinks. We talked about the government and the Constitution and who our representatives are. I speculated on the possibility of living in Paris, Prague, or Vienna, speaking of the fixed and permanent. There was some mention of her not having a good impression of Germans. I said I want to see *Naked*. She said, "Let's get together soon."

Typing for a couple of hours. Coffee, Guinness, and cigarettes.

Nearly 3 a.m. I lay on the bed. I'm still trying to get through *Homeboy* and the lurid junkyard density of his writing style. Now and then I come across a good line, but I wonder if this point of view would drive a person to addiction, or did the drugs instill a point of view so crude it's almost radioactive? Some of the more palatable thoughts in his misanthropic sick materialism: "Ironies were things girls used to curl their hair." When Joe is standing outside a strip joint, he has an exchange with a black guy, with him on heroin and the other on crack:

> How alike we are, Joe thought to keep himself distracted – yet how alien. Both addicts, but I to escape the life I was given and he to gain the one withheld. It's no coincidence that cocaine and heroin are called boy and girl on the street. This young blood staring at me exalts the ego that I shun, surcharges the reality I dim, uses the violence that sickens me to get his dick hard.
>
> "Yo!" woofed the leader finally. "You got group rates?... Yo mama did."

Friday, Jan. 21, 1994

Somehow managed to sleep until eleven. The drone of heavy machinery moving dirt continues. I looked out the window and saw a black woman in a hard hat standing on the edge of a construction site smoking a cigarette. A white prostitute walked by, a bit heavy, her thighs rubbing together in a miniskirt. The black woman rolled her eyes.

Later I was looking out a window and peering through the leaves at an empty flatbed truck on the street. It said INDEPENDENT SCISSOR LIFT and there were chains. I wondered what else might be brought into town in chains on a flatbed truck. A lead guitarist?

Typing for a few hours.

2:30 p.m. Went to work on the bus. There were two women swearing at each other - a white woman and a younger black woman with an infant. The white woman (in her sixties) was a tough old bird and got on the bus, walking back while yelling “Slut!” at the other woman who had gotten off the bus and was on the sidewalk making loud remarks of her own. “Ho!” They had gotten on and off the bus in ways that irritated each other. Given the temper of the white woman I figured it was just as much her fault.

Meanwhile, the afternoon paper: LORENA BOBBITT NOT GUILTY. It was a little depressing, mainly from the legal standpoint. There is something sickening about bad law.

In the office there was a call from a client who was fed up and angry (it’s a workers’ comp dispute). I have heard it before and couldn’t argue with him, he had a point. I left a memo for the Attorney. He doesn’t like it when I quote the insults that a client uses against him, but it’s part of my job.

MEMO

Ref: LVM (where's the file?)

He called and was very angry, swearing, etc. He has just about had it with you and he ran through all of the bullshit and lies you have been giving him, "bullshit" being a word he kept using. Also, he wants "some fucking answers" and he wants "another fucking attorney."

He has received little or no information as to what is going on, no letters saying what you've done, which according to him is nothing. The latest is that you fed him some more bullshit about being in yesterday at 9:30 and working on his case, which of course wasn't true and he can't figure out what sort of attorney can operate like this and on these hours.

One thing about his making so many, mostly futile, phone calls. He is able to ascertain your work schedule and he's not impressed. Coming in late in the morning and going to lunch. He said you're the only lawyer he knows that one doesn't get answers from, and mentioned another attorney who was competent, quick, and responsive, unlike yourself. I'm just repeating what he said.

The problem here is that he is out of money, on the verge of being thrown out, his PG&E is due, this case has been going on a long time, and you're just feeding him lies while not doing anything. I didn't tell him you were probably on a tennis court this afternoon.

He has been trying to get you to arrange a doctor's appointment for four months, among other things. He also said you've been taking attorney's fees from insurance company funds, which he didn't think was fair. So you might want to call him and talk for more than "10 seconds."

Another astute observation he made is that you "must have a lot of other complaints."

The client sent us papers for a change of attorney several months ago, but this one convinced him to remain, to little or no avail.

5 p.m. I accompanied V. to the station. She said she thought Ming was very nice, not snobbish. Also said she is dropping her law class, having found it boring. I returned to the office, finished up, and walked to the pool. It was full and there were no more towels. The man behind the counter said over the last few months 140 towels have been

stolen (they are plain and white). There were a couple of extras, though, and he gave me one, seeing as how I am a regular. I had a workout and shared a lane. One mile. Paused a few minutes in the shallow end. Underwater 1½ lengths (100 feet). Two lengths as fast as I could. One more length underwater not using my legs.

Got out, hot shower, and went home, picking up a burrito on the way.

8 p.m. Turned on the tube for *The Mission*. Jeremy Irons and Robert De Niro bringing their religion to the aborigines in South America a few hundred years ago. A fairly balanced account, which is to say the Europeans representing Portugal, Spain, and the Pope are given their due with the missions coming off angelic and productive, but then hellish and destructive. The colonizers impose their own sense of theater on other countries, giving themselves the starring roles, but how are the natives supposed to feel when according to the geo-politics on another continent strings are being pulled and missions have to be abandoned? It's like they're striking the set on a traveling production, and the native people who tend to have a fixed and permanent sense of time aren't used to an impermanence which comes with let-down and betrayal.

10 p.m. Reading *Adorno* (1984) by Martin Jay, the professor at U.C. Berkeley. After forty pages I realized I was jotting down notes from every other page. There was a familiar constellation of references from Kierkegaard to Samuel Beckett, not to mention Marcuse and Foucault. Theodor W. Adorno was a German social philosopher (of Jewish-Corsican background, 1903-1969).

Words to live by: Paratactic. Hypostatization. Aporias. Reification. *Jetztzeit* = now-time (tell that to the jet set with their insight on the zeitgeist).

12:30 a.m. On the typewriter for a couple of hours until the ribbon ran out.

The radio was distracting for a while, a solo guitarist doing anything he wanted on the instrument. He had a jumpy momentum full of change-ups, and used a customized electric with a classical guitar neck (Lenny Breau).

2:30 a.m. Read over an old journal and went to sleep.

Saturday, Jan. 22, 1994

I went out in the morning, a Saturday with dead air. I was barely out the front door when a black guy was walking alongside. He wanted something.

I picked up the paper. The airhead was acquitted. The knife of justice. I thought about the "maimed" man while I walked. There were two old people in motorized wheelchairs coming my way, the woman intact while the man had no legs. When I returned later, I walked by a hooker who used to be a man.

I picked up a typewriter ribbon, and guitar strings in the guitar shop. I went into the back room and plugged in a black Takamine, an acoustic which converts to an electric, using a small amp with reverb and "presence," and was more or less in love. I've heard that God is love, and so is music. Both are more reliable than humans, and I would just as soon inhabit this dimension of reverberating steel notes, an antidote for everything from the weather to my living conditions (it was $1400 for the guitar and amp).

Walked out. The last time I was on Polk Street a young man walked by in a bad mood. He kicked a metal newsstand into the street, slammed something else, and nearly got into a fight with someone further on.

Back home I was on the phone with my sister in Mountain View with news about a new niece – someone who was born yesterday. 8 pounds, 12 ounces. She was overdue

and had gone on growing. If they waited any longer, she would have been too large to come out, requiring a caesarean. The expectant mother said something the other night about not wanting to be "torn."

There was some mention of the Bobbitt case, with my sister saying it doesn't warrant taking the law into your own hands, but the guy was an asshole and deserved it. There was another case recently where a woman cut the "balls off" her husband, who is permanently disfigured. Men are delicate creatures in some respects. We talked a while – she's flying to Los Angeles next week – and then I read an article about the case. A photo of Lorena smiling and waving, driving away from the courthouse and holding up her right hand. Look, no knife. The jury went for an excuse of temporary insanity. I wonder if that applies to male defendants who harm women.

There is a problem when jurors are confronted with an either/or, not wanting to hit her with a guilty verdict when the penalty could be years in prison. A lighter charge might have been more workable. It's too extreme for her to be looking at a stretch in prison or nothing at all. You could do more time for unpaid parking tickets or being drunk in public. There was a possible charge of "wounding," with a maximum of five years, but again, she could have wound up with a few months. Getting off completely, except for a psychiatric examination, is not a good legal precedent.

I remember when I was in jail, putting in the last few hours for a DUI before returning to the office later in the afternoon (the Attorney told the judge he needed me at work). I was in a cell with a rough-looking guy who had done ten years for killing someone. He was currently in for a couple of weeks for hitting his wife. How did he get there unless the law does not allow it? There has to be some evidence of it though. A

woman can walk out and file for divorce and doesn't need a reason. A charge of physical abuse doesn't work if there's no evidence that it happened. It's like our personal injury cases - they need a doctor's report or they're worthless.

It would seem her fragile emotional state is sacred, while a man and his body parts are expendable.

As far as legal precedent goes, what sort of sliding scale of mutilation will be warranted, based on the degree of abuse in a relationship? It could implicate a large number of women. How to determine what should be cut off for what amount of mental or physical abuse? Would four years of psychological torture from a woman justify the man cutting off one breast? How about an ear? Imagine a man who's driven mad after years of nagging and manipulation and cheating who succumbs to a moment of "irresistible impulse." He picks up a knife and cuts off one of her fingers while she's sleeping. Imagine him being found not guilty.

When the verdict was read there was a "shriek of disbelief" – the high note of the proceedings. That was followed by a ghoulish chorus of women cheering for Lorena, who gave a statement to abused women: "It encourages you to reach out, talk to someone today." Reach out with a knife, and talk to an attorney.

Should a jury get involved with psychological defenses, being a group of amateurs? It would seem to leave the law in a mushy unpredictable domain. If it tightens up on the physical abuse of women, which requires evidence, the men might get the message. Not many want to sit in jail, lose their job, and maybe their wife as well.

Typing in the afternoon. The overcast turned to rain. The light broke through the clouds for a few minutes until the overcast took over again with a sullen efficiency.

I read the paper. The aftershocks of the earthquake are making for “frayed nerves” and “long lines at relief centers.” The shock of each moment, or rather hour, of being stuck in traffic.

6:30 p.m. Ming called and we were on the phone for over an hour. She has been reading *The Golden Notebook* and likes it. Her boyfriend is sick. We knocked around the possibility of going out and doing something, but it never materialized.

8 p.m. Reading with the opera on. It was nice to have an undulating continuum in the background, going on for hours with no interruption. It’s good for getting absorbed in a book.

I read about “one of this century’s most demanding intellectuals.” There were stumbling blocks - his prose style and my own limitations. Adorno “provided metacritical analyses of both idealist and Heideggerian ontologies in the name of an anti-metaphysical dialectic of non-identity which resisted closure and reconciliation.” The line verges on the impossible as your mental circuits give off smoke in the effort to comprehend it.

A soprano in the background was getting emotional while I read phrases like “factoring out social reality” and “resisting the death-like power of the false totality.”

10 p.m. I went out for something to eat. Unfortunately, I’m getting lazy and dropped into one of those places where it was a night of the living dead with a few rejects from a Fellini movie, an unwholesome mix of lower Polk Street and the Tenderloin, which is to say the mutants were out in force. You look for a sociologic silver lining as appearances can be deceiving. People are strange, but that doesn’t mean they’re not

aware, however much they're subject to the warping pressure of the streets. There were black men who were on the skids, and white male hookers, and a Chinese version of the dull-normal standing behind the counter.

When I walk out of my building it's a close call with the real, but there's a sudden drop when I've been thinking of critical theory and a minute later I'm on lower Hyde Street.

I returned home and reviewed the journal from last October. It seemed to be holding up, though in serious need of editing. I revisited the nightclub with a woman in a band called the Insaints. She was full of piss and vinegar and other surprises, taking Carmen Miranda one step further banana-wise. I thought of the banality of decadence.

12:30 a.m. I lay down for a minute and several hours went by.

Sunday, Jan. 23, 1994

9:30 a.m. Phone call from Ming. She got up early, couldn't sleep, and figured I shouldn't either. I was up though and having coffee. We talked for an hour. I was in a good mood, but she was miserable, like everything is out of sync. We made plans for her to come over.

10:30 a.m. I called my brother in Los Angeles with his dry sense of humor. I said something about there having been a recent special event (he was watching football). "Oh, you mean the baby. Yes, she's around here somewhere, in a drawer I think, sleeping." He had videotaped the birth and got in the way of the doctor, stumbling over wires and cords (not umbilical). I talked with my father who had been at the hospital with my mother. They weren't allowed in the birth room, but were right outside, hearing the

yells and moans of another woman, and then my sister-in-law during the last hour. The doctor induced labor with an injection in the morning.

I talked with my mother (who was not watching football). She is something of a feminist when it comes to the strength of women – and she should know, having had five kids. Finally, I spoke with my sister-in-law (who had been taking a shower). She sounded fine, still excited, and a little macho, saying the process had worn out my brother more than her, with him requiring more sleep afterwards.

This was all rather positive. Having a female is as good or better than a male in my opinion, though I've heard women say that girls are more difficult. At any rate, she was sleeping quietly – 20 hours a day for the first few weeks.

11:30 a.m. Ming arrived. I got out of the shower, dried off, and sat around in black briefs for a while with the sun coming through the windows. She took her shirt off and put on one of mine which she recently discovered, a pullover cotton thing I got for Christmas and which I don't think I'll see anymore.

She had picked up a few things for breakfast – eggs, potatoes, mushrooms. I put on some clothes and we were in the kitchen with her cutting something with a knife and going on about the depressing situation with her boyfriend. It doesn't look good and there are future complications down the road. He was abandoned by her for a year and then she went back to him. He probably has some anger or resentment. More to the point, he might want things according to his own agenda for a while, and he mentioned marriage.

She gets into emotional entanglements and yet is easygoing when we are together. It is the relief that we are only friends, or that - as she has said before - this is where the

better side of her comes out. The side that shows itself in an affair is the one that starts to choke.

1 p.m. We had breakfast at the round wooden table with some music on. I had surreptitiously turned a black and white portable on for the game without the sound. She had no interest and was underwhelmed with those who did, including her boyfriend and a roommate who she thought were “bonding” in the process.

It would require some finesse if I was going to watch it with her in the apartment. I got around it though. We sat on the bed as I changed the strings on my guitar with the tube nearby. I handed her one old guitar string after another and mentioned how she used to make wire things and she got absorbed in that for an hour, incorporating some icicle prisms from a candelabra, and a feather, and hanging it in the window. It caught the sunlight as the clouds were breaking up.

When I had the new strings on I played for a while, not overwhelmed by the sound. I have another guitar in mind (the black acoustic-electric). She sat cross-legged on the rug with her wire and feathers and cut-glass objects and a determined look, bending wires with her black hair to her shoulders, barefoot in black tights and a loose pullover shirt. There were a couple of times when she kneeled in the window fixing a hanging mobile that I remembered what it’s like to have a woman around during the idle hours of a Sunday afternoon.

The conversation wandered all over the place, from socio-economic matters to various trends and movements. I found out that she doesn’t want to be associated with levitating blobs of matter, thank you for very much (I compared her to a lava lamp).

We managed to have a relaxing afternoon. I was stretched out on a Mexican blanket on the mattress with her insisting that in spite of my insinuations she is not a sinister person. She told me what it's like to be a girl and have your older brothers and sisters say that you were found in a garbage dump. She had an imaginary friend for a while. I'm not sure what that makes me at this point.

Meanwhile, the game was headed for a wretched loss. She had gotten curious, watching for a few minutes, and exclaimed,

"Look, he hit him in the head! How rude!"
"He has a helmet."
"It still isn't very nice."
"He's getting paid a million a year."

4 p.m. We walked a few blocks to the main drag and waited for the bus to Marin, leaning against the wall and having one of our spontaneous dialogues. This morning when I answered the phone rather suddenly, she was taken aback. "You sound angry." I said that's how I normally am, angry and alone. She said, "No." I explained it again and she said, "No." Later she said we have evolved to the point she doesn't have to say "Excuse me" when she burps.

The bus pulled up and I was gone. It was a lovely ride out of town across a long suspension bridge, the morning clouds moving inland or evaporating in mid-air. There was a sailboat on the water 200 feet below a road suspended in the sky. I rode into the hills on the way to Larkspur. When the bus got there, I walked to the apartment of the Actress and her daughter. I was an hour late, and in retaliation she had gone for a walk. I watched some dark clouds slide behind a wooded hill in the fading light.

Half an hour later they returned and I whistled. The mother looked a little stern or hurried, but her daughter replied in kind, cupping her hands together and making a sound.

You never know when you will find an inherent rapport with someone. It was immediate with her, like an open window. It doesn't happen with many people, especially when they're only ten. She informed me that she will be a teenager in only three years. In fact, she will turn eleven in October, so make that two years. I said, "What's your hurry?"

The Actress was in a rush. It was typical that she would go for a walk, knowing I was coming, but which would leave them pressed for time. We left in five minutes. She was in a hurry to get to the play, and threw a package of noodles to her daughter who would have to find some hot water at the theater for her dinner. I don't mean the mother is not attentive, her daughter has good manners, but she's kind of thin. We drove to the woods near Ross in which there was an out-of-the-way theater with a seating capacity of 300. Maybe thirty showed up. *WHOSE LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?*

I sat with Maya in the front row, who was slurping her noodles. I had a glass of wine. She said, "You smell like wine." I said, "You smell like noodles with beef flavor." We get into these odd exchanges. She likes nothing more than to tease and have it returned. During most of the second act she was kicking my foot or blowing on me or doing things with her fingers and showing me, while her mother was on stage as a stern head nurse. I was gradually absorbed in the play. One way to gauge a production is if the actors don't get in the way of the play, if they convey it and they did.

The premise: a woman in her thirties or forties who is intelligent and a sculptor is in a car wreck. It leaves her paralyzed from the neck down. She realizes in her hospital bed that this is it for the rest of her life and demands some honesty from the doctors, wanting to know what right they have to control and institutionalize her if she doesn't want it. She wants to be released, knowing she would die in a week. The doctor responds

by referring to a mental health code which allows them to hold onto her. If she wants to leave, she must be mentally off. She has an attorney representing her.

I thought of Michel Foucault in *Madness and Civilization*. He wrote about people who give up their autonomy to experts who assume more power than is warranted. There was a point where the paralyzed woman, who could only move her head and mouth, was becoming hard to deal with. What was depressing was the lack of a response. She was surrounded with the detachment of professionals and those who couldn't treat her like a normal person. They were guilt-ridden for being healthy while she wasn't, and she wouldn't stand for it.

During the play Maya whispered little asides and observations, noting for example that she could see the faint outline of a red bra through the white blouse of a woman attorney. Later the patient leaned back, the doctor with his stethoscope on her chest, and said, "How do you like my breasts?"[13]

During the intermission Maya dragged me over to talk to someone. She seemed to know a lot of people, walking around like a stage-daughter. Then she stood on my foot and we talked about her low white pumps. Size 6 with yellow socks and pink tights.

When it was over, with some good applause, the actors came out and mingled with the crowd. I found myself talking with the doctor whose aura of medical authority was slowly fading, like he was going from a doctor to an actor to an ordinary man in a diminishing transition (if diminishing is the word).

There was a fine mist outside and the moon was nearly full while I smoked a cigarette (to Maya's disapproval). When we first got there her mother disappeared,

[13] In the original version (by Brian Clark), the patient is a man and the doctor is a woman.

leaving us in the lobby while she ate some of my trail mix, sitting on a chair with her knees up, legs spread. I thought of the confidence of young girls, before they're hit with a bio-chemical change of life. Some women have told me it is not a big deal, this allegedly profound transition, since it occurs slowly. They are anchored in their bodies which constitute a warm horizon and all the proof they need that they exist. It's like a Renaissance perspective where a human being is the measure of all things. Leonardo da Vinci drew a man whose limbs are reaching for a geometric symmetry as proof of his divinely ordained worth, or something to that effect.

We drove back with the Actress throwing questions at me about the production and the cast. She had reservations about one woman as an actress. I said she had nice legs and the Actress objected, saying they were not worth mentioning. And what about her own role? She had argued with the female director who wanted her to be colder and more stern. There were some difficult rehearsals. I said a director has to keep the entire cast in mind, considering the contrast of the characters and how that is conveyed to the audience.

Back at their place we sat around and Maya was told to get ready for bed. She sighed, went into her room, and came out in a flannel nightgown from her neck to her feet and lounged on the sofa. I was on a nearby chair and she was being coy with some mention of her "hairy" legs.

She kept touching my shoes with her foot. We talked about shoes, what I can do with mine, and what she can do with her "black sneaks." I mentioned the woman who was a rock climber in Yosemite. She mentioned someone who climbed Half Dome with a paraplegic. We wondered if someone is heavier as a dead weight or limp. I wasn't sure, so she lay down and said to lift her. I went over and picked her up, who was playing

dead, and carried her to her mother who didn't want her, so I brought her back to the sofa and dumped her there unceremoniously.

Okay, now pick her up when she isn't a dead weight. I picked her up again, with her in a sitting position, and carried her around for the sake of argument. It was the same, all sixty-five pounds of her (which is half of Ming). Rather light in fact. Her point was losing credibility in that she didn't want to get down and felt heavier as I carried her around. We finally went into the bathroom as directed by her mother to brush her teeth. I set her down and walked out.

A few minutes later she was going to bed. I said, "Sleep good," and she called out, "Thank you!" and wanted to know if I was sleeping over.

I talked with her mother for a while, having some soup and rice. Humorous and well-informed, she reads the paper and thinks about the news. She was shocked by the verdict in the Bobbitt case and didn't agree with it. The woman was guilty and should not get off. When the Actress talked with her women friends about it, they tended to agree, the woman wasn't helpless. She could have walked out if he was abusive. It didn't have to come to a point where she had an "irresistible impulse" to pick up a knife while her husband slept.

I mentioned the fallacy of her attorney saying the husband had "psychologically" cut off all routes of escape, so why hadn't she psychologically cut off his dick. She laughed, "Exactly." This notion that a woman's psychological discomfort warrants the physical mutilation of a man is a bit much. She said a man in the play, an Englishman, was angered by the verdict, but then he's from a more civilized country (if health

insurance and the murder rate are anything to go by). He thought she should have been put away for years, no question.

The Actress couldn't figure out the vagaries of a jury. A jury is a bunch of amateurs manipulated by professionals, and anything can happen. In this case, the woman came off more appealing. The facts in question fade into the background, becoming history.[14] It's even worse if the prosecution went for a harsh sentence, leaving the jury with an either-or it couldn't handle.

11 p.m. There was a big hug and a kiss from her and I left. It was a close call as to whether we would take things further, like sleeping together. We may have sidestepped the issue. I am starting to look on sex as an instinct with some complications attached. Many men and women prefer a hit and run approach, getting the sex and getting out before the complications hit. I've gravitated to a wary corner, and the only thing that would transform the situation is to be in love with someone, which is to say, "Love minus zero no limit," and that sort of thing doesn't happen very often – especially when it's more or less in unison. I'm about due for another long affair, and wonder how old I'll be when it hits. My longest ones began when I was twenty-two and thirty-three.[15] There have been some edifying close connections, but they lasted for months instead of years.

That reminds me of something in the paper this morning. I read an old line I had been trying to remember by Lord Chesterfield, who expressed a tired attitude in the vein

---

[14] "History is more or less bunk," according to Henry Ford, the father of the assembly line, in 1916. Like many people, he wanted to live in the present, and was tired of hearing about the past – although that would include whatever happened yesterday (and in fact he built a museum for his own industrial history). He was something of a futurist, however, and "futurism led to fascism." "The Italian Futurists praised invention, modernity, speed and disruption." Rose Eveleth, *Wired*, April 18, 2019. Henry Ford was so mechanical he became a Nazi sympathizer.

[15] Looking ahead: I turned forty-two in April, and the following month I met a woman writer from Louisiana. We would be together for many years.

of, “Copulation is the lyricism of the masses.” He said, “The price is exorbitant, the pleasure is transitory, and the position is ridiculous.” I’d rather not arrive at such a disillusioned view.

Where was I, walking a few blocks to the bus stop in a quiet deserted town. It started to rain and turned into a heavy downpour. I stood under an awning with the silhouettes of women’s clothing in a window. The bus pulled up, conforming to the miracle of a schedule, and I rode to the city in the rain. Forty minutes later I got out and walked a few blocks, the rain having stopped, and picked up a bottle of wine on the way home. It was raining again a few minutes later.

Monday, Jan. 24, 1994

In the morning I sat down with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. There were flowers next to the phone. A minute later the flowers started ringing. It was Ming. Her presence and her problems are a regular fixture in my life, not to say a pivot on which many of my mornings, afternoons, and nights revolve, usually to good effect.

Half an hour later I was staring at the typewriter when the phone rang again. It was one of those ominous moments which you steel yourself to be prepared for, hearing the voice of your mother in tears and expecting the worst. She said not to worry, my father was admitted to the hospital this morning with chest pains, and the minute she got into the specifics of medical tests and symptoms her voice became more or less normal. I took it in a stoic manner, not jumping to conclusions, though you get a little tense when your father’s health is in question.

She has a proclivity for getting emotional, if not in tears. It could be about anything, so I'm never sure how serious it is. A few years ago, the family had gathered on a holiday weekend at my parents' home and my mother decided – rather ill-timed I thought – to tell us that she and my father were considering a separation. My sisters were in tears, my brothers glum, with everyone serious and morose. After a while I walked into the sunken den and sat down at a black piano with some whiskey. I was considered a little callous for not going with the program, which I half-suspected was a psycho-drama she was playing out because she doesn't get any arguments from my father – he won't fight. Eventually there were adjustments, having given my father a shot across the bow so to speak – wanting him to loosen up and take vacations (like a Caribbean cruise). His asceticism had been weighing on her and she had a point. Following the family meeting she wanted a photo on the hill behind the house, and we were all supposed to smile.

Anyhow, he was admitted to the emergency room. The doctors will run all sorts of tests to determine the problem. It was not exactly a heart attack. Maybe the valves or arteries of the heart were beginning to struggle from not getting enough oxygen. He doesn't drink or smoke (I had to learn that on my own). What they don't tell you is that your heart can malfunction no matter how you've led your life, and he is sixty-five.

There was some question if he picked up something on his frequent trips across the border, helping the poor in Mexico. I got the phone number of the hospital and we talked a while. There have been some changes over the last couple of days involving the mortality of relatives. A niece is born and two days later my father is in intensive care. The inevitable is hard to argue with.

12:00 I went to the office in a heavy downpour with an umbrella. Met up with V. and we walked in a lighter rain to the Hunan place. She liked the idea of my brother videotaping the birth, but what about the camera angles? He didn't shoot it directly did he, like between her legs? I wasn't sure. Maybe that would be okay when the head is coming out. She has an endearing combination of discretion and the matter-of-fact, as if the body of a man or woman is as much a part of the terrain as trees or hills, and childbirth is a reason for being.

Smoked ham and whole garlics, noodles in peanut sauce, and tea. She has a sly sophistication, a covert capacity for which is not encouraged by those around her, like her boring boyfriend. She will admit to having evolved over the last year or two, but she is careful about it. She doesn't want to outgrow her plans for the future and the boyfriend in question.

I got her perspective on how much ten-year-old girls are aware of. Quite a lot, apparently. On the way back to the office we got on the subject of old Beatles tunes. Not only did she know a few, she wanted me to know the Philippines are not as remote as I thought, and hummed a tune, "Do you want to know a secret…"

In the office there was not much work with the Attorney gone. I put together another DUI case, with a BAC (blood alcohol count) of .18 (the legal limit is .08). Then I was on the phone, trying to get the name of a juvenile probation officer. That was followed by a memo about our clients and what they think of his lousy work habits.

Later in the afternoon I picked up some messages at the front desk and talked with the receptionist. She has a low opinion of one of the attorneys, and barely lowers her voice when referring to him as a dick. She showed me one of her textbooks with cases

from the 1800's, very dry. There was some mention of Marxist political theory. I was struck by the discipline of her life, driving to classes three nights a week. She lives in Oakland and is stunning with dark hair and make-up, not to say intelligent and opinionated. We get along rather well, and she mentioned that she's getting married in a few months.

5 p.m. I walked V. to the station and said, "You know who was found not guilty?" "That woman," she replied, referring to Lorena. She thought he deserved what happened to him. I'm still trying to figure out the logic, not to say legality of that perspective.

Her curiosity got the better of her, wondering how much was cut off, and laughing at the thought of it, or the fact that we were speaking in these terms - a phallus in the hand of a woman. I mentioned a recent case where a woman cut off the balls of a man, and again she was amused, even suggesting that they give him the sex organs of a woman. "What's wrong with that?" Oddly enough, the discussion was becoming so suggestive I was getting hard. Fortunately, I wore a coat. It used to be the mere thought of her would have that effect, but I thought I'd gotten over it.

I dropped into the bookstore and flipped through an *Esquire*. A long article on something called "Do me" feminists. According to another non-event of pseudo-journalism there are women in their mid-twenties to early forties who don't mind talking dirty. This could be a groundbreaking sociological discovery. The arbitrary slip of media coverage is showing, like when an ice skater with a sore knee was on the cover of countless magazines.

It's a brave new world of liberated women who are crashing through the open doors of journalistic attention, shaking their tresses like Naomi Wolf for a photo. They

convey a sensual vixen for the split-second it takes for a camera shutter to close. Wolf is thought to be courageous as she braves the treacherous currents of the modern world, but she is propped up and supported with every known security and insulation, including marriage. However, it must have taken a lot of courage to admit she likes men.

One woman, thirty, edits a magazine on sex in San Francisco. She likes a man to pretend he is a burglar who breaks into her apartment and forces her to "suck his cock." What keeps this in line with feminism is that even though he is "degrading" her, it is at her command. It gives mixed signals to the man, having to inhabit a role so she can get off on a fantasy.

A black writer, bell hooks, went on about how there is a need for more "versatile dicks," not wanting to be limited to an either/or of limp or hard ones. She spoke of men as dicks and gave a less than lyrical account of rough sex on Monday, "eating pussy" on Wednesday, and something else on Friday. There was nothing about the versatility of women.

Why does all of this deserve national attention? Is it a way of granting permission to others? Being coy with a reporter in a hotel room where everything is calculated and politicized, with an assumption that your private life is setting off a reverberating trend.

I walked home.

7:30 p.m. I called the hospital room in San Diego and my father answered. He sounded worn or bored. He is prone to neo-platonic Christianity, which is to say the body is utilitarian and under-emphasized, and when there's something wrong he is offended. He may have ignored the recent symptoms of a virus that he picked up during his trips to Mexico (with volunteers to build cheap housing). We talked about his being tested on the

treadmill tomorrow, gauging his heart condition. We both have slightly low blood pressure, but he is hypoglycemic. His working-class father died of a heart attack around sixty-eight.

My mother, brother, and a nurse walked into the room for a blood test. My brother, a physical therapist, was asking questions. When he got on the phone I said, "What are you asking the nurses?" He said, "Are you single? Do you live around here?"

There was some mention of the G.I. tract. I said, "Government issue?" He said, "Gastro-intestinal." My mother is more direct and matter-of-fact about bodily functions and dysfunctions than my father. I wonder if that's why women tend to live longer than men, if they conform to the facts of life with less resistance, leaving them with more longevity and less friction.

Reading in the evening with the radio on. I turned it up for the moody behavioral modification of "Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis" (1910) by Vaughn Williams, during which the phone rang. A woman with MCI wanted to sell long distance communication. It was a short conversation.

I had some coffee and Chianti and was on the typewriter for a few hours. I've found that wine is more fluid than beer. Meaning I have more of it in a writing session than beer (which I lose interest in after one).

1:30 a.m. I lay on the bed and heard voices. A few black men were yelling in the intersection, not unfriendly, just how they talk around here. I wondered why some people talk so the whole neighborhood can hear them at any hour of the night, and usually it is black people making their presence felt. It doesn't matter if it's 1:30 in the morning. Is there something about loudness which compensates for the dull substance of what is

being said? Do the voices rebound out of their heads more forcefully if those heads are empty? Dumb and loud seem to go together. Is a person's voice associated with the physical, rather than the mental? That would explain a few things, when the voice is used less for communication and more as a bonding element, if not a weapon, and a mindless shout is not uncommon. There's more punctuation than content, with occasional breakdowns in communication which can lead to violence.[16]

Tuesday, Jan. 25, 1994

Woke up too early and went back to sleep for a couple of hours.

I came to from a fading dream in which there was a phone call from a woman I haven't seen since high school over twenty years ago. She was of Japanese descent and called me on a whim, wanting to get back in touch. Then she walked through the door. It was unusual as no one I went to high school with ever calls or wonders how I'm doing.[17] It's in the past, and "history is more or less bunk."

Typing in the morning with some rain. A water droplet in the branches turned into a sparkling diamond. I glanced out the window at an old building. There were a couple of Latino kids in an apartment, brother and sister I think, maybe four or five years old. He was naked and unconcerned while watching the men working at a construction site.

---

[16] It reminds me of what a reviewer said of Spike Lee's film, *Jungle Fever*, that the characters were talking at each other, wielding wooden slogans and deaf linguistic poses like protest signs, and getting nowhere.

[17] Not their fault, I moved away and hardly ever went back. One time I dropped in on a woman friend I knew in college in Los Angeles (we had a short affair). It had been a few years, and things had changed. I found her pumping milk from her breast, having had a baby with the roommate of her and her boyfriend (who was gone). The roommate was an early aficionado of hang-gliding (they lived near the airport), and the household was no stranger to lysergic acid.

2 p.m. I was about to get in the shower when the phone rang. It was Ming, calling from a temporary job as a bored receptionist.

I arrived in the office around three with the Attorney there. I had left a memo which quoted the words of an angry client, including his curses, with comments on the veracity of that opinion. It also mentioned various errors, so I wasn't surprised when he blew up, yelling and swearing, pounding the desk, and throwing papers around. It's the sort of thing you never find the other attorneys doing, and was shocking for the secretaries. I'm used to it, remaining calm and explaining my points or questioning his, which were a bit off. One bone of contention was a letter that didn't go out yesterday. It was supposedly urgent. I said there was no way of knowing it was urgent if he didn't tell me, and furthermore the reason it was still here, if he read the memo, was the address he had for the juvenile probation officer was in the wrong town.

I finally walked out with him having let off steam and returned to a halfway coherent discourse, or as close as he gets to that sort of thing. I had left the door to his office open and Maria, the young secretary at the next desk, looked at me in amazement and wondered why I was smiling. She said she would have cried if it happened to her.

Later, after smoking on the balcony, I spoke with the receptionist. She was amused to hear about the blow-up. Then she told me she had accidently hung up on someone and said, "Oh shit," while pushing the intercom button so everyone in the office heard her.

5:30 p.m. I was still there, with Ming supposed to call. I thought I would check out a reception at the Goethe-Institut, something about "The dances of Weimar" with a fair amount of "depravity and ecstasy" (which I'm doing without these days). Then the

Actress called. She was driving into town for an audition near here (the Exit Theater), and asked if she could drop off Maya, who was all for it. I said, “Okay.”

On the way home I walked into the Goethe-Institut and walked out. People stood around speaking German, and it felt like I was sideswiped by a foreign *weltanschauung*, a missing chord of culture and sophistication on a common genetic wavelength, but I didn’t speak the language.

6:30 p.m. I straightened up the place. It was nearly seven when the Actress arrived, dropping off her daughter and leaving in a few minutes. That left the two of us sitting around, wondering how this was going to work out. If there was any awkwardness it went away as we warmed to the occasion with her getting interested in one object after another, and the conversation was picking up. I tried to have a cigarette, but had to negotiate the situation. It was okay as long as I stayed next to an open window, with her letting me know that secondhand smoke causes asthma.

There was a long interlude with a wooden “helicopter,” a propeller on a stick which you send spinning into the air with your palms held together, one moving quickly forward and the other back. She was delighted as we spun it back and forth across the room to each other. She tied a black ribbon on it and spun it into the air. I said, “That looks like a girl helicopter,” and she said, “That’s sexist.”

Maya loves to be sarcastic and to get it back. What she can’t stand is the sentimental attitude of older people. She has a capacity for repartee, but then her mother works in improv.

She also told me how dumb the boys are in school, and how a friend of hers is kind of fat and over 90 pounds, “like a cow,” a Jewish girl who whines a lot. Another

female friend (who is eleven) watches a man and woman getting undressed next door with a telescope. So far, she hasn't seen much. Maya looked at all the apartments in the window and asked about my binoculars. I said we could look at the moon, but she wasn't interested. She said she is good at spelling and to ask her some words. She got "bookkeeping" and struggled with "responsible". She tried on a diamond ring which was lying around, and didn't believe a large crystal I had was a diamond (it wasn't). Her skepticism knows no bounds. She didn't believe I took a photo of a woman's legs standing on a newspaper like a lotus blossom, or that those gorgeous legs were those of an ex-girlfriend (they were, hello Simone).

I was lounging on the bed when she walked over to look out the window and knocked Ming's mobile off (guitar string, crystal, feather). She tried to fix it, then pried the cigarette lighter out of my hand so she could light a candle, and concentrated on the flame dripping over an empty beer bottle. "Cool." There was a sardonic conversation, and she nearly knocked the candle over, with some comments about her burning down the place. I got the watercolors out (they're good for subduing women). We were going to work on a picture. She said she isn't very good and "Don't look," but managed a nice composition of a stem and leaves floating in the air with a few curlicues. It was done in purple, green, and turquoise.

There was some mention of a girl she knows from India who is kind of hairy, and she herself has "hairy arms," pushing her sleeve up to show me. I thought it was charming, but she was not impressed, being half-Latina with dark hair. I don't know where this dumb notion comes from, that women should be shaven, but she seems resigned to it.

Her mother returned from the audition around 8:30 and was in a bad mood, though she brightened up on seeing how we were getting along. I shared a Spaten beer with her and sat at the round table. I was supposed to add something to the watercolor, but didn't want to compromise what she had done. I mentioned painting a frame, so she sat on my leg and concentrated with the brush until there was the outline of a violet frame with some awkward arabesques on either side of a little heart. On the bottom she wrote both of our names. When I was at their home a month or two ago, she drew a sketch of me and then wanted to put herself into it, overlapping our faces, like my outline and her features.

I mentioned that my brother's wife had a baby, 8½ pounds. She knew that was on the heavy side. I said he videotaped it and she said, "Gross," and if I didn't think so that's because it is "a woman's thing."

Then she got the idea I needed a moustache. I sat back with her leaning on me, and her mother was amused. I got a long Snidely Whiplash moustache in purple, then a red outline around my mouth which Maya thought was funny. She stepped back to admire it and her mother, standing nearby, threw her arms around me. These moods come over her from time to time. The daughter had a sudden expression on her face, somewhere between confusion and disapproval.

When they had to leave, around nine, the mother said Maya gets a little giddy around this time, meaning she is tired. I walked them to their car with the moustache still painted on me.

9 p.m. I read for a while and turned up the radio for the Requiem in D Minor, (1791) by Mozart. I thought about my father, with my brother having called earlier in the

evening. I told him I was entertaining a young lady. He said he didn't know I could be entertaining. We talked about my father's condition. Feeling weak he postponed the treadmill tests. His weight is down to 140-something. I thought it was more. My brother and I are both around 170. It sounds like a Mexican virus, and neither one of us has complete confidence in the hospital.

10:30 p.m. Guitar and typewriter for a few hours.

Wednesday, Jan. 26, 1994

9:30 a.m. I had just gotten up when the phone rang, the Professor in Los Angeles. He was in his office and talking about the earthquake and the after-effects. Many buildings in Santa Monica were cracked and may have to be torn down. The commute for him is not so bad, taking side streets, but it's miserable for others.

I ran a phrase or two by him from the critical theory book. "The anti-metaphysical dialectic of non-identity." He doesn't have much interest in that sort of thing, and wanted to know if I could mail him the fascist paper. I said I would include a couple of others on chaos and the relation of public opinion and defense spending. We talked about the beginnings of the American empire and he went into his lecture mode, which was fine because I'm not well versed in how the U.S. throws its weight around in other countries. He mentioned the Spanish-American War and Teddy Roosevelt. It wasn't until the late 1800's that the state took on a sacred aura with the worship of the flag.

I mentioned what the leftwing journalist, John Reed, said about World War I: "It's about money." The Professor said it was a struggle of international capitalism which Reed felt the working class had no business getting involved in, much less dying for in

large numbers – and to what end? Trenches full of bones? He said that England vacated much of its empire, all the more so after World War II, with the U.S. only too ready to step in.

Around 1920 there was the formation of an anti-radical department which later became the FBI. The first head of it was a young lawyer named J. Edgar Hoover, and its priority was not protecting the country from organized crime. It was more concerned with radicals and bank robbers, and later went after pot smokers and non-violent civil rights workers, rather than machine-gun-toting thugs with surreptitious connections to the government. There was also the likelihood that the Mob had compromising photos of Hoover (he was homosexual and liked to wear a dress), so he barely acknowledged their existence, while gathering incriminating secrets about the politicians around him. That assured that he was head of the FBI for the rest of his life (and unfortunately he lived a long time).

We talked about Italian and Spanish Catholics who were fascists. The former sent troops and supplies to the civil war in Spain (as did the Nazis), supporting the dictatorial Franco, while the U.S. government was of little help to the non-fascist side, and the anarchists were knocking the heads off statues of the Madonna.[18]

When we got off the phone I typed for a couple of hours, but it was slow going, body and mind colluding in an anti-intellectual mood. My mother called from the hospital and said my father was doing better this morning and will be there another night. She

---

[18] At first, Mussolini was reluctant to align with the Germans, but was pushed in that direction by Western European powers which refused his overtures. "In 1935, when Germany began rebuilding its military in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Mussolini met with British and French leaders at Stresa, Italy, to try to form an anti-German alliance. The attempt failed, as France and especially Britain had no desire to fight another war with Germany. Britain also made a deal with Germany behind Mussolini's back, allowing Germany to build a navy again." www.answers.com/Q/Why_did_Mussolini_align_Italy_with_Germany

mentioned an echocardiogram. I thought about my father on a treadmill with a sense of dread.

NOTES

Consider the cultural atmosphere in this country compared to that in certain European countries. The density of fact-and-fiction molecules in the air is different – there are more fact than fiction molecules in the air in European countries (where intellectuals are more respected), while here it is reversed. There are more fiction molecules than fact, and the result is a deluded Disneyland of false consciousness.

Stepping off the curb the other night I experienced something which is not uncommon and usually involves a woman: right-turning bitches in high-powered cars. They slide up to a red light and go into a turn without stopping, glancing to the left, which means there is a blind side according to which I don't exist. Half a dozen times over the last year I was nearly hit. It's probably my fault for walking so much.

Talking with Ming the other day, I said something about how we spend entire days together, and when she's gone I continue to have thoughts of her. It's like when a leg is cut off and you still feel it. She liked that.

She thinks that we're androgynous, like she has masculine attributes and I have sensibilities that she associates with the feminine. Maybe we're sensitive about different things, and she has a shell to protect an inner softness.

She is often underwhelmed if not grossed out by what I eat – anything to do with honey, raisins, meat, or even peanut butter. You would think I eat them all at once (if you hold the peanut butter that could work). Forget about Russian cabbage soup, but there is nothing wrong with bean curd and Tabasco sauce**.**

In *Neuromancer* there is a Chinese computer virus which replicates with an infinitely subtle manner that which it ultimately infiltrates.

V. said she knows what she wants if I ever get rich: a gold Mercedes.

I read somewhere that beer was made as far back as 6000 B.C. The organized effort to cultivate the grains which go into making beer required a stable society, with beer as the cornerstone of civilization.

The foundations of our civilization may be gas and sewer lines, not to mention cultural swamp gas for the masses.

There are Asian women who want nothing to do with the patronizing notion of being "exotic." They want to be seen as ordinary, like everyone else, and act accordingly. They are exotic as a headache.

What if some women are compelled to run through the full gamut of emotions on a regular basis, like they're testing their reflexes or flushing out accumulated tensions? The conditions may not warrant a full range of emotions, so they operate with arbitrary triggers, and a man won't know what hit him or why it took so little to set her off.

I ran into B. last night on the street, going to her guitar lesson. We talked for a few minutes. I said Ming wants to learn how to play tennis and could I borrow a racket for her. She said, "Okay, but I won't let her have you." I said it was only tennis (a game where love means nothing). She then referred to the ongoing situation with the other woman and had a sheepish look. She realized there is a lack of credibility in having put me through some long sessions, airing her doubts and anger about one crisis after another, and yet the two of them are still together.

I was talking with Ming about movies. She has a low opinion of football, and said you get more from a movie. I thought about it later, how some films involve an emotional scrimmage with the viewer rooting for one side or the other, and someone ends up a loser. There is often violence and injuries, along with a blocked-out chaos where "the play is the thing." There are audibles and people running around with an artificial sense of urgency, and dramatic confrontations coming down to the last few seconds. Movies are known for relegating women to the sidelines of a conflict like airheads leaping to conclusions while the men throw bombs. There are parallel lines that go right by you and the morbid end-zone of a plot. The actors practice, each one with a specific role (which they are known for padding). Some play the heavies and are offensive, while others act defensive. All of them have a number on their back with respect to how much they're paid.

Ethnic discrimination alert, with blackness being denied or rendered invisible, another version of *Invisible Man* (by Ralph Ellison). How many times have I read an article in the paper on the latest murder, robbery, or assault, and even when the suspects are at large in the community and there are semi-identifying clues, there is no mention of race? Apparently, the responsibility for a negative image of black people doesn't lie with them and their actions, but with the newspaper to not mention it. This in a context of magnified racial politics where anyone who is merely impolite to a black person is in the news and racially identified.

I read about a young art student driving near Fisherman's Wharf around dusk. He saw a woman being "robbed by a man at knifepoint." He got out of his car to help her and was stabbed in the chest and died. "Hours later, police arrested a 35-year-

old career criminal who lived in a nearby housing project." That's about half a mile from here and there was no further description.

With respect to suspects remaining at large, there was a bus full of Japanese tourists in Vacaville. Two men got on with guns and ski masks and robbed them. There was some mention of the getaway car, an '84 or '85 Chevy Caprice (white) four-door, but "the only suspect description" was of the driver, "a man in his mid-twenties with a round face and a mustache." We're not supposed to know his race because it would constitute a negative image, and never mind if it would help in apprehending the suspects.

ANOTHER SON OF JESSE JACKSON NAMED IN FEDERAL HEROIN PROBE. I'm not sure if this is guilt-by-association, but there were wiretaps of conversations with a known heroin dealer – he ran an international heroin operation in Oakland. He is from Nigeria (undocumented), and both sons claim they didn't know he had anything to do with heroin, one having known him for six years. "I am surprised and devastated to hear of Mr. Ailemen's alleged involvement in illegal activities." How come I knew of this alleged involvement and he didn't, having read it in the paper a while back? He was tried in 1990 on similar charges. Someone is lying about never having done business with the suspect. The conversation referred to goods received for payment. Whether a euphemism for heroin or not, it's still business.

An article in the *Chronicle* by a black woman columnist which is a tour de force of slippery tact. She refers to there being "hints of a new movement… to eliminate that poverty of the spirit" which keeps black people out of the mainstream and its benefits. While the civil rights movement of Dr. King focused on an unjust system, this has more to do with black people who hold themselves or others back by doing it to themselves. Jesse Jackson has called attention to it lately, cutting through her evasive euphemisms - we're talking about the high rate of black-on-black crime.

But this is how she put it: "This new movement focuses on the ways in which black citizens have allowed white America's continuing racism to seep inward and manifest itself as self-hatred." "That self-hatred is far worse than the racism which is one of its progenitors. It is self-loathing and low self-esteem which have led to high rates of homicide, drug use and teenage pregnancy. Those, in turn have contributed to the breakdown of the black family. It is a cycle which must be broken."[19]

The implication is that black people in their status as the original humans have original virtue (though not original sin, oddly enough). Left to themselves without the lowdown and corrupt examples of white people, there is no such thing as

[19] Black families were far more intact half a century ago, so according to her logic the country was much less racist back then.

> black people being less than ethical with each other, as the customs and traditions of countries in sub-Saharan Africa bear out so well. Tribal warfare and the slave trade, not to say the subjugation of women, were going on for centuries before a few white men showed up along the shores of West Africa in their rickety wooden boats.
>
> Meanwhile, more spurious than the trickle-down theory is the "seep inward" theory, with the implication that blacks don't have a mind of their own. It is the racist ghost of the white man who inhabits their bodies and forces them to do bad things to each other. "The (white) devil made me do it."

I went to work in the afternoon on a crowded bus, standing next to the driver. I was hemmed in with the young and old of every race. The steering wheel was nearly horizontal, at the hub of which was: M * A * N. He was steering a broad concept.[20]

A small sign on the side: THERE IS NO LIMIT TO THE NUMBER OF SEEING EYE DOGS ON MUNI VEHICLES. I don't think I've ever seen one on a Muni bus. Maybe it refers to the passengers, considering how crowded it was, like we're all seeing-eye dogs on this bus, or guide dogs for the blind soul in each one of us.

I got out and walked to the office, so distracted with what I was thinking about, some conjectural dialogue, I forgot what I was doing and made the alarming indiscretion of going to the office instead of the café across the street. I had to urinate, however, which may have led me there while my mind was on other things.

I left again, walking past the Café Praxis (a word used in the book on Adorno). I thought of a Café Fungible where the customers are replaced by other customers, and a Café Non-Identity with no ID required. The Aporia Club is hard to find and people can't decide what they want and no one knows how it stays in business, and Café Reify has

[20] It refers to a truck and bus manufacturer in Munich, Germany.

people stirring hope into a cup of coffee. The Meta-Subjectivity Coffee House is haunted by bad poets. In the Paratactic Club the people sit side by side with no relation to each other.

I worked for a few hours, then walked V. to the station, having one of our minimalistic conversations. I get into the slipstream of her worldview now and then.

6:30 p.m. I left work, went to City Lights bookstore, and looked around. There was the prose of William Vollmann with an impressive density, and a book by a Chinese woman who survived the Cultural Revolution from a lesbian angle. I picked up a *Poetry Flash* and left.

I walked to a Nob Hill building and talked to the manager. He said to look at the studio on the second floor. It was completely redone. I sat there for a while with an open window overlooking a palm tree, a few succulents, and rose bushes. There were stairs and some illuminated towers in the background. I let it soak in as to whether I could live here or not. Only three windows compared to eight in my place in the Tenderloin. Less light, and back from the street, so I would be looking at roses instead of derelicts and workmen. It was too quiet, and he said a woman was ahead of me.

Walked home at a good pace and picked up a burrito. A black man walked up from behind. I was in a good mood for some reason and so was he, so we had a conversation. He mentioned how much he walks around, then showed me a booklet full of charity leaflets, ostensibly collecting for those and could I contribute something. I handed over some change which he put in the pocket of his coat and went on talking about his walking. I said it was good exercise. He said that's true, he could out-walk others his age or younger. "How old are you?" I asked. "Forty-five." A big smile and he

disappeared around the corner before I realized the likelihood of it being a scam, and didn't care. He looked a little shabby and there was nothing official about his presentation. Anyone could put some leaflets in a binder and pretend they're real.

I reviewed old sections of the journal in the evening, wondering why my interest faded in and out, and what the prose was trying to convey. If one maintains a daily effort with a journal, what accounts for the ebb and tide of its coherency? There are several factors, including the swelling and subsiding of my aptitudes and perceptions. There is material which I'm bored with, but which others might find interesting, or not. It's a point I'll have to spray paint on the wall, that it's not the business of the writer to second-guess a reader's interest. It is simply to put it out there (and duck).

11 p.m. I was ready for the typewriter, having opened a Guinness and had a few sips. I lay down on the bed to relax. The next thing I knew it was 5:30 in the morning.

Thursday, Jan. 27, 1994

I woke up early, a rested development. No sign of clouds or rain. The air outside was clear and light was pouring into the room since the shades were not pulled down. I had one of those moments when I walked into the kitchen and stopped. The wall was covered with little rainbows from the prisms in the windows.

I like how light can redefine a room and decorate an apartment. The rooms are renovated by electric lights at night, but the light in the morning has its own effect. When sitting at the typewriter, facing east, the light pours across my hands and I have to pull the shades down with blue cigarette smoke rising in the air. The man who wrote and directed

Through a Glass Darkly said, “Watch the light, you’ll never be lonely,” which is a lonesome thing to say.

I was on the typewriter for hours, getting bogged down in a swamp of sodden topics and racial concerns.

Phone call from my father from his hospital room. He’s going home today. His heart checked out okay, wired to a treadmill. They’re now looking at what sort of parasite from Mexico may have gotten into his system. There was some mention of his father dying in his sleep. A man with no bad habits – my grandmother wouldn’t allow alcohol in the house – and who was physically fit as a worker building roads.

While I was typing there was a loud knock at the door and two seconds later, like they were breaking down the door, the manager (with the key) walked in along with someone else saying EXTERMINATOR! I suppose that’s better than a storm trooper (I thought of William Burroughs when he was young and had that job for a while). As far as I can tell it has no effect on the occasional cockroach, or maybe it’s like amphetamines and they like it. Anyhow, the man shows up now and then, sprays everything and the kitchen sink, and leaves.

2 p.m. I went out. There was a manila envelope in the mail, the fascist paper from one of the history professors. He wrote a letter apologizing for it being late, going on for a full page on the subject of redefining Italian fascism. He may have thought I was another professor, and he asked for comments.

I got on the bus and headed towards the back. A second later I passed an apparition so jarring it almost hurt, like something pulling at my optic nerve and

distorting what I was looking at. A man's face was deformed, or maybe reconstructed, but skewed. I walked to the back.

In the office I typed up a pre-trial statement, about six pages. It's a case for alleged harassment and/or discrimination, with a woman from the Philippines accusing her employer, the U.S. Postal Service. The charges are tenuous and inflated, with the vapors of a paranoiac woman whose "emotional anguish" could be soothed for the "reasonable sum" according to proof (there is none) of $120,000.

There were accusations that her supervisors (most of whom were women of color) didn't let her take five minutes to wash her hands, or they asked for medical proof involving maternity leave. They didn't provide adequate security for her stamps, put her on a computer she wasn't sufficiently trained for, and didn't give her enough time to get to an EEO hearing,[21] thus endangering her safety for some reason. It went on and on, really earthshaking stuff, like a tempest in a teapot. After a while I had the impression – and I've met her – of a woman who sees everything from a magnified perspective where she is the victim of conspiracies. The slightest thing is blown out of proportion, and it warrants a complicated lawsuit. She wants to drag in the Assistant U.S. Attorney, with tons of paperwork, because the government should not ignore the possibility that she is a victim of harassment.

I finally brought it to the Attorney and told him how weak it was, just laughable, and he said I didn't know the half of it. There were hundreds of accusations and he had to boil them down to something even remotely plausible. There were items going back to 1982, a long list of remembered grievances. Even worse, the other side had been bending

[21] Equal Employment Opportunity

over backwards to accommodate her and to settle it, even monetarily I believe, but she won't budge. She has to have her day in court and shoot for the whole amount, $120,000. He said her husband wants a million. It was a wonder the Post Office kept her around as long as it did, even offering to transfer her to another branch if this one wasn't up to her standards of amenable treatment. If anything, this fragile flower was a thorn in the side of the Post Office.

The Attorney had to go through with it, having been paid some time back. It was enough to require his making an effort and following through with a trial. She wants a jury, fully believing they will be impressed by her righteous cause. Who knows, juries are capable of anything. The harassment wasn't sexual, it was more along the lines of occasional "sarcasm." The people she worked with were multi-racial, mostly women, and a few of them found her difficult.

There was a long article in the paper the other day about a woman trying for a class action suit for sexual harassment. One woman was harassed, but a hundred should get paid for what happened to her. The definition of sexual harassment has become so thin and esoteric it's in danger of evaporating. It's like the sheerest material in order to assure that almost anything can be construed as harassment. "Conduct does not have to be sexual or cause women psychological harm to constitute sexual harassment." Maybe it doesn't even have to be harassment. It tends to occur individually rather than to all the women employees, but who knows? For example, the Chevron Information Technology Company has 2000 employees, and 845 of them are women. Four women filed a

complaint, trying to turn it into a class action case where all of the women have been adversely affected.

One problem here is when the accused says that women magnify things, and the women say they're not magnifying anything, that's how they were affected (like subjectivity doesn't involve some magnification). It reminds me of a letter to the editor of the *SF Weekly* a few weeks ago. A woman launched a furious attack on men who have the temerity and nerve and what else – imperialistic presumption – to say something about her smile (especially if she isn't smiling). It's a dumb remark and none of their business whether she's smiling or not, but chances are they weren't being mean or threatening. She took it seriously though. Another woman wrote in and went a step further, vowing to kill the next man who indulged in such unearned friendliness and "physical surveillance" with her. There were some letters commenting on this, like don't these women have anything more serious to worry about? Are women's lives so easy that a man asking them to smile is an oppressive act?

I suppose the next woman who says, "Your shoes are untied," I should knock off her feet for interrupting the private reverie of my thoughts with her presumptuous advice (especially involving something below the waist) (which my shoes are), but I don't think that would help matters. It's a little more compromising with the women in the office who tell me my shirt is wrinkled or I need a haircut, or insidiously compliment me on my coat or tie (which is an object so I feel objectified). They are even more invasive when they TOUCH MY ARM WHEN THEY'RE TRYING TO MAKE A POINT IN THE CONVERSATION. You know what that leads to – my hand or my shoulder, depending what direction they go. According to the feminist program, a knee to the groin and then

backing off into a martial arts stance would be the appropriate response, while yelling something about a lawsuit. What good is emotional anguish if it doesn't have a dollar sign attached?

Where was I, in the office, putting together copies of the papers on fascism and chaos and sending them to the Professor.

The Attorney was leaving and noticed what I was doing, so I gave him a copy of "Reassessing Fascist Diplomacy and Military Policy," him being a World War II buff, if that's the word. He agreed with the premise that it doesn't help anyone, certainly not academics, to put a movement into an ironbound category of "inherently evil" and leave it there. We'll see if he agrees with the rest of the premise, that one reason for attempting an objective study is to show that fascism – like evil – isn't relegated to a distant location, exonerating certain democratic countries which are capable of running over foreign peoples with an iron tread as thoroughly as fascism ever did. The glorification of war, the corporate state, and having dictators as your allies would suggest the presence of fascist principles in the world, and so much for "It can't happen here." People want to believe that fascism is somewhere else, wrapped up in an iron coffin, and buried in the past. And yet, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."[22]

I left the office and walked to the pool. One mile, full speed ahead, with a follow-up routine. I was standing in the shallow end with a young Chinese woman in the next lane who could barely swim, but she made an effort in a clinging one-piece suit. I nearly committed the indiscretion of speaking to her.

---

[22] William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (1951)

Walked home with a full moon in a clear void above a red neon sign.

9 p.m. Phone call from Jon in the vicinity of vineyards. He got back an hour ago from New York City. He was there for a week, representing his company at a trade show and said it was cold and boring. He didn't make it to any museums.

It's something how he gets around. Over the last six months he has been to North Dakota (where he's from), Central America, New Orleans, and New York. It's something how I don't get around. It makes me wonder how intentional it is, with an assumption that if you anchor the body and leave it chained to a typewriter the mind is more apt to wander. If the body wanders all over the place, including other countries, the mind is compromised (though having something to write about later). I've done it, having spent a year in Europe, drifting from country to country with Simone, the French-speaking Belgian woman. We saw a lot, but my writing wasn't worth much. When it comes to love and writing, neither one works out too well if I am on the run. It's like being in motion is its own event. I miss it, but being on the run is how you run out of money.

I mentioned my brother videotaping the birth of his daughter. Jon said he would like to see a video of himself being born. I wasn't so sure about that. I saw a short film (8 mm) a few years ago which was kind of eerie. It was footage of my mother before I existed, when she was around sixteen. Demure and pretty, and with no idea what lay ahead in terms of my father and me.

We got off the phone and I called Ming, who sounded gracious and pleased to hear from me, although she was on the line with someone else so maybe I had cut in on a different persona-voice. She called back a few minutes later, now focused in my direction and going full speed, being in a quandary about some job opportunities, and after a ten-

minute blizzard of numbers and dilemmas she said, “So how are you?” and wanted to know how things are going with the Actress. I said we’re in neutral.

Friday, Jan. 28, 1994

12:30 p.m. With V. at the Hunan place, the conversation touching on castrati, trials, and lipstick.

In the office there was not a lot of work, and the Attorney never showed up.

B. called in the afternoon, saying there was a benefit at a theater this weekend and she knows the director. This was followed by her usual routine about Ilsa. She admits it is a broken record, all the more so with her having a bad memory. One thing about keeping a daily journal, the redundancy and repetition of life on earth are more apparent. The journal is informed if not deformed by that. I told her she’s been saying pretty much the same thing for months now. She doesn’t know where she stands with this woman who keeps her off balance and makes her feel manipulated.

An hour later there was a phone call from Ming which went on for a while. She found a job as a receptionist in a law firm downtown and wants to see a movie tonight.

I looked through the *Michigan Quarterly Review* which the Attorney gets (he is a bastard, but well read).[23] It was an issue on THE MALE BODY. The poems were prosaic, padded, and uninteresting. There were essays on masculinity or manhood in modern times, from Henry James to Warren Beatty, with the former confronting “the

[23] A few years later I was working for an attorney who was also in his sixties, but extremely different with a Rolls Royce, a Victorian mansion, and a telegenic aura which was pulling in the personal injury cases. He was Jewish, had a history of sexual harassment, and his mansion only had one book: *The Art of Sensual Massage* (in the bedroom).

feminization of American culture" (in 1885), and the latter wallowing in it with his pants down.

An essay on REMEMBERING MASCULINITY: PREMATURE EJACULATION POETRY OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY. There will always be an England. The verses held my attention, given the non-event of so much poetry these days in its approach-avoidance of coherency or a subject.

5 p.m. I walked V. to the station and went underground with her, heading for a streetcar line which she said is "dirty." It wasn't dirty, closer to dysfunctional. The train in front had a problem with its brakes. I didn't feel like waiting and returned to the surface and caught a slow and crowded bus to the Haight. I arrived at Ming's place with a bottle of wine (she is moving out tomorrow). An hour later we walked to the Red Vic Theater on Haight Street.

It was a 90-minute film which "contains images of extreme violence and graphic sexual content." (This was her idea.) They should have warned us it was sophomoric, the animation being the stiff low-budget kind which may have existed twenty years ago, but this came out in 1992. I'm not sure why she wanted to see it. The film is described as "psychosexual" (where people only think about having sex). It was vaguely reminiscent of *Neuromancer*. A young male secret agent is assigned a partner, a ruthless woman with long blades that slide out from her fingers. There is a woman from a parallel dimension, one of the "shape changers with supernatural powers," who turns into a long-limbed spider woman with vagina dentata (wrote détente, a Freudian slip or wishful thinking). A vicious cunt, in other words.

A woman in the service of the otherworld, a criminal android, comes on to the secret agent in an empty warehouse while the bad guys have him surrounded and his female cohort is being raped in the background. The android lets her slinky outfit slide off and walks towards him, slender and naked, with hallucinatory side-effects. She gives off a pink throbbing glow and her pussy, which occupies most of her torso, sucks him in.

When it was over I was underwhelmed. We walked to a lounge a few blocks away, passing young and wasted drifters lying in doorways. It is probably symbolic when you lay in front of a closed door. When I see someone lounging in a doorway it reminds me of the Kafka story, "Before the Law" ("*Vor dem Gesetz,"* 1915), where a man waits in front of a doorway to the law. The door is open, but there is a doorkeeper, and he waits his whole life.

We sat at a table with a couple of Irish coffees, a full moon rising in the window, and talked about the film. It was an animation set in Tokyo, but most of the characters did not look Asian.

There was some mention of the devouring female and a man who is cut to pieces by a cunt. It had an element of female empowerment, but should empowerment be located in a realm of make-believe? At any rate, the vagina dentata is a myth, if not a bad metaphor, and worse psychology. A man who feels reduced or empty after copulating with a woman thinks that her vagina caused it (talk about post-coital letdown). I think it is the least dangerous part of a woman. If there is something in a woman whereby a man is reduced or cut to pieces, it would be her mind (followed by her voice).

I never understood pussy aversion. I know it exists, and many women put up with it, hoping for a conversion. It's like being threatened by a warm oasis. That reminds me,

when I was in the eighth-grade I was sitting in class one day when one of the girls spread her thighs in a short skirt and made the sound of a machine-gun while pivoting back and forth in her seat, aiming at her fellow students.

Ming made the observation that I am talking more often these days about the polarities of men and women, which she finds disturbing, if not tiresome. She tends to be androgynous, which can avoid the sophomoric showdowns of gender. I said that I am speaking from experience, but she doesn't want to hear about it and reminded me that she's a woman.

We walked back to where she is staying with her boyfriend, who was working at the oyster bar. I hung out for a while, sitting on the front steps having a cigarette and a glass of wine, a full moon in the branches of a tree.

11 p.m. I caught a bus to the Tenderloin. At home I made coffee and was on the typewriter for a few hours. Then I read old poems, going through a pile of wasted literary efforts. I called the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington this morning with respect to a deadline for applications for a writing fellowship. The odds aren't good. 2400 applications and less then 80 grants.

4 a.m. Went to sleep.

Sunday, Jan. 29, 1994

9 a.m. I was woken from a dream with the phone ringing. Not enough sleep by a long shot. It was Ming. "Oh, did I wake you up sleepy head?" I was groaning, trying to focus on the concept of what she wanted to do – go to Oakland to get a pickup truck. She wanted me to go with her. Why couldn't the boyfriend do it? He was being difficult and

didn't want to. Having said I would help her move there was no way out, though she compromised and said we could have breakfast first.

Half an hour later she was downstairs and I went out. We walked to a greasy spoon diner and sat in a red booth with a dim light coming through. I was in an altered state of consciousness, not bad for mundane things like moving boxes or a casual dialogue. I said,

"I know why I like you."
"Why?"
"Suffering builds character."
"Thank you."

I had the paper open, in keeping with my desultory frame of mind. There was a man smoking toad venom, a baby shot in the Tenderloin, and another mistrial for the Latino brothers who killed their parents. What's worse, smoking toad venom or that the authorities have the right to prosecute a person for it?

After breakfast we walked a gauntlet of the down and out to a futuristic monorail and soon were gliding underground and coming to the surface on the other side of the bay in an industrial "wasteland." We got out in an open-air station to transfer trains and took the next one.

We got out at 12th Street in Oakland, which is like another country. There were mostly black people walking around, and the only ones who acknowledged our existence were those who wanted spare change. She couldn't even have a decent exchange with a black woman bus driver who drove up. Ming asked for directions and a black woman passenger interrupted her and took over the conversation with the driver and Ming was left there staring, so we walked off with her fuming. There was some mention of the imperious black women she has run into at San Francisco State or working behind the

counter at Headlines. A friend of hers was in a similar situation in a coffee shop. If there was a customer acting pompous, playing up a master-servant relationship for all it's worth, it often was a black woman. Not that men are more kind, but when it comes to over-the-counter transactions it is too mundane to make a power struggle out of it.

Her sister picked us up. Ming said her sister is even more "hectic" with directions than she is. We drove by Lake Merritt about half a mile and ended up in an apartment with polished wood floors, a good computer, and a baby girl who was frozen in the headlights of adult attention. Ming was getting maternal while a bulldog with bulging eyeballs was dying for attention.

At some point Ming was distracted and her sister said the two-year-old wasn't used to her not responding. I said I wasn't either.

We drove back across the bridge in the pickup with her getting used to the brakes. I got the radio working and we had a moment with the Righteous Brothers getting emotional with their soaring vocals as we flew across a highway hanging from the sky on cables, arriving in the city like an inspiration.

Neither one of us have driven for a long time and it got her temper going, being impatient with other drivers. We made it to the upper Haight and found her boyfriend waiting on the doorstep with his second beer. It was still in the morning and he hadn't started moving. Things were tenuous between them, and talking about it later she wondered if he didn't want to move after all. Or was he bummed because his buddies were being lame and unreliable? They were no help at all, guys in their mid-twenties. The roommate he is leaving behind is a musician who works in a computer shop. He is a nice guy, half-black, and his girlfriend is black. Ming finds her compliant, where she is more

like a complaint. I get along with the boyfriend, who had a year with her and one year off. He seems to verify an old suspicion, something she has alluded to before, that she is better as a friend. Being her boyfriend is a misery.

We drove a load of stuff to the place on Bush Street, the three of us crowded together in the front seat, and unloaded the truck. Neither one of the men has a driver's license. I felt activated which was good, considering the effort.

Their place is on the 7th floor with a view of the downtown and an old stone church across the street. We made two or three trips, stopping off at her place in the flat with the sound room. I haven't driven around town this much in months. I was having fleeting moments of *deja vu*, passing places (wrote palaces) where I used to live or were the lairs of ex-girlfriends.

I found a can of WD-40 and said, "Is this yours? It 'stops squeaks'," and something about a sticky mechanism. She said, "I don't need a lubricant, thank you."

Talking about the news in my semi brain-dead state I imagined how the stories would overlap: In order to protest something an orphan cut off the feet of an ice skater who was having an affair with a member of the royal family, who said he would rather smoke a toad than talk to reporters, and to break the windows of condemned buildings in L.A. they brought in Whitney Houston.

4 p.m. We dropped off the boyfriend at the oyster bar, talking about if he should wear a wetsuit on the job. The two of them are not getting along and yet they're moving in together. One of the dilemmas in her life as an independent woman who likes to make her own decisions: she likes to have a man around, or rather men (a further

complication). She doesn't mind having a boyfriend, but is unclear on the concept of being a girlfriend, the promises and compromises.

We picked up some trail mix and this is her in a nutshell: she told me how disgusting it is, then picked out the best parts for herself (dried pineapple), leaving me the rest. There was one more trip to the new studio, by which time the light was fading. She was relentless, moving boxes into storage, though it wasn't urgent. I said I was burned out on the subject of boxes and she relented. It was getting dark and the city lights were coming on. Across the bay the lights twinkled in the rising heat-waves. I was impressed with the church windows across the street, and wondered if this domesticity with a nearby church was adding up to marriage, but she gagged at the prospect.

We lay around with the radio on, having a beer with a lava lamp in motion next to the bed. There was a Mexican fabric on the wall, and a silk cloth I hung in the kitchen. She kept rummaging through boxes, not knowing where to put it all, and wondered why the shelves were so high or she was so short. We were laughing at the dumbest lines, being tired. We rested on the bed, listening to Pink Floyd, followed by the Spin Doctors which she changed, not in the mood. She lay on her back with her hand down the front of her shorts. She has been known to pull out a pubic hair and hand it to me as a souvenir, but on this occasion she pulled her T-shirt up and made her belly go up and down. She is amused at what it can do, but wishes there was less of it. I put an almond in her belly button.

A few minutes later she was standing up and getting blunt. There was no toilet paper in the bathroom and, "I have to take a shit!" Earth girls are not that easy.

We went out, passing a neighbor in the hall, an alcoholic in his late forties with a dog and a cigar. This area has a certain formality to it. There was an old place with eucalyptus trees which I recognized. “Didn’t we come here once when you were going for a pregnancy test?” “Why yes… who was I sleeping with then?” I said it was hard to keep up with the constant turnover of the men in her life, but she objected to the concept. We returned to the studio, then left again, walking a few blocks to Polk Street where a couple of male whores were having an argument. I picked up a hot pastrami sandwich which she found weird, and some Greek food, a bottle of wine, and walked back.

It was a nice meal in the kitchen with a window overlooking the city, a slightly eroded moon in the window, and the opera on. It involved a wily and seductive woman (*Carmen*, by Bizet). Ming doesn’t have much experience when it comes to living with a man, but knows how a room should look, arranging the artifacts and one of her psychotic sketches. The place was built in the 1920’s and has some style, along with a carpet so thick I almost didn’t mind. It went well with the lava lamp, the levitating blobs of nothingness and matter in a state of constant fluctuation.

No coffee, and the wine was making us relaxed. I said, “Guess who I called.” She said, “The girl at the health food store?” “No, the National Endowment for the Arts.” I thought I would apply for a writing grant. She was unclear on the concept and didn’t think the government would hand out money and not expect something in return. Like what, a sonnet for the Senate? Verses that extoll the wisdom of the Attorney General?

11:30 p.m. We went out with her having changed into some old jeans that were too large (probably her boyfriend’s), a sweatshirt, and hiking boots, looking like a

tomboy with her hair in disarray. She drove me home on the way to pick up her significantly petulant other.

I sat around thinking for a while, then fell asleep.

Sunday, Jan. 30, 1994

It was slow going in the morning, a little worn out. Yesterday was removed from any mental effort and it took a while to get something going on the typewriter.

A phone call in the afternoon from the Czech woman. That was followed by a call from B., with a plan to get together this evening. Something about a benefit for a small theater. I had a long workout on a wooden instrument, a couple of hours. It was semi-hypnotic with the game on. That reminds me, yesterday we talked about the self-hypnosis of smoking a joint.

7 p.m. I read an essay in the *Michigan Quarterly Review* (Vol. 33, No. 1) on CONSUMING MANHOOD: THE FEMINIZATION OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND THE RECREATION OF THE MALE BODY, 1832-1920. It quoted a fallacious line of the times: "You can't have a firm will without firm muscles."

At the turn of the 19th century, "manhood" was considered the opposite of childhood, and "virility was counterposed to puerility, not femininity." To be manly involved taking on responsibilities and being a good provider. It's a point I've been gravitating towards or trying to make for a long time. Some men are caught up in a false polarity, trying to separate themselves from feminine traits. It's even worse if those traits are associated with manners and communication. They paint themselves into a manly corner as an ill-mannered mute.

I have a problem with essays making statements like, "American men have been searching for their lost manhood since the middle of the 19th century." Since the Civil War when the country lost a lot of men? How many men over the last hundred years were aware that they were searching for their lost manhood?

In the 1800's there were puritanical two-dimensional crackpot white men with their dry hysteria (and Old Testament-inspired superstitions). They had something to say about men and boys holding onto their disciplined essence, like a loss of semen was a loss of self. In line with those sentiments there was a hands-off approach to masturbation, though the author admits it's hard to know if the general population stuck to the program. He supports his belief that things were stiff and neurotic with selective quotations from how-to-be-a-man books. I'm not sure if it was like that for the man on the street, like I'm not sure if everybody now is part of the sexual revolution.

There was a transition from a 19th century inner-directed man to a 20th century other-directed man. "Inner-directed men went their own way, could stand alone, tuned to the hum of an internal gyroscope; other-directed men scan a mental radar screen for fluctuations in public opinion" (that's how they get elected). "Historians have long noted the turn of the century as an era of transition from a 'culture of production' to a 'culture of consumption.' Identity was based less on what one did and more upon how one lived."

In *The Bostonians* (1885) by Henry James, one of the male characters is "in a rhetorical torrent":

> The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't soon look out, will usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and most pretentious that has ever been.

Too late.

There was a good point made about the "gradual feminization of public school teaching." In 1870 two-thirds of all teachers were women. By 1910 it was nearly 80 percent (a problem noted by a rabbi and some people in England).

"Fears of cultural degeneration were fueled by the entry of…other races & ethnicities into the growing northern industrial city." More particularly, it was "the city itself that bred feminization, with its conformist masses scurrying to work in large bureaucratic offices, sapping innate masculine vitality in the service of the corporation." A health reformer in 1907 said, "Our cities are populated by weaklings." Was that before the hit men and construction workers arrived?

It is odd how corporations characterize themselves in masculine terms, and given the cutthroat competition that is not implausible, but corporations were seen in the past as a feminizing influence in the worst sense. I don't know if bureaucratic conformities are particularly feminine. They are dehumanizing perhaps, but gender identification is more complicated. Cities were presented in mechanical terms with throbbing pistons and erect towers, while a countryside with gentle hills and flowers was seen as feminine. The argument is weak, as there is more to human beings than you can shake a billboard or a tree at.

Men were worn out by the rat race, becoming "weak, effeminate, decaying…" (sounds like Warhol) "… from the demands of the workplace." And yet at the same time, their manhood was "dissipated" in a certain lassitude, being "over-sophisticated & effete." This being the United States (at the turn of the century), I'm not sure how many were in danger of becoming over-sophisticated. There are anemic descendants of the

aristocracy, but their forebears were ruthless when it came to grabbing land and holding onto it and building fortresses. There were Frenchmen a few hundred years ago who had effete refinements, wearing a woman's hat and stockings, but if you questioned them you'd find an efficient sword at your throat.

There is also a fallacious premise that being a woman or a homosexual is synonymous with being weak or useless. And if cities erode the masculinity of men, "sapping innate masculine vitality," try working on a farm from dawn to dusk and see what happens to your vitality. Some men had a "resolute avoidance of all emotions or behaviors seen as even remotely feminine." They defined themselves into a dead end.

There are books from a hundred years ago that seem prophetic, or have things been changing less than we are led to believe? *American Nervousness* (1881). *Sexual Neurasthenia* (1884). "Neurasthenia tended to invert gendered health, masculinizing women and feminizing men." There is evidence that this country has been masculinizing women for a long time, as noted by writers from de Tocqueville (in *Democracy in America* (1835)) to Philip Wylie (in *Generation of Vipers* (1943)). They wrote about how much control and influence women have, and those have increased in the half century since *Vipers* was published. The feminists claim the patriarchy holds them back, but it must be pretty weak if women are everywhere.

Meanwhile, at the turn of the century, before World War I, there was a sense of things being "over civilized" and languid. It was a time when the strict morality of the Church was as prevalent as television is now. There was "a growing desire to smash through the fluff of bourgeois gentility and the tangle of corporate ensnarement to the throbbing heart of life." Some people wanted to find a "rehabilitation of the early

barbarian temperament" (and they found it in the trenches of a war). I thought about a young man lighting out for the territories, escaping from the suffocating clutches of religious women as envisioned by Mark Twain.

9 p.m. Phone call from B., apologizing for having nearly blown the evening. There were three or four events going on, but she wanted to rehash the situation with the other woman. Their relationship continues to leave her off balance. Ilsa has a certain finesse when it comes to sending cards with messages of love, and yet she comes up with some loveless situations, with her girlfriend feeling jerked around from here into next month.

Meanwhile, the Saloon has King Perkoff on his saxophone, there is a party at a gallery (Art Attack), and something else in Oakland. The radar network of this woman for anything resembling a party is extensive, but socializing is her *raison d'etre*.

I walked over to her place around 9:30, and got the usual appraisal. My coat didn't go with the sweater, and furthermore it was not for evening wear. More like a spring afternoon (a sky-blue linen sport coat). I'm not sure why it wouldn't go with a black and purple sweater, but I have a sufficient detachment from clothes to not worry about it.

We went out and caught a cab to 6th and Howard, a rundown area with a nondescript theater with a guard at the door. Inside there was a high-ceilinged room with a skewed set on the stage and seats lining the wall. The performers were in our face not ten feet away. It was a benefit for the Bindlestiff Theater, and was a tour de force of local talent. We were late, and walked in on a weaker note, a girl on the banjo with some guy

talking or singing. It was followed by an actor making the most of hammering a four-inch nail into his nose.

Intermission in a back room with $1 drinks. I bought some lousy beer for us and we spoke with a few acquaintances. There was a young man with an effete haircut who it turned out was “lovers” with a tall and clunky-looking woman who used to be a man. B. was trying to process this information. Never underestimate the surgical urges of emerging urbanites.

Then it was show time. I felt like a passive spectator who was in the mood for watching, which was fortunate because there was a lot going on. The little stage had a red velvet curtain in back and an over-sized filing cabinet on each side (for a current play called *The Memo*.) A black woman had a microphone and kept turning to the side to manipulate a tape loop machine. I thought she may have had some atonal opera training, having a fine voice. She was given to any sound effect she wanted, going into a repeating loop and singing along with a previous looping sound (there was a repeated refrain, “How can you talk to me like that?”). She would run it all together into a confusion of tongues, then cut to silence, going from a higher volume to a lingering gentle note. Most of her head was shaved, with a dreadlock coming out of the top and hanging down. Pamela Z.

A white chanteuse with blonde hair in a slinky gown, tending more to cabaret and torch songs in the style of Edith Piaf. She had the presence of someone who has studied and rehearsed every note and nuance, and had some powerful lungs when she wanted to use them. Her voice was an object like a silver instrument projecting from her. I didn’t

get her name, but she was in a group performing with Pamela Z. called The Cube Chicks. It was a knockout performance, with a man on piano.

She was followed by some lesser acts in the key of vaudeville. A dour-looking man in happy shorts and one woman's shoe talked about being with an emergency room attendant in the hills while on mushrooms and coming across an injured man.

There was a slide show narrated by a man about a talking diaphragm (B. later said she walked out on that one).

Two guys from *Nose* magazine who I've seen before, including the writer Jack Boulware, doing a laconic sendup of uncoordinated rockers (using an electric guitar and bass with little amps).

Connie Champagne in a white gown trailing on the floor, a platinum wig, heavy make up, white fur, and railroad boots - a prop for the torch song. I thought the other singers would be hard to follow but she has her own approach, coming across with fragile emotions. One of her songs got a lot of applause.

A man in a suit did a caricature of a Shakespearean actor delivering a mock-pompous poem about the bastard King of England and what a long dong he had. It was done with precision and well-rehearsed gestures which cut the air.

A female roommate of the MC, a thin blonde woman with some brassy commentary, a bouncy Broadway type, did "A Song in the Key of Me." She could belt it out. There was a languid longhair guy on the piano with a cigarette. The gentle chords and notes flowed from his careless hands almost in spite of himself.

Ian Shoales did a long monologue with notes, a white man's guide to Africa delivered by a man with dramatic training and not bad writing. I was beginning to think

that half the audience would have a chance to strut and fret and stretch upon the stage, like a "poor player" who is "heard no more." Now and then I don't mind hearing "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."[24]

I wondered if I should get up and do my homage to Frank Sinatra, having rewritten the words to one of his songs, but no one asked.

> Fly me to the moon I want to leave you far behind,
> I have a lot more on my mind but it would be unkind.
> In other words, we're all through,
> in other words, good-by to you.
>
> How'd you get to be so cold I'll never really know,
> and even though you're not that old your mind is kind of slow.
> In other words, hang it in your ear,
> in other words, I'm out of here.
>
> Please don't get hysterical you know it's only fake,
> don't think you're so historical you're only on the make.
> In other words, you waste my time,
> in other words, I don't have a rhyme.

Sinatra's version was more sentimental. On the other hand, he hung out with the Mob.

An actor walked out in a slouching hat, boots, jeans, and did a routine on the subject of the theater, pacing around the stage with a lot of presence. He defined "bindlestiff" – what hobos put together on a stick over their shoulder - and unfolded a handkerchief on the stage, asking the audience for contributions. A scarf and other little items showed up. I was sitting on the floor, took a final sip from my beer can, and flung it on a whim, maybe ten feet, and it landed on the handkerchief. He wrapped it all together, tied it to a stick, and walked off.

During the intermission I walked around the theater. B. was sitting behind me for a while, and said she wanted to leave soon. It was nearly 1 in the morning, but I couldn't

[24] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1606

find her. Turned out she was downstairs in the basement, which I didn't know existed, and was talking with someone.

I wandered outside, feeling cut adrift and leaned on a parking meter with a cigarette. The buildings and the street were like a dead-end movie set. Once again, I was impressed with all the underpaid talent in this town. You wonder how much of that exists, like everyone and their sister has some kind of aptitude or shtick. It is an embarrassment of riches, and an old line came to mind: "We've come from the many to join the few!" "You can't, there's too many."

I caught a cab and rode home in a seated position. I probably could have walked. It was not much more than a mile and the transition was too quick, going from a crowded theater to a lonely studio. That sort of thing can give you existential whiplash.

Monday, Jan. 31, 1994

Typing in the morning. Dead air, a sullen overcast. A cold has implicated my system with subtle shadings of infection which seem to come and go according to my exposure and resistance.

2 p.m. I was getting out of the shower when the phone rang. Ming on her break. She said the job at the law firm was more demanding than she thought, but not boring. Never thought she would work in such a place, but found it okay. Things are not okay on the home front, expecting an epiphany from living with the boyfriend, but he was sullen and distracted and she didn't like it. Her insomnia continues. When falling asleep depressed she wakes up wired. We talked about the lone male syndrome versus the social networks of women.

Went to work. The attorney was out of town (a court appearance) and there was not much to do. V. walked by. “You leaving at five?”

5 p.m. We walked a few blocks to the station with her going on about her temper, saying it was “Up to here” with Maria (motioning to her forehead) and how lazy she is, wanting V. to do her work and V. won’t do it. Maria likes to sit around on the phone, filing her nails in a tight dress.

I dropped by a bookstore and found a *New Yorker* with a long article by Harold Brodkey (who wrote *The Runaway Soul*) on his medical condition. He has acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

I had a look at Howard Stern’s book. My brother in Los Angeles said the man is witless, and he can’t understand the attention he gets. That is saying something as my brother used to be a TV addict. Whispering dirty nothings into the ear of the American public is an odd way to make a living, but Stern likes to hang around the lowest common denominator. He holds on to the schoolboy humor because it keeps him young, and whether jealous, jaded, or Jewish, he finds a way to mock the goyim. When things are brought down to his level, anything more refined is bound to lose a confrontation. Not because it has less substance, but for the same reason a piano sonata would lose a contest with someone banging on a garbage can with a hammer.

Home in the evening, reading selections from *The Essential Lenny Bruce*. I was struck by the comparison with Stern. Lenny talking dirty to empower his satire. Howard talking dirty to empower himself (the same with sounding bigoted). I wouldn’t say that New York City made him dumb, but possibly deranged.

This town makes me sleepy. Either that or being out of sync can wear you out, which is to say I lay down on the bed. There were gradual stages of disintegration as I became more relaxed and started sinking. The last conscious thought I had before something pulled the plug in my awareness circuits was, "I'd better watch it… I am getting too comfortable…."

I came to a few hours later. One way to avoid those nightly sessions of coffee, cigarettes, and typing is by going to sleep early. If I never had alcohol until after 10 p.m., then all it would take to stop drinking is go to bed early.

Tuesday, Feb. 1, 1994

Woke up in the dawn's early light. In case I didn't realize the beneficial effects of the night before – getting a lot of sleep, no alcohol or coffee, I hit the typewriter on a dead run. It went on for hours, going over the falls, until there were over eight pages single-spaced. It was several thousand words, and I was hardly aware of it until the last page, like when you're stretching to encompass a subject and it takes a lot of words, thinking out loud with 90-word-a-minute fingers. That is not to mention the stops and starts and hesitations, the prevarications and precarious speculations.

Workout on a wooden instrument.

1 p.m. Went out, a little faint, being hungry and stretched to the limit, and passed an empty vodka bottle at the foot of a tree. I walked to the library, thinking about a life of telescopic adjustments and amnesia, multicultural degeneration, and death benefits. There was an article in the paper about a court limiting benefits for accidents. "Cocaine overdose called result of intentional act." "The insured is not entitled to coverage for such

a death… because he or she should know that death is a common, natural, or substantially likely result of such activity." Right, that's why coke is so popular. You do a couple of lines and drop dead, which is cool when you're with friends. The life of the party and all of that. When doing cocaine, you can't even count on getting laid, much less dying.

In the library with a grand staircase. Architecturally it was a formal occasion, but the people on it, including myself, were anything but that. It reminded me of when the peasants occupied a palace in a film about the Russian revolution.

I had reserved some essays by Greg Tate, a black writer for the *Village Voice*, *Flyboy in the Buttermilk*, and checked out a few other books, partly as a counterpoint to him. *The Poet Assassinated* by Apollinaire, *The Butchers Wife*, and *War with the Newts* (for Ming).

Walked home.

2:30 p.m. Waiting for the bus. I walked a block or two, then had to run for one going by. I was stepping on the bus when the driver said I couldn't, it's for school kids. I looked down the aisle, there was lots of room with hardly anyone standing and he was on the usual route downtown. It was a regular 38 Geary bus with no sign saying otherwise, like "special," much less "school bus," and I didn't get it. I've been taking Muni buses for years in this town and right around this time. I'm used to riding with rowdy school kids, but he was adamant. I was backing off the bus, still with a foot on the step, and not in the mood for this. "It's a fucking city bus!" "Don't fuck with me man!" the Asian driver replied, shutting the door as I removed my foot and he took off.

I waited for the next bus and when I got on, I asked the driver what he thought about it. He was suspicious, like it didn't sound right. I'm beginning to wonder if there is

a Muni driver syndrome where their egos are as big as the bus. They consider it an effort to stop and pick you up, a miserable pedestrian. The drivers are mostly racial minorities, so there might be something else going on, feeling a certain power behind the wheel of a bus and they abuse it. The Muni situation has attained legendary proportions in this town (along with the scheduling problems). I have run into black women drivers who were so condescending you would think it was their own bus and the internal combustion engine was invented by someone in their family.

I had a confrontation with a tall and strong black driver who had pulled to the curb, got out of his seat, and walked over to adjust the side mirror. He went back and forth at least ten times, messing with the mirror (did he want to see the road or himself?). People on the bus were exchanging glances. I was in front and had the temerity to ask, "Will we be leaving soon?" (I was on the way to work). I didn't realize that I had crossed a line: I was questioning a black man. He could barely restrain himself from knocking me through the window, walking up and standing close and glaring. It reminded me of the line in *Flyboy* where "Learning carries the weight of a revolutionary act and linguistic skills are as prized as having a knockout punch." The driver was not possessed with much in the way of linguistic skills, like my question was so hard to respond to, and that left him with his knockout punch and the dim realization that slugging a passenger was not part of the job.

A black bus driver was parked a short distance away. I waited at the bus stop for him to finish his break. When he did, he drove right past me, though I was clearly visible and had been for several minutes. All of this is minor stuff, but it amounts to a slow and steady drip of toxic feelings in the atmosphere.

On the other hand, a driver shot a passenger in the leg recently. The driver was white and the passenger was hitting him for some reason. It was probably the driver's fault for being white.

There was an article in the paper today (I don't have to look very far to find these things). A black driver, forty-six, was driving the bus that goes through the Presidio woods. He pulled over at night with one passenger, a woman, and turned the lights out. He must have thought it was a romantic situation. He walked back to her, at which point he "exposes himself" and "demands sex." She refused and resisted. He finally walked back to the driver's seat and drove her to her destination where she got off. He is now on unpaid leave and she is pressing charges. It was not a bus named Desire.

Meanwhile, I was on the way to work. There was a white man on the sidewalk, out of work, with a sign and leaflets on THE DIALECTICAL THEORY OF UNEMPLOYMENT.

The Attorney was in his usual careless mode. He bounced a $2 check off the Superior Court, County of Santa Cruz, and had to send one back for $27. Quarterly employer taxes were due yesterday, nearly $1000. He doesn't have it, or my paycheck either. He hasn't paid the office rent in a year and a half. The attorney who runs the office is an old buddy of his, and thoroughly professional, but his patience is wearing thin.

I put together some files for a couple of new cases – a collision with complaint for property damage, and an arbitration. The work went on for several hours.

There was a phone call from B. who wants to get together, and mentioned a party on one of the piers, but I was not in the mood. She said she's been working a temp job at the SF General Psychiatric Ward and doesn't like it. I said, "Is it contagious?" and told

her about our client when he showed up off his lithium. He was on the street for days and looked like a derelict with bruises and sores and an old dirty suit. I took him out on the balcony and we had a strange conversation. There were people coming after him and bugs were crawling under his skin. By the time I got back in the office I felt lightheaded. I sometimes reflect the frame of mind of who I'm talking with. It may open lines of communication when I talk with kids or manic-depressives or even attorneys, but it takes a toll if I'm becoming too chameleonic.

7 p.m. I left the office and commenced an interlude where timing is everything. I caught a California bus which I almost never do, but it was pulling up and I didn't feel like walking over Nob Hill. I got off at Hyde, picked up a few things at a store, and walked down the street. I was within two or three blocks of my place with the peripheral vision that you cultivate in this neighborhood. I noticed on the sidewalk across the street a couple of guys doing a stealthy approach, then breaking into a run and jumping on a man and throwing him to the ground. My first impression was that they knew him and were fooling around. The next second I realized they were not fooling around and then there was a similar flurry of bodies right in front of me. A young guy was walking in my direction not ten feet away when two men materialized out of nowhere yelling "FREEZE!" and "POLICE!" They struggled with him, forcing him to the ground, pulling out their handcuffs, and clutching whatever plastic packages of white powder they found – he was caught with his mouth open and they yelled, "DON'T LET HIM SWALLOW IT!" They were plainclothes cops who don't look any different than the guy they're throwing to the sidewalk, which I found disturbing. All of this was right in front of me and I stood there, curious and surprised, and any second someone could pull a gun.

I finally walked on. They were careful about going for his hands, pinning them behind him before he could reach for a weapon. I figured the odds were 50-50 that he had one. An article in the paper said Latinos from Los Angeles are coming here to expand their drug territory. A black man and a Latino shot and killed each other a couple of weeks ago on a nearby street.

I went into the corner store, bought a banana, and walked home. I'm beginning to wonder if the Tenderloin is making me overly conscious of a country full of enmity. I live in an area with a high concentration of ex-cons, guys on parole, and mental ward rejects, not to mention the drug dealers, prostitutes, and strung-out strangers. Then you see two girls on roller skates and signs for a Vietnamese festival.

In the evening I read an article on Soviet socialist realism in *Time* magazine which I found in the office and generally avoid, being a mainstream manipulation of the issues. A recent cover showed an ice skater in the moment of her pain and anguish having been banged on the knee. It was a small step for her, who quickly recovered, but a giant step for mankind considering the coverage this has gotten.

As for the current cover: imagine a Monet of early morning light, then superimpose Joseph Stalin on it, gazing off into the distance where as Robert Hughes put it, "No future Chernobyls here." He is caught in an unnatural glow with a pure white uniform. It is toxic kitsch for the true believers, "Morning of our motherland," though mourning is more like it. There was another composition: "Collective Farmers Greeting a Tank" with hats and flowers as it rolls through the orchard. What's wrong with this picture?

Workout on a steel-string guitar.

I called the Actress. She said she auditioned for a police video and got the part, a small role in a training film where she will be in uniform at the airport, acting authoritative. I told her about the Bindlestiff Theater, which she has heard of. We talked about books and she asked what I've been reading. I was flooded with the recollection of newspapers, magazines, and books, and stumbled around a bit. What to say? A man in the Soviet Union may have found an evolutionary missing link…the Congo is falling apart from tribal warfare… and closer to home we have the ice follies. Want to hear about bifurcating trigger points?

She gets impatient with the overly intellectual, and told me about her voice class. She was "transcribing" sentences, breaking them down into their phonetic components. Also, she will be in town this weekend. I said I might be in St. Helena, which sounded evasive, and we got off the phone – she had to get her daughter out of the bathtub.

Typing for a few hours.

2 a.m. Went to bed, reading *The Poet Assassinated*. It was an antidote to the dreary world of journalism. I don't relax, I just wear myself out.

Wednesday, Feb. 2, 1994

NOTES

A BENEFIT AT BINDLESTIFF

A guard is standing at the door,
the neighborhood is tough,
the actors don't want anyone
to interrupt their stuff.

At Bindlestiff you always know
the end of the world is near,
it's right outside, it's in the show,

and even in your ear.

A narrow room, a wide horizon,
crooked set askew,
the distortion of reality,
don't miss your cue.

The conversation is attractive
in a room with a view,
they hit you with an interaction,
but they never screw.

In keeping with historical chaos,
things are so contingent,
a dilemma of the lost
and found. I need an agent.

I would probably not expect
to find a Noel Coward,
the blithe spirits are neglected
here at 6th and Howard.

A lot to offer or to cough up,
improv can improve
your circulation, and you see
more poses than the Louvre.

I see the other-directed struggle
with an inner voice,
when it comes to playing a role
you often have no choice.

You turn into a wooden statue
standing on a stage,
the seconds and the minutes going
by, you feel your age.

The problem with a poet is
he doesn't know how to act,
and actors don't know when to stop,
so it requires tact

if one is talking to an actor
taking off his face,
a person floating in a sociologic
outer space.

Motor nerves and broken mirrors,
a reflex being tested
by a hammer-head director.
Fall for the suggested,

and a theme song for the theater
is "I'm Your Puppet,"
even when they're cutting loose
or preaching from a pulpit.

Their lives are being slowly twisted
into imitating,
when it comes to being someone
they are tired of waiting.

And yet, it seems, the theater
is like an empty clearing,
real life finds relief in it,
a guarantee of hearing.

They're emoting as they find their
footing in the footlights,
and they're channeled through a fiction.
It is closing tonight.[25]

12:30 p.m. In the Hunan place with V. She takes an interest in my women friends, and said a Filipino guy has been waiting for seven years for her to break up with her fiancé. She knows how things would get tangled and confusing if she slept with him. Smoked ham and garlic over rice, hot and spicy with my tongue on fire. At one point she sighed, saying, "Steven, Steven, Steven…." We walked back to the office as she talked about her workout routine.

During the afternoon I had a conversation with the receptionist about tribadism, and I'm pretty sure that she's the one who brought it up. "A lesbian sexual practice in

[25] An excerpt.

which a woman rubs her vulva against her partner's body for sexual stimulation…." I think she's getting bored with her law books.

After work I went home and found a message from Ming. She thought we should have dinner at her place. Then she called, and though I'm going over there we still talked for an hour.

I walked to her place, about ten blocks. An odd coincidence involving two of my closest female friends: they both live in studio apartments on Bush Street, and my place is almost equidistant between them. Ming was in sweatpants and a sweatshirt with a hole or two. We talked in the kitchen, having a glass of wine, the conversation bouncing off the wall.

She told me that our mutual friend, Tanya, who is half-black, is on leave from her daycare job where she takes care of abandoned babies. It seems there was a recent requirement for drug testing and she refused - speed and marijuana are a regular thing for her. The microscopic evidence of whatever drugs you've taken in the last few weeks will show up in your hair. She was having a bad hair day.

We talked about an article in the paper where the Chinese government is trying to convince the population that ants are a good source of nutrition, along with other bugs. It sounds like the collective farms are not doing well.

Then Ming was banging around in the narrow kitchen, overwhelmed by everything. We were losing the thread when she got a phone call from a female acquaintance (an ex-roommate) who constitutes a wet blanket for anything I'm doing and this was no exception. The conversation went on for twenty minutes until I was getting

bored. When we're talking we are hooked up to a power line, and when she's on the phone it's like a circuit breaker with my interest in a slow decline.

She segued from the phone call back to me like nothing happened, saying the woman was in Guatemala for a month. She went there on a whim with a friend from college who was not a good traveling companion. On the last day, three hours before her flight, a man tore the purse from around her neck and ran away with it. Her money and passport were lost, and she has strap burns on her neck.

The mood was picking up when we went to the store for sourdough bread and wine, bouncing off each other in the aisle, figuratively and literally, with a nonstop repartee. Walked back and prepared a meal. I chopped some garlic for garlic bread and she made spaghetti. Her boyfriend called from work. It went on for twenty minutes or more, by which point I was lying on the bed and staring out the window at the city lights.

Then she walked out of the kitchen with a look of wonder, pulling at her hair. It seemed she had turned on the gas in the oven, but didn't get around to lighting it for a good ten minutes. When she did there was an effect, feeling like a sudden sunburn on her face. Bits of hair were singed or burned, one eyelash was visibly reduced and so was one of her eyebrows. I never met a woman who is so grounded in the real world, but unclear on how things work.

We finally had a meal – with some mention of how the meal wasn't burned, just her. The boyfriend woke up that morning with dark smoke drifting in from the kitchen. The toast was burning while she tried on clothes.

The conversation was more serious when she questioned why I don't trust women. I think relations between men and women are burdened with ulterior motives,

power struggles, and some aberrant forms of feminism – especially when the old prerogatives are still around, like pretending, for example. I said that B. doesn't trust the woman she is having an affair with. The mood swings give her whiplash and she can't stand the constant fluctuation of their relationship. Ming said the men she has been close to were moodier than women. I said, "Ever think you had something to do with that?" which stopped her for a minute. She hadn't considered that.

I also pointed out that she had abandoned more men than had left her, which she admitted. I said I learned my lesson with younger women, or thought I had, but she was getting edgy, being a younger woman. She doesn't like it when I speak of love in the past tense. I said it gives women too much importance to assume if things aren't working out with them romantically your life is dead in the water. She agreed. The writing and music have been getting more attention and it shows. I still have moments of doubt from living alone. There is an isometric friction now and then, but lots of couples have some friction of their own, and it is magnified since there are two of them to share and escalate the tensions of existence.

There was some discussion on whether I am cynical or realistic, while the bottle of wine was heading towards empty. She said she can be cynical. I said I usually refuse that label. It is written off as a shallow or an arbitrary response to life. I mentioned when people accused the government of lying during the Vietnam war, or thought the FBI had infiltrated leftwing groups, they were thought to be cynical or paranoid, but it turned out their suspicions were true and they were being realistic. She respected the distinction.

11:30 p.m. We had gravitated to a fine-tuned understanding, sitting at a wooden table in front of a window with the city lights at night and the bottle empty, when her

boyfriend arrived from work. He is twenty-two with long hair, his mountain bike and surfboards in the corner. They had only recently, like yesterday, arrived at a provisional even keel as far as their cohabitation goes.

Things lightened up. I tried to impress on her the cause and effect of gas and flame, while he noted the burned hair in the bathroom sink. I mentioned a *Surf* magazine on the bathroom floor, like there's an ocean in the toilet. There was a phone call from the Phantom of the sound room. He's been carrying a torch for a long time and they have argumentative negotiations every now and then. The latest was his having flaked on helping her move. She was on the floor talking with him, saying it was a "bum deal," but don't worry about it. That was the wrong thing to say as he is willing to be punished, which I pointed out and the boyfriend agreed. We were soon bored with her conversation, so I walked by and tripped over her, doing a full body roll.

When she was off the phone the boyfriend noted there was no more wine. I went out, returning with two stouts and a Red Hook for her. She had a few sips and lay on the bed, the turquoise lava lamp in slow motion in the corner. The room has windows on two sides with nightlights to the horizon. Ming was tired and regressing. The earlier conversation may have caught her in some contradictions, but she was feeling comfortable with the attention of two men like a stereo. We were being sardonic though, and she said, "You're both capping on me." At some point she got hold of my lighter and lay there like a child with it. He pried it out of her fist and handed it to me over her loud objections. I finally gave it back, then jumped on her, rolling off the bed and hitting the floor on the other side.

I ended up pacing at the foot of the bed, restless, while the two of them lay side by side. She said I was making her nervous and to lie down, so I stretched out at the foot of the bed while she was on the verge of passing out. It was after one in the morning when I got up to leave. She sprang out of bed and gave me a big kiss and a hug at the door.

I walked home, where I lay in bed with follow-ups of the evening on my mind. In the store I wanted a cookie and she said, "Sweets for my sweet." I asked her what it meant with her preferring salt and vinegar potato chips.

Thursday, Feb. 3, 1994

Typing in the morning.

2 p.m. I went downtown with a boring overcast and dropped into the Koch Gallery. The show was called EROTIC? There were eighty photos, old and new, blue and borrowed (if not black and white), which had erotic connotations depending on your point of view. A picture of subtle swells in the ocean was effective. So was a woman lying on her side with one knee up in 1930 (Frantisek Drtikol). Who would have believed that women smiled and spread their legs back then, long before the sexual revolution stumbled on that sort of thing?

The "Satiric Dancer" by Andre Kertesz (1926), lounging on a love seat with a turning statue on the side.

A small room with nine shots by Jan Saudek. The male reviewer in the *Chronicle* was underwhelmed, saying they lacked "humor." Saudek is too hetero with his tinted tableaus. The reviewer preferred a photo of a black man with a dildo in his butt (by Robert Mapplethorpe). I failed to see the humor, but maybe I didn't look closely enough.

A woman with an eel around her neck, her body caked with mud (by Nina Glaser). Sex is dirty, feel the eel.

A large photo with several Mexican guys standing around naked with artificially injected breasts. Their male organs were intact. "3 Graces" (by Joel-Peter Witkin).

I had seen some of these pictures before. The suggestive form of a pale and graceful root like a female torso in a half turn (as seen by Edward Weston).

I thought about the practice of looking at photos such as these. It is a close encounter with the intimate, although the room is open to the public. Your body looks at images of bodies. It is common knowledge to everybody there, having bodies and most likely some experience with the bodies of others. At the same time, what is being conveyed? There was a composition with three people whose faces were hidden: a woman lay on a rug-covered bed, her legs spread wide, with a luxurious dark-haired cunt. A man crouched on the floor and hid his face with his arm, the hand of which was buried inside her. A woman on the other side, her head veiled, rested her heavy breasts on the reclining woman's leg.

I was struck by the ambiguity of the situation and what I was looking at. In one respect I was staring at a wall, or rather at a two-dimensional piece of paper in a frame. You could say I was taking the picture all over again. It is erotic, pornographic, or dumb – you can't please everyone. I was looking, but not participating. Those that participated weren't looking. Actually, they were not even there. The picture is a lingering echo of a moment in a room in which a man's hand was the vanishing point. *"Eine Liebe*" (1990) = "A Love" (by Jan Saudek).[26]

[26] He is from Czechoslovakia. As a boy during the war he was sent to a concentration camp for children (he is half-Jewish). When he grew up he was poor, but liked photography. His

There was a photo from the 1930's which I saw years ago, I think it's French. Two women in satin nylons ending mid-thigh, their skirts hiked up past their waists, straddle a wooden chair. One is on the chair, the other half-standing and straddling her, with one exposed pussy over the other. It was nicely framed with the graceful forms of the chair and their wavy labia. They seemed to be in a good mood, like this was no big deal and kind of amusing. "You want us to pull up our skirts and pose on a chair? Sure, no problem."

In the office the Attorney was gone and I was bored. I checked the messages in front and spoke with the receptionist. Usually, she has a law book on her desk. This time a magazine with lingerie was lying open. We have a nice chemistry, at least in the context of an office. A woman attorney in her late thirties walked in, touched something, and commented on the static electricity. I said, "Sorry, it's my force field." She said, "That's quite alright!"

6 p.m. Took a bus out to Masonic, picked up a beer and a poor boy, and went to the flat for a session in the sound room.

The Phantom wasn't there. I was considering my next move when a guy came out of the bottom flat, a drummer I've played with a couple of times. We had a cigarette and he said he wouldn't mind jamming again. His band has been getting some notice, playing the local clubs – DNA, Paradise, Bottom of the Hill, Chameleon, and Brave New World (guitar, bass, drums, and singers – Clarke Nova). He said they are leaving at three in the

---

photographs were often staged in the same run-down room in Prague. He got in the habit of tinting his photos so they wouldn't look so drab, and he had to hide his work from the Communist government because it was erotic. I mentioned him to the Czech woman, saying I like his work. He is prominent in her country, but she has mixed feelings about him. She respects his work, but his eroticism has included one of his daughters.

morning and driving to a club date in Los Angeles. I had the feeling they would hit some traffic after the earthquake.

He mentioned his eclectic reading, a soliloquy from *Hamlet*, and an acting class. He's a rough-hewn fellow in his late twenties, a straight-ahead powerful drummer. His roommates are the ones with the motorcycle repair, with five or ten eviscerated bikes (the sound room is in the back of the garage).

He invited me to listen to a tape they made, having gotten some time at a recording studio on Russian Hill. Fifteen hours for $300, with another $300 for mixing. They sounded good, fairly tight, with sudden stops and change-ups, where you can tell a band knows what it's doing. The singer was a maniac. He said they had to get him to pace himself. He also said that none of their songs sound alike. I mentioned that to the Phantom later and he said he wasn't sure about that.

We talked for a while, having a beer, and then I knocked on the door next door and found the Phantom. It was his day off and he had gotten half-drunk that morning. There was some pot on the table, but he was not dysfunctional. He couldn't believe I've never gotten drunk in the morning. We went downstairs to the sound-room dungeon and turned on the equipment. There were complicated sound decks with wires everywhere. I hooked up the Les Paul with him on drums.

We had a good two-hour workout, more or less non-stop, though he took a few breaks. When I'm holding the guitar I don't want anything else. I thought of someone in a novel called *Man's Fate*,[27] the opium addict in China. The orbit of his life does not include the vicissitudes of being with a woman. I was impressed by that, especially when

[27] Andre Malraux (1933)

that state is arrived at by an ex-professor. I've had some long involvements with women I was attracted to, and probably out-acted by, but lurking in the back of my mind is the allure of not being jerked around. I don't want to be an opium addict to pull off that detachment, but the music helps.

Meanwhile, a long session with the Phantom. For a while he used a drum machine on which he could program beats, while banging on the discs with drumsticks and adjusting my sound with an echo where you slam a note or chord progression into an echoing silence and gravitate into another dimension.

10:30 p.m. We walked out of the sound room and into the garage. One of the mechanics had left the radio on. It was a program with a woman talking about feminism with her pious well-fed strategies of what is needed for the next phase. The voice seemed to come from a pin-up girl on the wall, posing above the greasy machine parts.

We went outside in the cool night air, sat on the steps, and smoked cigarettes. I felt the relief that comes from an electric guitar. I don't know if it is better than love or sex, but it comes close. I was distracted at a young age, having music to fall back on, so when it came to women I was careless or detached. I didn't put a lot of effort into it, but there was usually someone there. However, there was one or two who thought I needed a lesson, holding my attention and then emulating a vanishing point.

I was not so detached that it didn't hurt, but I was held together with guitar strings. Ironic, this duality of musicians. Some get into it for the girls, like you rub a guitar neck and a girl appears in a puff of smoke. More often the music is a refuge from women, and you're practically self-sufficient with it. Not a few musicians put the music first and girlfriends second. Hence the old line: never marry a musician (or a writer).

We went upstairs for a few minutes. The Phantom's connection with music has been warped and blurred by women, but the alcohol and drugs didn't help. His mind is not known for its rapid turnover of thoughts and ideas. He tends to fixate on one preoccupation or obsession, becoming a broken record. It's the downside of inhabiting a timeless present of inertia. Ming said she finds him strange and annoying, if not a glutton for punishment. I said, "You sure can pick them." It was a loaded comment, considering her problematic love life, but she said she doesn't pick them. The situations with men just happen.

I took a bus back to the Tenderloin.

Friday, Feb. 4, 1994

Went to work in the afternoon. The Attorney was gone, there was not much work, and he was late again with half my pay. The legend continues, with his being mentioned in a magazine, *California Lawyer*. It was in the back section entitled BAR DISCIPLINE REPORT.

There were summaries of the most recent discipline actions – disbarment, suspension, probation, public reproval, resignation or reinstatement – taken recently by the State Supreme Court or The State Bar Court. 2 disbarred, 1 resigned, 16 suspended, 10 on probation (including him, suspension stayed), 4 public reproval, 1 interim suspension. The oldest man to be disbarred was seventy-five. The oldest woman to be suspended was seventy-three.

His entry (at sixty-five):

… was placed on 4 years of probation for violating the terms of his probation.

> In 1992… was placed on probation for misconduct. He failed to file quarterly probation reports… and failed to file records showing his handling of client trust funds.
> In aggravation, the bar considered that [he] was publicly reproved in 1989 for client abandonment and placed on probation in 1992 for commingling funds. In mitigation… considered that [he] cooperated fully with the bar. The probation was ordered to run concurrently with the previous probation and will expire on… 1997.

5 p.m. I was talking with the receptionist. V. stuck her head through the door, ready to leave and wondering where I was. She had been looking for me and even stood outside the men's room and called my name. The relationship has progressed if someone waits for you outside the men's room. She also said, "Are we having lunch on Monday?" On the way to the station she told me she made a small error on a document, distracted by her thoughts. It was something personal, but more significant than her hair, which is saying something. She wore a tight sweater with blue and white stripes and tight blue jeans with a belt around her narrow waist. Her straight black hair had an obsidian glimmer to it.

I said I was headed for the pool. There was some question of whether I have any muscles. I said, "I don't flaunt them." She said, "That's because you don't have any."

I dropped into a gallery, but the artwork wasn't much to look at. There were variations of geometric squares, and a woman gushing over them to a female assistant. There was a woman whose contribution to the art world was some photos of the bloody cosmetic surgery she had done. What was poignant was a shot of her "Before," with natural features, compared to the "After" shots. Less poignant was a transparent container with "flesh," or fat taken from her and framed on the wall with a line about how the body is a costume (I nearly wrote custom). It is customized, and the customizer is always right. (A sign on the wall: BIOMEDICAL POLITICIZATION OF THE FEMALE BODY.)

I walked up Geary and passed a gallery I never noticed. Something caught my eye and I went in. Modern art from Russia. It was contemporary realism by those who were well schooled in that approach since other forms were not allowed in Soviet schools. (I'm speculating, but I sympathize with those who want to avoid the flimsy decadence of the West). The painters met a still-life head on and passed right through it with a dreamy exactitude. One man, Dimitri Dergunov, stopped me in my tracks. He had some fine-tuned paintings, with a hand as steady as a surgeon while not losing the poetic impact of a composition.

The woman working there had short blonde hair, dark eyebrows, glasses, and an accent. I asked her about him and she smiled, saying I had focused on the best one. He was young, thirty-two, and taught art in St. Petersburg. She showed me photos of his other work. I had the feeling he used every spare moment on painting. Maybe those long Russian winters helped him to concentrate, the cold light infusing his perspective. I wondered if there was a subversive message in his work, extolling the qualities of transparent objects (with a subtext of transparency in government). It was not about the working class, however, being someone with a naturally aristocratic sleight of hand.

She said his works cost more, and was almost apologetic, in the $3000 to $6000 range. You could pay that much for a paint-splattered canvas that someone had on the floor of his studio after walking on it as a way of demonstrating the foot-loose attributes of an otherwise pedestrian artist. This is a land of opportunity for the self-invented.

I walked to the pool. It was the usual watery routine.

I walked home. Books, a wooden instrument, and fell asleep early.

Saturday, Feb. 5, 1994

The Vietnamese New Year is being observed a block away. I had the window open and heard the music from a stage, including a man with an accent singing one of those wistful Vietnamese folk songs:

> It's now or never… come hold me tight.
> Kiss me, my darlin', be mine tonight.
> Tomorrow will be too late,
> It's now or never, my love won't wait.[28]

1 p.m. I went out for a few things and had a look at the TET festival. A couple of streets were blocked off, but the crowd was a little sparse. The paper expected 10,000 or more, but I'm not sure if a thousand showed up. The neighborhood is not too inspiring, and there were wasted emissaries from the lunatic fringe, a welcoming committee for some new arrivals in this country.

I walked around the booths with everything from phones to travel and on-the-spot examinations. "Health is gold." There were CDs of Vietnamese torch singers, stuff from the old country, and the smell of fried food.

I was underwhelmed at first by the stage show, the men in white turtlenecks and black suits. There was a man with a Hawaiian slide guitar and an older woman in a gown singing to someone. A girl in a traditional costume did a stylized Thai/Vietnamese routine to a record. She had a look on her face that was serious and mature one minute, and rolling her eyes or bored the next. This was followed by three young women who did a slow-motion routine in wrap-around fabrics with bare arms and shoulders.

At some point I started to lose my composure. It happens once in a blue moon and was unexpected. I was in a crowd of Vietnamese people - young mothers, babies, teenage

[28] I lied. "It's Now or Never," (1960), right out of Memphis.

hoods, old folks - and had a vision of bombers in the sky dropping a disgraceful line of bombs which fell in formation. Helicopter gunships appeared on the horizon. I had never been this close to the people the U.S. was killing in large numbers (and I was nearly drafted during the war). They were more remote when seen on the news twenty years ago, but these were the people who felt the impact of our bomber diplomacy, and being in the crowd was bringing it all back home.[29] A wave of pathos came over me and I was sad as hell. I had to walk around to shake it off, but it would come back when I thought about it again with all these men and women in a lighter mood with strings of firecrackers being flung in the air while I stood there wiping my eyes and thinking of the military bombing their delicate cuisine.

I left feeling shaken. This doesn't happen very often, the physical side-effects of pathos. I passed an old white woman with stringy grey hair, an alcoholic with a cigarette who was talking to herself. "My body is not for burning…."

At home there was a message from Ming. I poured some coffee, lit a cigarette, and tried to level out. I called her back and realized I was talking in a subdued manner which she quickly picked up on. I finally told her about it with a few long pauses since I was on the verge of tears again. I had to get away from the subject, returning later by some roundabout means to mention the thought of bombers flying over the men and women outside my window. It's like you have a hidden reservoir of sadness which is shot through with anger and shame. She was sympathetic and hates to cry, but admits it can relieve tension.

We talked about other things, including her wanting to do something tonight.

[29] Most of the immigrants are from South Vietnam, but the war hurt the entire country.

2:30 p.m. There was a knock on the door while we were talking. It was Jon with his video camera on, taping his arrival. He had come from St. Helena with an overnight bag.

We hung out for a few hours. I had a beer and he had two with regular tokes on his pot pipe. I didn't want any. It's getting so one or two hits every couple of months is enough. He tends to be a little nervous, and it can make some people edgy. He channels that into his camera. There was an interlude where I picked up the Stratocaster, plugged it in for a reverberating distortion, and provided some modulated sound effects while he panned around the room, doing close-ups of certain objects and then moving to the window and shooting a couple of whores walking by. He managed to refrain from yelling, "Show us your tits!"

He also taped a segment where I was in the overstuffed chair with the *Quarterly Review* on "The Male Body." I turned to the essay on "Premature Ejaculation Poetry of the 17th Century" and started talking like a pedantic scholar, quoting some of the passages.

> In liquid raptures I dissolve all o'er
> melt into sperm, and spend at every pore
> a touch from any part of her had done't:
> her hands, her foot, her very look's a cunt.[30]

I forgot to mention the paragraph about the female orgasm. "On the surface, it seems to have little evolutionary value." It isn't necessary for reproduction. Neither is men and women having a good rapport.[31]

---

[30] John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester

[31] There was an interesting point in the footnotes where someone "argues that the 18th century marks a movement from a single-sex model of physiology (male & female as versions of each other) to a double-sex model (male & female as contrasts and opposites to each other), which

We were going to film the Vietnamese festival, but weren't hearing any music and looked out the window. It ended at four, which was early. I wanted to show him the booth on substance abuse. It had a kit with plastic reproductions in little compartments of every kind of drug. "Syringe." "Joint." "Book of matches with hidden roach."

A couple of young Vietnamese women walked underneath the window in silk dresses. We went on talking. He was not in the mood for the meeting with his "wife," the Brazilian woman who persuaded him to go through the motions of a civil wedding so she could stay in this country. He was going to have dinner with her and compare notes if and when the Immigration people had any questions, like what side of the bed does she sleep on? [The inside.] Any identifying marks? [Two nipples and a belly-button.] How often do you have sex? [Never, she has a boyfriend.]

6:30 p.m. When he left there were six fire trucks down the street. That seems like a lot for an overdose, but I didn't see any smoke.

Ming called. There was a light rain outside and we knocked around some possibilities for the evening. She was in the mood for a movie. I said, "*Naked.*" She mentioned a few others, but we got *Naked*. I read that the main character got a little rough with women and warned her. She immediately wanted to know why I want to see it. I said there is more to it (turned out she loved it).

8 p.m. I was about to leave when the phone rang. I hesitated, thinking it might be the Actress, but it was her ex-fiance. He was calling from the men's club in North Beach where he works. We hadn't talked in months.

---

results in the disappearance of the female orgasm (and sexual pleasure) as an acceptable category." Maybe we should head full steam into the 17th century.

He said I should come by the club some time. A topless dancer who I had a conversation with one evening (Stormy) has been asking about me and wants my number. It may have been about tennis. He said he isn't sure if she likes men, if you know what I mean, but I am used to that. When I was there the women would drift through the tables and get acquainted with the male customers, suggesting the back room for interpretive dancing (no interpreter required). With her and me there was a different slant, with both of us stepping out of those roles. I told her I was there as a friend of the chef and she relaxed, saying she didn't mind "not working" for a while. I got her life history in half an hour. We were outside the usual sex routine, what with her preferring women. It was an unassuming conversation, and I'm not sure what she had in mind. Maybe tennis with a tenuous connection.

He was dying to get on a court himself, and we made some vague plans. No mention of the woman he is no longer engaged to. He said he is finally getting his life together, having more time for books and writing. I'm in a similar situation where the sublimated forces leave you tearing through books and periodicals and typographic currents, not to mention workouts on a steel-string guitar. It keeps you in a frame of mind where you could fall in love at any time. You have to assume that women see right through you with a built-in radar.

9 p.m. I walked to Ming's place, stopping at a store on Polk Street. I went from male whores on the street to ice skaters on a television in the store. I was having that kind of day and tried to explain it to her later, saying, "Do you sometimes find your life is a whirlwind of significant moments?" I was being a little facetious, but she said, "No, it doesn't ring a bell. Is yours like that?" "Yes, more and more." There is a constant input of

absorbing information when you are immersed in life, reading all the signs and signifiers, and whoever you talk to is revealing more dimensions than you knew were there. Having a history of your own expands your radar as you tune in other histories and mysteries. There could be some self-delusion here, if not the altered state of someone who can't figure out what's important or not. It sounds like what occurs when you are on lysergic acid and you stand in rapt attention in front of a tree.

I have a sense that for a long time my mental age was not in sync with my physical age, but now at forty-one they're closer together. Took a while.

I showed up at her studio with a bottle of wine. She looked different. One thing about a complicated woman with mood swings, her appearance goes through changes as well. I usually see her from a fresh angle, like a renewed connection which I hardly ever get tired of, but it might have something to do with how my mind works. It is often in a renewal mode. What made her seem alive and different when I saw her was because of my existing in a revolving and prismatic dimension (or so I like to think). I described it in those terms, but she was skeptical.

We had some wine, then walked to the Lumiere Theater on a dark night.

The theater projected us into a tight dimension of the English. In London there's a cold-water flatness and you feel like you're imploding. People talk in a rapid clipped manner. There is the density of an ancient city with limited space and morbid monuments, rather than an atmosphere of endless opportunity and room to move (much of which is shot through with false hope). There is an economic weight which seems to bring out a nurturing patience in the women, or is that more common in a homogenous country? Is there more empathy when everyone is rooted in the familiar? Maybe it is

generated out of necessity when things are hard and cold and it is up to the women to provide a pillow and warm milk. There is a deference to men in a homogenous society, or is it merely respect? What ever it is, it felt foreign to me.

I've been in London a few times, beginning in the mid-70's. You can see where the punk bands came from and what they were up against in the dead-end alleys of a collapsing empire.

An out-of-work drifter who is twenty-seven (a girl thinks he's forty) is living proof that a little education is dangerous, especially for someone with a quick mind and a quicker tongue. He has a constant grinding edge, and there are sharp gears revolving in his head whether or not he enjoys it. It seems to be a role that he prefers and which perpetuates itself in his jagged life, getting jerked around by circumstances as much as he is jerking around a woman. He ends up on the streets and after a while it starts to seem deliberate. There is no easy point here as to politics or music, and not much of the latter. No rebel amplifier soundtrack. He's an angry young man shaking his fist at God, or giving him the finger as a response in kind.

I would have liked to talk to him. The cards are stacked in his favor when he's baiting or debating someone. A security guard, a drug-addled girl in love with him, a man putting up posters, etc. His routine concerning the apocalyptic Book of Revelations puts him in odd company, including Ronald Reagan. His assumption that it will soon be over for Homo sapiens as we know them has echoes from the New Age to Michel Foucault. The latter characterized modern human beings as a socio-historical construct which is being phased out (say goodbye to bourgeois individualism and its offshoot, the Bill of Rights). The former thinks the species will continue in a disembodied spirit form, which

ties in with the character's neglect of the body (his own and those of women), while he holds onto a mental edge.

That edge has become his instrument, if not identity, and he won't let go of it. If he wasn't young and angry, he would be reduced by a third or more. Whether or not he needs that edge to survive and see through modern life, it is killing him. He wants to maintain a critical perspective, but there are consequences, thinking he will lose it if he gets too comfortable with a woman. It is interesting how close he comes to going back to his old girlfriend, the warm embrace and pillow talk of her, but only because he was beaten to a pulp on the streets and she is taking care of him. He regresses like a wounded child, but with no intention of losing his momentum in her soft presence. He is brutal and abrupt with women (a couple of them seem to like it), making sure it doesn't get too comfortable. He has an anti-body attitude, pulling the hair of someone during a hard fuck, testing the limits and the patience of a woman, not to say her motives. He is suspicious of how much they will take and why. An alcoholic older woman, maybe forty, wants him to hurt her, so he does – by refusing to touch her.

When it comes to nihilism, I wonder how it co-exists with other points of view. There is a craven young man with a low regard for human life, a creep with a black Porsche who demands immediate gratification. It was a woman who said that, "Every woman adores a Fascist,"[32] but some women love a stray dog of a man. Men will gravitate to roles which get the attention of women, and some pathologies continue when the end result is a woman in the mood. There are always women falling for a drifter or an amplifier freak, a talking head, a uniform.

[32] Sylvia Plath, "Daddy" (1960)

There is a scene about the ambiguity of consent. Ming said it was rape when we talked about it later. I wasn't sure, at least in the legal definition, which she said is beside the point. If it's beside the point then how are you going to press charges and see him in court? The presumptuous yuppie shows up in the flat where the two women are staying (Sophie and the main character's ex-girlfriend). Sophie has already screwed the main character, regardless of how the ex-girlfriend felt about it. Now she is alone with the playboy from hell, and is being coy in her miniskirt and torn fishnets. There is some possibility of his being the landlord. He ends up kissing her hard and she goes along with it. Next shot, they're in bed and both are wearing black underwear (which doesn't signify consent). She is whipping his chest with her long black hair while he lays there. I'm thinking, this looks a lot like consensual sex. She could have gotten away if she wanted to. He wants her to wear a nurse outfit and she obliges. The next thing you know he is fucking her from behind and she doesn't like it. When it's over she is shaken and bruised, having consented to the sex but not to the roughness it brought out in him. She could bring charges of misdemeanor assault, but won't call the police because her drugs are on the premises.

So how is it rape? Does it become so in retrospect, when it is redefined as a dubious encounter? Leave it to the English to come up with a cold and disconcerting sex scene. Must be something in the water.

Things were so dysfunctional it seemed to be another example of a Jewish writer and director making the goyim look awful. Much of Hollywood works along those lines (including television), and it isn't like there isn't a lot of material to work with. I wanted more of Johnny's overheated brainstorm sessions (the director didn't want to make *My*

Dinner with Johnny), and thought the reviewers had exaggerated his brutality and intelligence. He went on about those black markings on products being the sign of the devil.[33]

As for the alleged misogyny of the film, there are several angles of response. If and when misogyny exists, how are you going to show it without being accused of misogyny (as if a film contains an implicit approval of whatever it shows)? Even then the women tend to come off more moral or consistent than the men. A couple of the men are maladjusted horrors, and a third, the young man, is an incoherent lunatic with a twitch. The security guard is a self-deluded loner with "the most boring job in London." The main character is beaten up and taken care of by two of the women, an ex-girlfriend and the nurse who returns from a trip. They're competent and caring while the men are cads.

We walked out of the theater into a drizzle, with Ming saying how much she liked the film and was surprised it was so funny. Both of us like black humor and the unexpected line. She was delighted with some English expressions, like when Johnny talks to a dumb security guard and says, "You big girl's blouse."

We had walked about two blocks when she announced she had to pee. I said we were just at the theater with restrooms, but she said, "It doesn't work like that." I said, "What about your intuition?" She said her bladder marches to the beat of a different drummer. We made it back to her place a little after midnight. The next hour or so trailed off, talking in the kitchen, then lying shoulder-to-shoulder on the bed, staring out the

[33] It was something I heard from an Iranian girl about ten years ago. She was nineteen, lived downstairs, and seemed to like me – enough to have a naked photoshoot. However, I couldn't take it seriously - the bar code paranoia - and that may have turned her off. She had "Eyes Without a Face" (Billy Idol) playing over and over one afternoon, and then she disappeared.

window. Having finished the bottle of wine, she made some orange spice tea with nothing else in it – the suggestion of milk or honey makes her gag. I never drink tea (and gave up coffee a while back), so it was a bitter cup.

We listened to an old Velvet Underground tape, some of the quiet numbers like "Heroin" and "All Tomorrow's Parties." Things were getting too relaxed with our tea-dried brains and her feeling out of sorts, having cramps. I said I could leave and she could take a bath. She said no, just because she likes to say no, and wasn't in the mood for being wet. She told me the next day she took a hot bath when I left.

So we talked. I wondered when her boyfriend got off work and she said he went out for drinks with friends. There was some mention of how difficult it is living with a man, and how there was a constant redefinition of herself according to her subjective mood formations - a phrase I made up for the occasion, but she wasn't impressed.

I left around 2 a.m., walking home in a light rain and thinking it was one of the few times we were on the quiet side, and yet in retrospect there was a lot of communication.

There was a phenomenon at the corner of Post and Larkin. Ten or twenty women were posing hard and carrying on with a line of cars snaking slowly around the corner, checking them out. The bars were closing and it was pick-up time. Most of them were surgically-altered and/or silicon-injected ex-men. There were two lonely looking female hookers under an umbrella across the street. I walked by them and got an invitation which didn't make my night.

Sunday, Feb. 6, 1994

9 a.m. The phone rang, with my having gone to sleep around 3 in the morning. Not enough sleep. It was Jon who spent the night with his "wife" and said they would pick me up for breakfast in an hour. I managed to pull myself together and meet them on the street. We ended up at a place in the Castro called the Patio – a covered area out back with male waiters in pink T-shirts and a woodsy atmosphere. I had one of the better omelets I have had in a long time, with spinach, bacon, and sour cream, along with toast and orange marmalade.

I was sitting across from a woman who is as hard to get along with as breathing. A wide smile, short dark hair, thirty-two, on the slender side, and nearly 5'11". She works in a women's boutique downtown, a Scorpio named Socorro. Jon has aligned himself with an alluring woman with inherent difficulties (he's a Libra, for what it's worth).

When we left we drove out to the cliffs (my idea), although it was raining, and took a trail which had a view of the ocean. The woods were wet with scented eucalyptus and deserted. She had a premonition of finding a dead body out there.

We were getting along, having met at the New Year's Eve party, but hadn't said much. I was distracted by one woman or another, not to mention a little around the bend. Turned out she and Jon were in the front room, sitting down and watching while I kissed the Actress for a while. I said I was holding her up, while providing emotional support.

We walked through the eroded terrain which dropped off to the rocks and riptides two hundred feet below. There was some mention of her having taken mushrooms once and never again. The last time I took them was in 1987 (time flies when you're in orbit). It was in a cove at the bottom of the cliff we were on, and during the second half hour

(for her it was the first hour) I sank into a mild depression. When I pulled out of it, making a few adjustments, the rest of the afternoon and evening had a preternatural calm, and I felt as much at home in the sand as a piece of driftwood.

We fooled around on the edge of a steep drop-off and Socorro pulled me back. Jon was shooting now and then with his camera. We went on walking, and then drove to the Cliff House with the ruins of a Roman bath nearby (a 19th century version). A man on the rocks was swept out to sea by a wave last week. It was four in the morning and chances are he was under the influence and then underwater and his life was over.

A table with a view of lethal surging currents.

We left with the rain coming down and were in a hurry so Jon could make the ferry to Vallejo. Then he looked at the schedule and realized he had the time wrong, so she dropped us off at my place and we hung out for an hour or two. I said, “If your wife didn’t have a boyfriend, I would go out with her.”

He left for the ferry and a minute later my parents called. My father had recovered from whatever put him in the hospital for a few days. He may have hinted at a theological crisis of some kind. I mentioned coming across a reference to Paul Tillich, who lectured at Union Seminary in New York when he was there in 1961. We talked about a related tangent with my mother on the other phone. She doesn’t have much interest in theology.

I got off the phone and a few minutes later Ming called. We launched into an epic conversation, over two hours, during which life went on. It’s like we were communing on the phone while doing other things, or she was. I have a hard time with that, though eventually I made some soup. She was all over her apartment, cleaning or in the kitchen. I heard a faucet, “What’s that sound?” “I’m not peeing, if that’s what you mean.” Then

she struggled out of her clothes and went into the bathroom. The toilet flushed, followed with more water sounds. She said she was in the bathtub, making for a watery reverberating atmosphere. She thought I should take a bath as well, for a stereo water effect, if not a heated conversation, but I wasn't in the mood.

We covered a lot of ground. At some point she said she is bloated and her boobies were floating in the water. There was some reference to a line from the movie, "The future is arriving every second." It sounds like the old notion of a fleeting present. I prefer a present that stretches out for days, an expanded realm with more impressions and less pressure. It's the sort of thing that is incurred in a hallucinogenic trance (or living in California).

Ming said she could tell me things she wouldn't tell her boyfriend, though he's painfully aware of some of this – including her preoccupation with opposing forces and the Other. She is often restless or dissatisfied, assuming there is something else she could be doing. She hates this aspect of herself, which tends to undermine the present and any relationships therein. I told her, "On the other hand, it keeps you from being married in the suburbs with a boring husband" – one of her nightmares.

She is nervous about living with a man, like it comes with a traditional oppression, even though she has as much freedom as he does. More in fact, considering her tendency to walk out when she wants to. Maybe living with a man is difficult because it is a strain to keep up with the act. What act? Is she pretending? Is it difficult because she is engaging in behavioral engineering, or is too aware of other men**?**

There was some discussion as to whether she is sensitive or not. Ming said she isn't, and I agreed too quickly. I was also informed that she is not ambiguous, just because she wants to do something tonight but doesn't feel like it.

I said when things with men "just happen," she might be wanting sex. It's a powerful force, but it doesn't guarantee that she will get along with someone. It isn't necessary for the continuation of the human race that men and women get along. They could argue from the altar to the grave, but as long as there are interludes of screwing and conception the species will continue. The old custom of arranged marriages is closer to nature, what with nature's indifference to the sentimental.

More water sounds when she got out of the tub and dried off, then lay on the bed in her underwear feeling relaxed. I said we're like the mongoose and the cobra. She wanted to know what I meant by that and who is the cobra. Her, of course. In keeping with a previous notion that it helps to be light-footed around her, knowing her slow-moving coils are powerful. She has said that when a man gets too close, she starts to choke.

8 p.m. When we were getting off the phone she said, "Let's go swimming on Wednesday." That followed some mention of the law school aptitude test and *The Whip Angels*.

With respect to the latter, a Victorian sex romp she borrowed from my eclectic small collection, she wondered about a scene where a girl is made fun of because her "lips" were protruding. Her labia, in other words. It was something Ming is unfamiliar with. I said there isn't anything wrong with it, and I had a foreign girlfriend who was all

the more erotic for it. She said hers are not that sensitive or even visible, and then dropped the subject.

Meanwhile, I sank into a big chair with *Homeboy*, a lurid gutter of a book which put me off a while ago, but I got back into it and it took off. It is set in the Tenderloin, the city at large, and later in a prison (Vacaville). The Attorney has a client there, a Latino doing a ten-year stretch for second degree murder, having killed his girlfriend in a drunken argument.

I am preoccupied with prison as a claustrophobic nightmare and a failed institution, the cell shock of bondage. The book was hitting close to home, considering how many ex-cons haunt the Tenderloin. The mood of some of them on the street is carried over from prison, with the police doing regular sweeps for parole violators. Prison is a touchy atmosphere, it's volatile in Vacaville, and the racial divisions are magnified. You avoid eye contact unless you want trouble, and the slightest thing can be construed in that pressurized realm as a challenge. A few of the confrontations I have had were triggered by nothing much, but I may have been dealing with a prison mentality.[34] I was in line at the corner store, and a macho thug thought I was standing in the wrong place and wanted to fight.

Later in the evening I was on the typewriter for a couple of hours. I thought I was tired, but lately the mental currents have been operating on overdrive.

Monday, Feb. 7, 1994

[34] They come from a correctional facility on disconnect. The inmates are so maladjusted when they get out that over half go back. It is a prison of eternal return.

12:30 p.m. I arrived at the law office and found the whole building (sixteen floors) had no power and the elevators weren't working. Neither were the phones. I was supposed to meet with V. and wasn't sure she was there. I walked up thirteen flights and found her. We then descended on the elevator which was suddenly working and walked to the Hunan place.

She was adorable and stunning in a tight sweater with her curiosity and gossip. I related some information about Jon and Socorro, with an official asking personal questions, like how many times a week they "do it." She said, "Oh, for example, three." I referred to the Phantom and his obsession with Asian girls, and she exclaimed, "You don't like Asian girls?!" There was some mention of which young women in the office have small bones or big bones (hers are those of a bird), while agreeing it isn't common for a Chinese woman to have big boobs.

Meanwhile, she takes grim pleasure in nagging or ignoring her fiance. There was a recent episode where he had the temerity to prefer an evening with the Oakland Warriors to her. It was the sort of attitude she wanted to correct before they went ahead with any marriage plans, saying "I could marry someone else," and she probably could. There was the usual sense of walking on air when she's around.

In the office there was not much work with the Attorney gone but not forgotten by his disaffected creditors and clients. I think the legal reference with CA in it refers (in his case) to Client Abandonment.

I picked up some messages at the front desk, with the receptionist becoming downright chummy. Later she walked by my desk and said something, just short of being flirtatious. Maybe it's in her nervous system. She said her thighs will hurt tomorrow after

climbing thirteen flights. Maybe her job is boring and I am a diversion. It might go further, but I'm twenty years older and she is engaged. The latter is more significant than the former, since I've been with women who were seventeen years younger and twenty years older, and history has a way of repeating itself. Her engagement is a little shaky from the sounds of it.

Meanwhile, the psychological side-effects of getting acquainted with a woman who is turning up the heat a little. In the apartment that night I had a vague sense of the room – even the guitar – being flooded with the current of a new connection. It felt like a cold coming on, in the sense of being subtle and pervasive. I get infected by the spirit of a woman like a positive virus.

5 p.m. I walked V. to the station and then walked home. It occurred to me that Ami, the receptionist, has noticed the rapport with V., as well as with Ming, who dropped by the office once or twice. I seem to be on good terms with women who come from India, China, and the Philippines. They are twenty, twenty-four, and twenty-six, respectfully.

Speaking of women, the following day the Czech woman called and wanted to meet at the hot tubs. While we were there, sitting in hot water, she related a disturbing episode. A good friend of hers had an affair with a Czech man for a month or so, but thought there was something going on between the two Czechs. There was – linguistically – but nothing else. My friend was surprised and hurt one night when the woman kicked them out of her place, and the Czech man responded by calling her a flimsy and hysterical American. My friend couldn't believe the woman would react like

that. Six years of friendship down the drain. How is it possible that someone was so bossy, easily threatened, and throwing away relationships like so much Kleenex.

The Czech woman said her friend had a history of going through men, and maybe this is why, if there was more vanity than substance to the woman. Which reminds me – I'm free associating here – a passage in *Homeboy* on the character of women:

> Folks referred to so-called good women as women of character. Well, I learned it was the other way around… good girls was plain as grits, it was the bad uns had the gumption of gumbo. Only they understood when you down and out, when life's laid you low, your words' all that's left to save you. The others, the ones who never had to fight to keep their souls, they never learned they had em to lose, and their word aint worth the breath they spend on it….

On the way home I dropped into a bookstore and had a close encounter with a kind of minimalism which is popular because it's undemanding. It doesn't overshadow the reader with an intelligence more than their own. The second opus of Banana Yoshimoto. After one book (*Kitchen*), when she was twenty-eight, a slight effort, though nicely modulated, someone said, "Her achievements are legend." "One of the most important international writers of our time." Another example of someone I wanted to like, but the inflated rhetoric of how she is presented makes you wonder.

There was a magazine article on a man whose "career is an unfolding slow-motion exploration of the post-Renaissance conventions of framing, mounting & signing." Is this damning with faint praise for a painter? His subtlety, not to mention single-minded obsession (he must be a genius), seems to consist of presenting more or less blank canvases on which he found the urge to pass a brush dipped in white paint across a few times. He can stroke it until there is a white fluid, and it's all he has done for decades. Having found his off-white pigeon-hole, he's sticking to it. Maybe something

ruffles the feathers of his "mute specific" psyche once in a while, producing a slightly altered brush stroke, but that's about it.

A review in the *Chronicle* referred to the revelatory dimensions of pure visibility:

> Only when you look patiently can you appreciate the physical richness of Ryman's work as well as its vulnerability to dismissal, the poignant dependence on its being seen.

He is breaking new ground with a painting that relies on being seen, and it doesn't get more effete than this. The "vulnerability to dismissal" is a sign of what a thin excuse for art it is. You could put up anything - a blank canvas - or nail your shoe to the wall, and it would also be vulnerable to dismissal. However, it can't be that v.t.d. if he is having retrospectives in London, New York, and here.

At home with a book. Tore up the guitar for an hour.

Tuesday, Feb. 8, 1994

Typing in the morning, the desk swamped with reference material of every sort. *The Dialectical Imagination*, "The Male Body," notes scribbled on envelopes, articles torn out of old newspapers. I can't keep up with it.

A newspaper sat near the typewriter for a while, a page of obituaries and police reports. Initially my attention was on a SUSPECT IN SLAYING. The sketch of a black man with a woman accomplice. They killed a young Asian man at a corner store in the Castro District. There was a previous article about the incident with the suspect at large and no mention of his race. Even now there is only the police sketch to give you an idea. Time and again I see articles about robbery, assault, and homicide where anyone with information as to the suspects is asked to call this number, but you're not supposed to

know if it was white or black or Asian or Latino guys who made their getaway in a white Honda Civic, which might narrow it down a little. Or would that be racially divisive, like reporting it is more divisive than the actual crimes? Ironically, it puts a lot of black criminals in the realm of an Invisible Man (Ralph Ellison version). The racial identity is emphasized when things are positive, and blurred into a universal background when they're negative. It can't even be referred to when the suspects are at large - another instance where the facts are politically incorrect.

Same page, a woman hung herself from a slide at an elementary school (the students were kept inside). Talk about going downhill. She was fifty-five with a Russian name.

My attention drifted to the obituaries with a curious juxtaposition of a man and woman, ninety and eighty-nine. Moscow and St. Louis. The Russian man was a "leading advocate of graphite-moderate nuclear reactors…," who also "devised a method for demagnetizing naval vessels to protect them from mines." He was "instrumental in developing the Soviet nuclear-powered fleet of surface vessels and submarines," and was somewhat responsible for the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl.

The woman was black, a "pioneering gospel singer" who was "blues influenced." "Her deep contralto and flamboyant vocal flights." She was one of fourteen children.

Willie Mae Ford Smith and Anatoly Alexandrov.

I went to work in the afternoon, walking by Home Boy Liquors. A pigeon flew down the sidewalk about head level, coming at me like something in a 3-D movie, a dimension found in four-dimensional life. The genetic disturbances were out in force, looking for a handout or a blackout in the midst of our BUDGET BREAKDOWN.

The Attorney was gone, not much work.

7 p.m. I was relaxing at home when the phone rang. The Czech woman was getting off work and wanted to meet at the hot tub and sauna place. She came by last Thursday with a bottle of vodka when I was in the sound room, and called back later with a message sounding like she had finished most of it.

I walked past the shallow reflecting pool in front of City Hall which symbolizes public servants with a lack of depth. The fountain was actually working.

We met in the lobby, got a room lined with redwood, and took off our clothes. A minute later we were in hot water up to our waists. The tub was hotter than usual, and just what the doctor ordered. She kept climbing out, it gets too hot for her. The last time we were here a back rub almost got out of hand, but we avoided it this time around.

When she called she said she hadn't shaved her legs in a while, like this was a concern of mine. The hairs on her legs were barely visible. More visible was the fact of having put on ten or twenty pounds over the last few months. She is thirty, and used to be a slim-hipped tomboy with strong legs and a firm behind.

Not that I am anything to write home about (he wrote), at six feet and 170 pounds. The swimming and the walking keep my arms and legs in a functional mode, but extra muscles are hard to come by, and my stomach is not as hard as it used to be. Who was it said our souls are strapped to a dying animal?[35]

The sauna was so hot I had to put a towel on the bench with her sitting next to me, leaning forward with her breasts protruding (they used to be smaller). With her pink

[35] William Butler Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium," (1933)

nipples and blonde pubic hair there's no mistaking her for Ming, but both of them are heavier than they want to be. I wonder at what age men and women worry less about their looks, with their character picking up the slack. She has a spiritual side, and often has a book, Gurdjieff at the moment, but is preoccupied with her appearance. She has a distinctive Slavic look with full lips, pale skin, and pale blue eyes, and changes her hair color as often as the seasons. It was purple and short not long ago, and now it's black.

We each had a towel. It was okay for both of us to sit on mine, but hers couldn't be touched. However, when she was done with it she said I could stand on it. At one point she had to pee, a woman who is not exactly shy about her body, but squatting over the drain was unheard of (and I offered to turn around).

When we were in the hot tub she said, "What's new?" That's a hard question for a writer. I could show her twenty pages of the journal covering the last few days, or reply with, "There's nothing new under the sun." I felt like a baked potato in the sauna, sweating out the toxins. It feels like your hair is burning off, along with some peripheral thoughts and mental static. You come out with an empty-headed serenity of skin and bone.

When the hour was up we dried off, put our clothes on, and walked out in the lobby. I had a cigarette and she had a Coke while putting on lipstick and looking fresh. A couple walked out, finished with their purifying hour, an Asian man in his forties and a blonde woman in her twenties. She gave me a knowing glance with a half-smile. Walking up the stairs to the street we passed a tall whore on her way down and having some negotiations with a man as to the price. I think a second man was involved who was young enough to be his son.

We walked a block on a semi-deserted Market Street and sat at a bus stop, having a relaxed conversation, but not for long. A black man approached like we had nothing better to do than to listen to him. It wasn't an interruption because you're on the street and that's his territory. A man in his forties, gesticulating wildly and talking fast, having wandered across the street through traffic, then back to this side when he spotted us, walking up and bumming a cigarette from her. "Could I have two?" Talking nonstop, it seemed he wanted fifty cents. I looked for some change like a street tax, but could only find a small amount. I handed it over, apologizing, and he almost refused it. Then he continued with his shtick, and hearing her accent he said, "Are you German?" I nearly said, "Are you germane?"

He finally went away and a minute later another black man walked up, this one more composed. I said I gave what I had to the last guy. He glanced down the street and apparently knew him, saying he is wacko and allegedly a vet, but not sure. He walked off, then turned back and yelled, "How about them Cowboys!"

The bus pulled up, I kissed her and walked home.

10 p.m. I read for a couple of hours, feeling deeply relaxed from the heat treatment. Then I was on the typewriter.

Wednesday, Feb. 9, 1994

NOTES

> When subjectivity is all the rage, an angry black woman takes the stage. It doesn't matter if it doesn't add up, she has the confidence to pull it off in front of those who're tired of doubt and ambiguity. The ego is an art form, the way that others use neurotic indecision as a role - and Wanda Coleman doesn't have time for that.

However, she says that if she "didn't express… anger in [her] work," she would be a "terrible writer." When that becomes your primary motivation, sooner or later you come up with situations which produce the requisite anger and friction which generate the writing. It's like musicians who are better when they bottom out in something like the blues, and find their life is reproducing whatever it takes to give them the blues. It could be unconscious or deliberate.

Wanda Coleman said, "As a writer in the city of Los Angeles I feel that I have been collectively silenced." This is an ongoing theme in a recent interview,[36] her struggle as a writer and poet, saying that "In various quarters I have been silenced." There are "cultural barriers," having something to do with being "black" and "female," not to mention "West Coast." You would think that women poets are not allowed in California.

She gets to have it both ways, though, when you realize that she is as silent and ignored as a three-alarm fire. She has given over 500 readings, is "published in many magazines, journals and anthologies," has "recorded spoken word performances," and received "a Guggenheim, an NEA, and other major fellowships and awards." She is also the co-host of a radio show. "Films have been made about her… 7 books since 1977." I read the interview with a sense that I was missing something. There was a credibility gap, a woman given a few thousand words to explain how this culture doesn't provide her with words or a voice. I forgot to mention, she is "working on a libretto commissioned by the Houston Opera."

How long can this go on before the pose which has sunken so far into her circuits it's a permanent attitude is getting old? She quotes a poem about how mistreated she is (sounding like a standup comic with a shtick - "I don't get no respect" (Rodney Dangerfield)). "So you think you're a … fine addition to the human species / they will treat you like feces…" "They will open all doors / except the one you want to go thru…," which is a weak complaint. Society is not a doorman for writers, and doesn't have to find the right one for each person. And given the awards and recognition she has received, I wouldn't call it shit.

One door she wants opened for her with deep bows all around: "I consider myself worthy of the kind of legitimate literary attention I've yet to receive." Maybe so, but that's a common complaint of many writers, and I'm not sure what she means by "legitimate." Does that refer to well-known white reviewers? How about the black literati, and if they're not giving her sufficient laudatory attention, why not? There was some mention of being rejected by her black peers, I can't imagine why.

There are duplicities and paradoxes operating here, like whatever problems she has are in "situations… related to who I am as a black person." Odd that she is

[36] *Poetry Flash* (1994)

> blaming race (which deflects attention from her personality), when she can be at odds with other blacks as well. "You don't trust nobody where I come from; you don't even trust your mama."
>
> It left me with mixed feelings about her and her work, who is generally an honest woman and that must count for something. She got her start with Black Sparrow Press. "He gave me a bunch of the books to read. Especially giving me the ones by black authors. He told me how dreadful this stuff was, and I had to agree."[37]

I went to work in the afternoon. Read an article in the paper about Los Angeles, which continues to wallow in a behavioral sink. The complications brought about by fire, riot, earthquake, and a mud slide make it worse. There's no place like home.

Last night in the office, having cleared off a pile of stuff nearly a foot high next to the typewriter I threw away most of it, but kept a few things. I showed Ami the PETITION FOR DESTROYING WORTHLESS PERSON. She wondered if it was authentic. I showed it to one of the legal secretaries, a black woman in her late twenties, who got a grim determined look on her face like she could use it. I said, "Do you know any worthless persons?" and she nodded in the affirmative.

There was something from SKEPTIC magazine, a poll, with "shocking percentages of belief in the paranormal."

---

[37] NOTE: The above was written in 1994 when Wanda Coleman was forty-eight. In 2012 I was involved in a poetry festival at the Cocoanut Grove in Santa Cruz (put on by Sparring with Beatnik Ghosts). My wife and I stayed at The Darling House, a bed and breakfast from 1910 overlooking the ocean, which offered discounts to poets. Wanda Coleman was one of the headliners of the event, and was at The Darling House with her husband. They had The Pacific Room, which was very large with a view of the ocean. We had a small room in back with a four-poster bed from China. On the morning after the reading, we went downstairs to an open area with a breakfast table next to the windows – an old-fashioned layout. We were at the table with Wanda and her husband, Austin Straus. She was around sixty-five, and seemed to have mellowed. It's also possible she wasn't feeling well, as she didn't stay long at the table. I went on talking with her husband, a Jewish man who was quite voluble. She died the following year.

Astrology	52 percent
ESP	46
aliens landed on earth	22
dinosaurs and humans lived simultaneously	41
communication with the dead	42
clairvoyance	59
personal experience with psychic power	67

If nothing else, believing in the paranormal jazzes up your life. My life is jazzed up by the facts, in the sense that "the truth is stranger than fiction." If you exist in a world where a prophet can appear in a tortilla, it would make the whole business of tortillas less mundane. But so would having tacos while discussing the theory of evolution.

The other afternoon at work I went out on the balcony for a cigarette. There was a view of the bay and hills on the horizon (I was bored). An old plane went by, an historical throwback to the 1940's, and a chain of associations went through me with a chill of recognition. For a long time I have been preoccupied with planes and jets, particularly a few years ago when I would go up on the roof at night with my girlfriend and smoke a joint. I would be transfixed when a throbbing turbo jet floated through the void as if it was the refined mechanical height of Western civilization. It was so magnetic you would think I saw one while on acid in my younger days, and the reverberating heavy metal presence stayed with me. It is the visible limit of our civilization, like a lofty old cathedral, and it has the authority of an angel of death. I later came across it in a Godard film, where he used a passing airliner as an angel.

I wondered if some other motivation was behind this fixation on planes, and if it's possible to inherit a point of view. My grandfather on my father's side built a small plane

in the 1920's when he was a young man. He was a mechanic who picked up parts from local crashes and built his own - he wanted to be on a higher plane. (I used to pick up scrap metal on the street for some reason and bring it home.) However, he was going out with my future grandmother at the time, and when a friend of his died in a plane crash she put her foot down (the barnstormers were pretty reckless). It was her or the planes. He chose the planes, but eventually went back to her, my future existence riding on that decision. His dream of flying was further grounded by the Great Depression, and eventually he operated earth-moving equipment for the county.

There are fragmented tendencies if not resentments that one inherits. I'm preoccupied with planes, but mechanically speaking I couldn't fix a skateboard. I also have a wary caution when it comes to women, being descended from a Protestant matriarchy on my father's side. It was very real in its control of the home. My father resented the authority of his mother who ruled the roost with an iron Christian hand, a tall Nordic woman who did all the talking. She didn't allow a drop of alcohol in the house.

Where was I, losing track in the office and working late as it turned out.

7 p.m. I headed for the pool, killing time in a foreign magazine store. I figured Ming would be late. We were supposed to meet at seven-thirty and it was nearly eight when she showed up, walking into the lobby like time is on her side.

We were kind of polarized sitting there (what else is new). I was in a dark coat with tie and slacks, while she looked tired and disheveled in a sweatshirt and bicycle shorts, talking about a case in her office which was getting more annoying by the minute. A loaded topic – harassment – and a lawsuit where the elusive subjectivity of a woman

tries to link up with the nuts and bolts of a monetary settlement. The woman is suing the police department (with an attorney provided by the city) for how an officer made her feel. He put her in an uncomfortable situation, but there was no physical contact. Oddly enough, he was helping her out and got her off the hook for a DUI.

It seems the woman had been drinking and drove her car off the road. The police investigated and found her wandering some distance from the car. One cop offered to take her home instead of a breath test (I wrote breast) or having her arrested. He was violating police procedures at this point. Having driven her home he didn't force his way in, but was presumably invited. At any rate, he propositioned her, she turned him down, and he left. She is suing for having been propositioned, although she managed to avoid a DUI.

I said, "How much?" Ming didn't know, but said it's in the Superior Court (the jurisdictional limit of the Municipal Court is $25,000). She doesn't think the woman is suing for money, but for ethical reasons.

We went downstairs to the weight room. Ming wants to begin a regular routine, with me included. I took off my tie, unbuttoned my shirt, and we hit a few machines (or they hit us). Then we lay on mats, doing approximately a hundred crunches. This was followed by separate locker rooms. It's a sophomoric formality, but we're in public.

We had the same lane in the pool. I swam a mile. She did half of that, then got tired and used a kickboard for a while. She got out of the pool and walked on the tile near the shallow end. I was struck by how graceful she is, though claiming to be a klutz who runs into things. Ming is caught between the womanly and a tomboy state, with slender hips and muscular legs, and insists she is not as firm as she wants to be. I said she isn't

eighteen anymore. She said, “I’m not twenty-three anymore,” which was last year. Her shoulders and chest are more expansive, and she said her bustline is 37 inches (she is 5’4”).

I swam a length or two underwater and got out, walking by an English girl in a loose bikini which was slipping off.

We walked to a Greek place on Polk Street and had dolma and falafel in the backroom, talking about legal matters. For some reason I wasn’t tired from the workout. I walked her home, then back to my place where it turned into a night with no alcohol.

Thursday, Feb. 10, 1994

Typing in the morning. Went to work in the afternoon.

6 p.m. I left on my way to Ming’s flat, walking on Bush Street. I was still downtown and passed a gallery with big windows and looked in. There were people rubbing elbows with a few statues. It was an opening for Stephen De Staebler which I wanted to see. I had a picture of “Two Women Walking” by the typewriter, but having the picture facing me and not the schedule (on the back), I forgot.

I strolled around with a glass of sauvignon blanc, looking at the sculptures and taking notes:

WINGED TORSO POINTING

WINGED WOMAN WALKING

WALKING MAN

The wings were clunky flung appendages, just one to a customer, looking like a broken chunk of concrete or a mutant flipper. It was noisy around the muted figurines,

with the crowd as loud as the statues were not. Two or three of us were interested in the statues. Maybe the others had seen them before, or were too polite to stare.

TWO WOMEN WALKING: nearly life-size, no arms or wings, long slender torsos, partly eaten away by radioactive erosion or the aging process. Legs which were very thin, as if humans with a tenuous balance. Some association of the fragile and the graceful, if the latter requires being vulnerable.

Partial torsos of the women were not idealized. It had the effect of being molded from real models. The statues had a look of being put together in clumsy sections by a semi-organic means. There were references to rock, strata, bone, and geological accumulations where the human features are blurred or non-existent. A figure with one broken wing jutting straight up without a head.

A tendency for leaning forward on their spindly legs, bending over slightly from the waist. How gauche if I were to knock one over accidentally, breaking into fragments on the floor with everyone shocked. How would I respond? “I’m only human.”

WINGED TORSO POINTING.

De Staebler was there, talking with a small group of older men. Short hair, sweater, an easy manner about him.

No head, no arms, one wing.

No arms, no wing.

I wonder to what extent the narrator of this journal would correspond to these fragmented figurines. They are mute, but not inglorious. There are traces of having been wrapped in bandages with echoes of the mummified. The bare skull of a mortal android. We are generalized as mortal beings and constructed out of tenuous matter.

FIGURE COLUMN WITH PELVIC CUBE.

Eerie figures standing in frozen motion in the midst of a crowd that moves around them, ignoring any resemblance to their own personas. I thought of them going into jerky slow motion (the statues), like a stop-frame animation.

A second cup of white wine in a white room with bronzes which were permanent in their amputation. The crowd of people more or less intact, and each one with a naked broken past. I tore myself away, and nearly committed the indiscretion of saying something to the sculptor.

I walked up the street and almost got run over by an Asian woman in a low expensive sports car. It was coming out of an alley and stopped. I walked by in front of her, in plain view, but the car went into forward motion and I had to jump. I turned back, a little angry, but there was hardly any response from her. It was a primordial encounter with someone locked into an oblivious power trance. If she knocked me down, would it justify my kicking her window, assuming I could get back on my feet?

I know it's a cliché about women drivers, and more men are involved in bad accidents – especially when they're driving under the influence – but when it comes to minor confrontations with a vehicle it's usually a woman driver, and me who's jumping to the curb. I have the green light, but that's typical for a man, relying on a mechanical excuse.

The other day I was downtown and yelled at a woman while flipping off a second. The circumstances were as follows: I was not quite at the corner and a woman ahead of me was in the process of crossing the street, but a big sedan ran the light and instinctively I yelled at her like someone I cared about. Maybe it was a knee-jerk reaction or I didn't

want to see her bouncing off the hood of a car. She jumped back and the big sedan went by with a large white woman behind the wheel who hardly noticed.

City living keeps you on your toes (it is the equivalent of No-Doz). I walked to Ming's place, picking up a burrito on the way (the woman gave me a free Mexican dessert, *arroz con leche*). When I arrived she was messing around in the kitchen and said I was late. More comments about how domestic she's becoming, and she looked nice (compared to yesterday) in black slacks and a dark green blouse. I said I was nearly run over by an Asian woman and she laughed.

A couple of hours of wine and conversation. Everything from legal cases to whether the eyes are the mirror of the soul. I think the voice is. She said it is her feet. I said, "They're small and knobby," so she was traumatized for a minute, but went on in that vein, as if what you do with your feet is a manifestation of your spirit.

She went off on a subject which has come up lately. The Czech woman said I'm secretly in love with Ming and it is undermining relations with other women who would see this rapport and be discouraged or assume we're having an affair. If you know someone and it feels like love, your nervous system isn't looking for it elsewhere, even though it isn't a full-blown romance or is compromised.

Ming would question how compromised it is, and she disputed some of my contentions about women, while admitting she has hardly any women friends and gets along better with men. Also, my ex-girlfriend (an old friend of hers) is not seen in a very good light. The young are not fully formed, and haven't revealed what they're capable of. They may not know it themselves, and it's not their fault if they're in transition and those shifting grounds have a built-in potential for betrayal or desertion.

The conversation passed in and out of serious topics. She later said she aspires to my approach (I aspire to it too, but it doesn't always work), where you don't avoid the serious facts of life, but find a balance with the lighter stuff. It's like Galileo dropping objects from a tower and they fall at the same rate: a corpse, a Bible, or a comic book.

10 p.m. We took a bus to the Paradise Lounge. I wanted to see the Mermen. They were playing when we walked in, surf music from a power trio. The guitarist had thick wrists and a lot of equipment, an array of foot pedals for echo and reverb, while expanding the genre like the Ventures morphing into Jimi Hendrix. I like it when an amplifier is unpredictable and there are different sound-effects ripping through the sound barrier in a semi-controlled drift.

They took a break, we were drinking wine, and another group started up on a nearby stage. From the first notes I knew I wasn't interested. Halfway into the second or third tune she realized she wasn't either. We headed for a lounge on the second floor where a combo played: saxophone, congas, electric piano, a woman on two snare drums, and a guy shaking something. Latino syncopated rhythm music which was jumping. That went on for a while, then we went downstairs for the second set of the Mermen. They were stretching out while we sat in a black lounge on the side.

12:30 a.m. The band was done and we left in a cab for her place. I give her a kiss at the door and walked home.

Friday, Feb. 11, 1994

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office and we went to a Vietnamese place in Chinatown. It was crowded, with everyone sitting at tables having bowls of fish and

noodle soup, which we had, sitting shoulder-to-shoulder. This is a woman who I thought was shy and now we talk about almost anything. When we walked back, she mentioned her constant back pains and touched my lower back to show me where it hurt. She likes to walk along while rubbing shoulders, except for being a foot shorter.

She expressed some anger at Maria, the young assistant she works with who came to work in a slinky dress so tight she could barely walk – and asked if V. would go to the bank for her. V. was steamed because their attorney is hiring a woman to help out, another young Filipina, and Maria was scornful, speaking of "FOB's who barely speak English" and work for low wages. She acts like she never spoke Tagalog, and for V. this is insulting, who holds onto the language and is proud of it. She has a low opinion of anyone denying their roots, and said Maria is from a province in the Philippines where, searching for the word, people are known for being arrogant.

Meanwhile, there was not much going on in the office with the Attorney in court. I talked with the receptionist out front. She said she is 93 pounds and wants to put on weight. The question of what country she is from, what cultural time and space, is intriguing, having roots in India, but she was born here I think. Ami speaks of someone as being "hella drunk," but never heard of the Paradise Lounge, and surf music is beyond her comprehension.

5 p.m. On the way home I dropped by the chic clothing shop where Jon's immigration wife works, with her in a stylized coat and long skirt, black stockings, and black Army boots. We were in a good mood, talking in the back for a while. It was another instance of a woman from a foreign country whose spirit isn't burdened by

dogmatic gender competition. It's like the instinctual prevails over the ideological, and she comes up smiling.

When I got home there was a phone call from B. She had tickets to a play on Sunday night, *Calla Lilies* with Connie Champagne. I was noncommittal. A lot of people want to nail down the near future, giving it form or direction by way of a projected schedule – reservations, dates, plans – but I shy away from that and sometimes regret it. I want to keep it open as to what I'm doing on any given night, rather than being locked into an arbitrary social commitment. I may have been exposed to existentialism at a young age, where you can't presume on the future or even that you'll be around tomorrow. It seems to be how I operate. Whether that amounts to inhabiting a more intensified present or not, I'm not sure.

Phone call from Ming, some plans for tomorrow.

8 p.m. Took the bus to the sound-room flat. Someone let me in the garage. The sound room is in back and the door was open. The Phantom and a friend were mixing the tape of a group they had in there this afternoon.

I put a new G-string on the Les Paul, got hooked up and in tune, and stood there for a while waiting for them to finish. It puts me in an altered state when I'm around recording equipment and guitars. No matter how much of a force field it has, it comes with a tedium like you can't believe (like making movies). There are mind-numbing interludes of dead air. Hurry up and wait, with things getting bogged down in the repetitious and the technical while losing track of the music, and the muse is tangled if not strangled in the cords and wires, especially when one or more of the technicians is drunk.

It's the oddest thing. My IQ drops when I have a guitar in my hands, providing for some patience or resignation, but it gets on my nerves. Ironic that an energetic art form has some dead time in it, while a medium like writing can maintain a current where the mind is alive and kicking, even though the writer is sitting there and hardly moving. If his body language corresponded to what was hitting the page he might be writhing on the typewriter like an eccentric virtuoso on a grand piano, complete with moans and kicks, occasionally compelled to pound the keys with his fist or do a tap dance on the desk and finish it by kicking out a window.

Anyhow, they finished what they were doing and turned me on. The Phantom picked up a bass and we took off with a G-minor blues progression, using the drum machine for an upbeat rhythm and this went on for a while. I had a nice clean sound with some reverb, while he had a pounding slap-happy bass, not too drunk to give it all he had. However, he was a little around the bend when it came to operating the recording 8-track. I was ready to record, all systems go, warmed up and coordinated and spewing out notes and jazzy chord progressions which he liked. "You've been practicing?" But he is given to stops and hesitations, insisting that with everything set up and ready to record we take a cigarette break. I was breaking out with spontaneous combustions and he wanted to sit in the garage and have a beer.

So we did, sitting in the shambles of motorcycle repair while he talked about how fish ejaculate with no hands.

We returned to the sound room with its black walls and low ceiling without much damage to the mood. Turned on the tape and went into it. After a couple of minutes it was too much for him, like he got off on the wrong foot, although it sounded fine. We

stopped, rewound the tape, and started again. He had another cigarette. I realized in all of these prevarications that it made him nervous, like he started to choke or got too excited when it came to being recorded. This is someone who used to tour with a band some years ago. Oddly enough, there is a similar reaction when he's lying with a woman.

He finally started again and I was so warmed up the notes were flowing with an effortless momentum, going off into some variation and improvisation, back into a rhythmic structure, and then tearing it apart. The structure was abandoned in mid-air and I went off on a tangent of a syncopated crescendo, dropping down into a walking bass counterpoint to what he was doing, then stretching out into the higher register, walking all over the neck, building up again into a bending two-note strangulation and the guitar had never sounded so in tune, with the sound-hole greater than the sum of the strings.

We were going for about twelve minutes and there were a few minutes left on the tape when he suddenly stopped and figured it was enough. Even worse, he wanted to go back and listen to it, applying ourselves to this stretch of music and adding other tracks when I could barely restrain myself from going off in other directions. I thought of all the music we were losing with his mechanical approach. On the other hand, the music was recorded by mechanical means.

He suddenly thought it hadn't recorded and I had a sinking feeling, but he finally pushed the right buttons and we listened to it. Not bad. I could have left it at that, with three tracks – guitar, bass, and drum machine. He wanted more, so we added another track with him banging on the drum machine with sticks, making an erratic clicking sound, and me on the guitar with some distortion.

Rewind and listen to it through an amp. It had a full sound with two guitars weaving in and out, although I faded the distortion track the last couple of minutes. I had the feeling it was getting muddy.

Mixing five tracks. He wanted to add some off-the-cuff vocals. Each track can be adjusted relative to the others, magnifying one of the instruments or muting it, putting some echo on the guitar. He had the headphones on and a beer-numbed head and the final mix was not as clean as it was before, but it depends on the tape-player. He wanted to hear it on a boombox in the kitchen so we went upstairs. I was exhausted.

1:30 a.m. I walked out with a copy of the tape and took a bus home.

Saturday, Feb. 12, 1994

10 a.m. Woke up with the phone ringing, the Professor in Los Angeles. I was thrown into a history lecture, and held up my end of the conversation with some effort. We talked about the Counter Reformation and the Jesuits in the 1580's, Ignatius Loyola, and the Aristotelian aspects of the Jesuits (which I take to mean empirical, for one thing). He said the Counter Reformation incorporated a more rational approach which the Protestant Reformation had initially postulated.

We talked about the film, *The Mission*, and how the Jesuits in South America in the 18th century were becoming a political problem, having come to the conclusion that every native person had a soul. Therefore, as children of God (or soulful men and women), they should be treated with respect. That had political overtones, and many or most of the Jesuits were called back to the Old World. He said their presence in the New

World was curtailed, with Spanish missions along the coast of California, for example, being run by Franciscan monks.

I mentioned the left-wing Jesuits my father was in contact with in Mexico and Central America. They had a common interest in helping the poor, who were not getting much help from their own governments. I also told him about the year my father spent at Union Seminary in New York. The Professor referred to the postwar pessimism in the 1950's as a "crisis of faith." World War II was not too encouraging, with the churches having to reexamine their role in the world (the Catholic Church had been in bed with the fascists). Maybe they should honor the original message of the man on the cross and help the poor.

He said something about an incident in Los Angeles. Gang members shot a deaf woman using sign language because they thought she was using gang signs. We wondered if the shooters should be shot for being so vicious, not to mention dumb.

And could I send him the paper on "Reassessing Fascism," he doesn't have it. I said the Tenderloin has a prison atmosphere with lots of ex-cons in the area. He said it isn't worth my being here and I should move. I got off the phone, the conversation having gone from Catholicism to Black Muslims with beliefs which are unworthy of Islam.

11 a.m. On the typewriter for a couple of hours.

2 p.m. Ming called. We had planned to go out to the cliffs, a warm afternoon was in progress, but she had a lot on her mind and more was weighing on her heart. She was practically in tears and getting choked up, very unusual for her. Insomnia, confusion, and despair as to why things aren't working out with the boyfriend.

She was talking with the candid air of the wounded, her defenses down and her ego compromised. One of the points that puzzled her to no end is how she had miscalculated so badly. I figured a love affair might be in trouble if it was calculated, but we knocked it around for a while with my interest fading in and out. I had the feeling she was throwing softballs by me and I would occasionally take a swing at some assumption and knock it over the wall.

The question here is if she is hard to live with as a girlfriend, something she has told me and demonstrated with a few men. She is at her best with a certain detachment and romantic distance. It is curious that she gets along better with me than with him, at least in terms of communication and rapport, and at this point is spending more time with me than him. There was a suggestion of something we have touched on before, if what we have between us is undermining any romantic connections with others.

She mentioned a growing sense of gauging a man by what he brings out in her, intellectually and otherwise. There is also the problem of her growing and maturing to her faint surprise, with the boyfriend a year or two younger, and the gap is widening. They had a year-long estrangement (which was mainly her doing), during which he more or less suffered and waited alone while she enjoyed the attentions of a few men and he knew it. You might suppose he built up some resentment. As for getting back together - she admitted it was comfortable, a reaction to having been overseas. She wanted to come home and he was associated with that, forgetting that when they split up a year before they had been arguing a lot. I said maybe the separation was beside the point. They picked up where they left off, and if that was a state of arguments and friction it was here again.

She said the honeymoon is over. They have been living in the new place barely two weeks and things are miserable. He resented leaving his old place and living according to her agenda all the time. As if the past and present aren't problematic enough, her future plans are straining their relations even more, since she wants to go to Alaska in the summer. He doesn't want to. It is turning into a power struggle in the midst of which she will voice her "needs," wanting him to listen to her problems and give her a hug once a while, and is astounded when he argues and negotiates those points. I said in having gone back to him she was returning to the scene of the accident (I didn't say crime), and trying to get some love from someone she had hurt, so of course he was wary.

Not to let him off the hook. I was surprised he wasn't more into it, romantically speaking, and was thinking back to when I was his age. To shack up with a woman was a fine thing, an atmosphere I would surround myself with. She felt like he was taking her for granted while he went out drinking with his friends, who she doesn't find very stimulating. She was feeling the estrangement of someone in their early twenties who is drifting away from people they have known since high school.

The worst thing here is needing someone, wanting to lean on a man, but he couldn't handle it. She was surprised to find she wanted that. It didn't fit with her indoctrination that "A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle," so she is even more puzzled at her wanting a boyfriend. I have seen men and women who before and after a love affair were pining away and miserable, but when they're with someone they are so confident and careless that they end up blowing it. Love mixes with the ordinary things of life. It's in the air you breathe. You get used to having it around and being enhanced if not enchanted by the presence of another person. If and when that person

disappears – even if you're the one who ended the affair, being so full of yourself and forgetting how that feeling came from someone else – the enhancement isn't there anymore. You feel reduced, and you are living out the old line: you don't know what you have until you lose it.

After an hour of this I mentioned the sun was getting low and negotiated her coming over. I straightened up the place, took a shower, and was more or less ready when she got here, walking in a little depressed.

We took a bus towards the ocean, sitting in back with a black man on the next seat who was talking out loud to himself and everyone on the bus. His monologue was getting louder and more emphatic. The only reason I think no one replied or asked him to be quiet was that most of it was incoherent and so slurred you could barely understand what he was saying. He got out on Fillmore Street and I expected some applause.

Meanwhile, I was reading the paper:

SNOW SHUTS DOWN EAST COAST.

Skinheads acquitted in kicking death [a blind man in Germany].

LOSE WEIGHT WITH HYPNOSIS [watching TV?].

Deaf woman using sign language shot by a gang member. She was communicating with her fiancé while they drove to dinner. A truck pulled up beside them and she was shot in the face.

Woman says Clinton asked her to have sex in 1991.

We got out at 32nd Street and walked towards the cliffs, dropping into a store for a few things. I had lightened up by then, and there were some comments about her sitting on the frozen meat.

The trail begins at an overlook near the Legion of Honor and we followed it around the point with the sun getting low, increasing the shadows in the headlands across the water. We walked until we were past Land's End and were exposed to the sun. There was a lower promontory and we found a place to sit on the eroded cliff with the waves exploding on the rocks. I had a small beer and she had a large one and downed it before I finished mine. She returned to her domestic concerns while I lay there watching the sun go down.

We were interrupted a couple of times by a gopher tugging a plant into its hole a few feet away. When it did, it covered the hole with dirt.

Closer to the water was a naked man on the rocks.

The sun went down in flames, the horizon was a tour de force, and it was colder than expected with her pulling her sweater over her bare legs. It was nearly too dark to see, so we went back up the cliff to the main trail and walked through the trees. I went over to the side to urinate and she followed suit a little further on, standing up a minute later, pulling her shorts up and calling out that she finished before me.

We walked to the Cliff House and got a small table by the window, having a couple of Irish coffees and warming up. Things were getting dreamy and relaxed with Pink Floyd on the soundtrack. We were sitting together with the conversation getting personal as concerns the two of us. There was some mention of our having a good rapport, even though we're not doing anything with it as far as shifting into a higher gear (or is it lower if it's sexual?). For one thing she is concerned about ruining a fine balance and doesn't want to tamper with it, which is okay with me. You have to go along with a woman's knowledge of herself and what she's capable of, but there are times I drift into

her sphere of influence. Now and then one of us will pull back and give it a rest for a while.

We took a seat near the fire with a buffalo head on the wall, sitting side-by-side and staring at the flames. I was getting restless though, and we finally left, walking up the road to a bus stop on the edge of the woods. No bus, so we walked into the woods. I sat on the ground, leaning against a eucalyptus tree in a dim light with the shadows of the trees. She was acting odd, as if regressing to a little girl state and said as much, spazzing out and being a cute disturbance. I relaxed while she was in constant motion, stomping around with a firm determination in white shorts and hiking boots, flattening the strips of eucalyptus bark on the ground, and walking around one tree or another while throwing pine cones at the tree I was leaning on. There were constellations on a cold clear night.

Finally, the bus arrived and we rode all the way back to my place.

In the apartment I turned on the opera, *Tosca* by Puccini, turning up the aria where a man is in a prison cell and looking through the window at the stars, *"E lucevan le stelle."*

10 p.m. I found some reruns of *The Twilight Zone* on the black and white portable with her wanting to zone out, having made some soup. She was trying to forget her problems and relax. We made hot toddies with rum, hot water, honey and lemon. She liked it, lying under a Mexican blanket on the bed and suggested we have another. It was a nice counterpoint to a few chills coming from the tube – dead people in the Twilight Zone, although they don't know they're dead.

We wondered what would happen if the two us were doing something, then looked around and saw Rod Serling with his back to us, addressing an unseen audience.

Around midnight she wanted a back rub and lay on the floor on her stomach. I sat on her butt and in no time she was moaning. If someone listened outside the window they might have thought something else was going on. “That feels so good… right there….” I went from her shoulders and neck down her back, a thick torso which can take a lot of pressure, and then her behind, doing a firm massage of her butt which included her tail bone. I’ve found from past massages it’s a relaxation point (wrote realization) for her. She moaned a little, muttering how good it felt, and then was half-asleep, though I didn’t know it as I continued down her bare legs, lightly scratching her skin, then sitting on the floor and rubbing one foot and the other with her legs on mine. I stopped when I realized she had fallen asleep.

I glanced over at the tube with the sound off, with someone turning into a wolf man. After a while she came around, got up slowly, very relaxed and sleepy and said she had to go. It was nearly two in the morning, and I called a cab. I walked her outside and opened the door of the cab. There was a big embrace, as if that’s what she needed all along, but only in parting would she let it happen.

Back inside I found a film in progress and was slowly absorbed, a British movie set in the 1940’s, *Chicago Joe and the Showgirl*, and was impressed all over again with British realism, not to mention the caliber of the acting. They seem to have a more homogenous precision of call and response.

It was a true story about the only U.S. serviceman convicted in British courts during World War II. He went on a crime spree under the influence of an eighteen-year-old blonde viper who got him to kill a woman for her fur coat. What got me was how

killing someone wasn't made to look as easy or inconsequential as throwing a strike and you're out, or touch them and they fall down and don't move. It was problematic from start to finish, with him hesitating because he didn't feel good about knocking off a woman. You see the struggle within him, but finally, at the girlfriend's constant urging, he manages to knock the woman over the head with a wrench. She is not so easily knocked out however, and the next minute he's on the ground trying to strangle her and it is not an easy process. She is thrashing about and kicking and making noises, very unladylike. The situation was as clumsy and awkward as you might expect, rather than the two-dimensional homicides we get from Hollywood.

Finally, she was presumed dead, the coat removed, and the girl was laughing at how the woman kicked and struggled as she put on the coat, reveling in its luxury and warmth. They picked up the body by the arms and feet and tossed it into the water. The woman later turned up alive in a wheelchair with a neck brace.

Towards the end they were caught, having killed a cab driver at her insistence and his reluctance, which is not to say he's not responsible. She went through the dying man's wallet, pulled out pictures of his wife and kids, sort of curious and amused while her paramour was feeling sick. The girl was clueless as to other people's suffering, and you wonder if she was a sociopath or very dumb. At any rate, they were caught with the dead man's cab. When they were interrogated she was "singing," accusing the man of forcing her to do it, an American private who was not much older. They were both convicted, but he was hung and she got out in 1954.

For the last half-hour I had something going on the wooden guitar. I think the hot diluted rum had something to do with it.

Sunday, Feb. 13, 1994

Slow going in the morning. The alcohol last night had a "stop the world I want to get off" effect, amounting to a mute paralysis if you have enough. The morning after was an echo of that immobility. I was reduced to the fundamentals of existence which are more apparent with your brain on hold. It is not a bad perspective once in a while, but trying to write in that state is difficult. Later in the afternoon I repaired to a wooden instrument.

An article on Solzhenitsyn got me further out of the mood for drag queens in the evening. From *The Gulag Archipelago* to *Those Damn Calla Lilies*. B. had tickets and wanted an escort. It was after 6 p.m., the play was at 7, and I was not motivated. Ming called. I hadn't expected to hear from her. She wanted to hang out, having been stood up by the boyfriend. She observed the Chinese New Year with her family that afternoon, and there were no fireworks. I wanted some, or maybe she could come over and chase away the evil spirits. She wondered what I meant by that, and planned to burn some sage at her place.

6:45 p.m. I was still on the phone with her when someone knocked on the door. It was B., who walked in, dressed up and ready to go, and how come I wasn't ready? Her girlfriend was waiting in the car downstairs. I told Ming I had to go. There was some mention of meeting later and I changed clothes and went out.

We were dropped off at Artful Circle, and a few minutes later were sitting in a small theater. The lights went down and I was confronted with some male caricatures of women in a milieu of heart-wrenching kitsch. For a while I was looking for the exit, not

sure I was in the mood for clunky lines, bad acting, and the fey poses of female impersonators. Out of a cast of nine, two were actually females, including Connie Champagne in a blonde wig and borrowed gown.

It got better and eventually I didn't mind being there, the drag queens with exaggerated modes of expression in a melodramatic send-up of the human condition. There was a man in an orange wig, grotesque heavy makeup, an old woman's dress, and long pearls, whose facial contortions were cut and polished with the relish of a professional.

We hung around when it was over. B. disappeared (the lady's room) and looking for her I nearly walked into a dressing room. The door was open with one of the cast members changing. A Latino, Mr. Femme Fatale.

I went with B. and a few others to the Orbit Café on the corner, a nice place with drop-dead deco. I was soon losing interest in the conversation, with B. getting loud with a homosexual man who was getting loud in return. I had the feeling they were not communicating so much as echoing each other, with a sullen bull dyke sitting next to them and not saying much. B. was working herself into rhetorical hysterics about working for a week in a psychiatric ward.

I went to the bar for a cigarette and sat there, feeling better. I saw Connie Champagne without her wig, having darker hair. Her stage persona was a female caricature. The waitress walked over and said I had a phone call (I had left the number on Ming's answering machine). I picked up the phone and she said she wanted to get together. A few minutes later I left with B. and we walked to Ming's place, with B. holding my arm most of the way.

For a while the two of them were getting reacquainted at full speed, seeing who could talk faster. I think B. won. We were sitting on the floor and I ended up leaning against the wall and reading a magazine for a while. They covered a lot of territory, from China to looking for jobs. Ming described how things hadn't gone very well in that long-anticipated encounter with her Chinese roots. She felt refused and looked down on, when she wasn't being ripped off. Being a woman who was traveling alone was suspect, like she might be a whore or worse. She couldn't stand the looks she got of wary disapproval.

We had some wine, which is not what I would have preferred, having had enough alcohol the last few days, and after an hour or so we left, walking to Polk Street. I kissed B. goodbye and went with Ming to a Greek café around midnight.

We sat in the back, a dark room with small tables and Christmas lights, having falafel and dolma, yogurt, and a beer, sitting side-by-side and talking with a friendly tired gravity. The subject of her domestic turmoil came up again, with more discussion about love. We've been drifting awfully close in recent days and weeks, and I don't mind if she leans on me, but it's stirring up some old feelings which I usually have under control, if not sublimated and diffused into a slow burn which informs a lot of this rapport. I wondered if I was tired or falling in love with her all over again. Probably the last thing she wanted to hear, given her present difficulties, so I went off on another tangent with an awful singer on the radio.

1:30 a.m. I walked her home, and there was some discussion of how it is we get along. She said I'm one of the few people she knows who is more cynical than she is, which is saying something. She reminds me of a Chinese beatnik, and thinks she was a man in a previous life. I tend to refuse the notion of previous lives, and I'm not sure about

her having macho tendencies. Never mind that she wants to drive a forklift, there are still some womanly characteristics, being bosomy with smooth skin and full lips. Also, indecisive and oblivious to her effect on men.

Arriving at her door I said in a previous life she was a pretty thing in the ocean. She wondered if it was a whale or a jelly fish. I kissed her twice and walked away. There was a sultry invitation on the way home from a woman leaning against the wall.

Monday, Feb. 14, 1994

12:30 p.m. I walked into the office with a pink rose and some ferns for V. Three different women said, "Is that for me?" including the receptionist who had no flowers on her desk. I went out later and got some for her.

Some women blossom when you're going through the proper motions. Your mind is immaterial, you could leave it at home - the main thing is a good suit and some flowers in your hand. I wore the dark one with a white shirt, red tie, brown slacks, and there were some interesting results. V. for one, who expects special treatment because, "I'm the woman." At the same time, she doesn't hide her gratification. It isn't hard to hand a woman flowers, and you don't have to say much – the gesture is more eloquent than words.[38] I don't know that words have much effect anyhow. You can talk until you're blue in the balls, but chances are the woman is responding on the same level and you're

[38] I met a flamenco dancer in Grenada, Spain in the 1970's. She was staying in the same hotel as Simone and me. We had seen her perform the night before – with intense *gitano* music. I saw her walk by the next morning and asked the concierge in my bad Spanish if that was Concha Vargas. He thought I wanted him to take me to her room and introduce me, which is what he did. She answered the door in a bathrobe with her hair down, looking lovely, and I stumbled around with a foreign language. The next day she was lounging in the lobby, so I went out and bought a large yellow rose. I returned and gave it to her and she understood.

no closer than when you started. You might be mentally, but not much physically. Close, but no cigar.

V. looked more formal than usual and we left, picking up something and walking to a park in Chinatown. It was a clear afternoon and the plum trees had the little white flowers of an early spring. There were shredded firecrackers on the ground. On the way back I threatened to put out a floating red balloon with my cigarette – "Broken Hearts."

In the office there was not much work. I went out for more flowers. I wasn't sure who I was getting them for. I asked for a tiger lily and the guy came up with a big one and I realized it was perfect for Ming. I picked up something else for Ami. I wasn't sure if it was proper, but I might as well err on the side of giving someone flowers, rather than not. Chances are she won't be offended, whether or not she has a significant other. You would think it was a rare event the way she opened up, smiling and saying thank you. I thought they might look good on her desk, but she wanted to take them home.

5 p.m. I walked V. to the station, then headed for Ming's office, a planned rendezvous. I levitated to the tenth floor of a sterile corporate law firm, and walked in with her at the front desk, having said earlier what a lousy day she was having. She was not in the mood for sentimental occasions, but did not refuse the flowers and could not get over how pretty they were.

I walked her home, stopping at a vintage store with used stuff and found a turquoise glass ashtray. If I ever collected things it would be offbeat ashtrays, and maybe shells and rocks. She got some incense and we continued to her place, 1½ miles, with her a bit worn. Last night was another miserable experience with the boyfriend, and tonight

they will continue the negotiations from a more sober standpoint. Did I want to come up? Not really.

At home, early evening, the phone rang. A ten-year-old girl on the line, the daughter of the Actress, saying thank you for the home-made card I sent the two of them. A picture I cut out of the paper and xeroxed, "Pinky the Contortionist," a girl about eight or ten years old was lying on her stomach with her body bent behind her with her legs coming around and down with her feet sitting on her head. I drew a red heart on one foot which was vaguely symbolic of something, not sure what. Emotional contortions.

She was impressed and said she couldn't do that, and told me about the cards she received at school. Also, a sterling silver bracelet which she priced at about $10 from a boy in her class who wanted to take her out. I was unclear on the concept, she's in the fifth grade. Take her out where? She wasn't sure, just go out with her.

"You mean like a date?"
"Sort of."
"You're in the fifth grade."
"So what, other girls do it," (laughing, like she knows something I don't).

We went on talking, and then her mother got on the line. She was in town on Saturday and tried to call but my phone was busy (she went to see *A Streetcar Named Desire*). She had also seen *Naked* and liked it. I asked her how does a ten-year-old girl go out with guys. She said it is conceptual and wasn't worried, then went off on a tangent, saying I have prurient tendencies because of the movies I watch. I said I don't go to movies very often. She said I went to a movie called *Naked*, like it had something to do with naked people. Never mind that she saw it herself. There was another incriminating film I saw. I thought for a second and said, *Like Water for Chocolate*? She said, "See

what I mean, you're prurient." She then said she will be in town on Wednesday night, let's get together and do something.

I got off the phone and called Jon in St. Helena who left a message the other night when I was in the sound room. He said the videos he took at my place turned out well, an hour of episodic segments. They went from me reading 17th century poetry to the hookers walking by under the window. (If they're selling it, I guess they're sales girls.) It was a meandering conversation. In a few days he will be in New York.

When we got off the phone, I read parts of the journal from a few months ago, the four-dimensional historic stillness of it all.

11 p.m. Went to sleep (no beer tonight).

Tuesday, Feb. 15, 1994

Woke up early from a vivid dream, feeling rested with a lot of sleep. Lately there has been some turmoil in the subconscious, but the dreams fade when I come to. This time I had a clear recollection, maybe because an element in the dream continued into the conscious state, namely an erection. I was in a huge old reading room like the New York Public Library with high windows and reading lamps, but instead of tables there were small beds, at least where I was. V. was sitting next to me. The next thing I knew she leaned over and kissed me. I may have combined some of her characteristics with those of Ming, but she had a go-ahead look in her eyes. Curious, ready, and willing, though there were some people walking by. I wondered how to manage this without attracting attention, especially since I had a hard-on. V. was interested and looking at it. We arranged a blanket to cover us, blocking the view of anyone going by, and I pulled it out

in its standing pale length. Then I fumbled with a condom package, thinking it looked a little beat-up or past the expiration date.

The dream expired and I lay there for a while with a full erection, but it was ignored. The dreamy scene with V. had conveyed an atmosphere which lingered and I was distracted by the after-effects that morning, feeling an unconscious look of love. She is not a prude, and has a curiosity about a lot of things, but it was probably inappropriate to have this kind of dream.

Typing for a few hours.

I was writing a short note to the woman in Vienna when the phone rang. It was Ming at work, inviting me for lunch.

1:30 p.m. I stood in a renovated alley downtown, leaning on the granite, and she walked by, practically another person compared to yesterday. A person can look different depending on the angle of the light – haunted by the specter of how they're going to look in a few years, along with echoes of how they used to look. Today there was a glamorous woman emerging from a thrasher tomboy, black hair tied in a long thick braid, a chic black suit with a stylish brown jacket, and lipstick.

We walked to a nearby café and had lunch at a round marble table with a cigarette afterwards. More talk about her miserable domestic situation. Not sure when she's been driven to tears so often, but is resigned to it and wants to lighten up, not get so analytic and give him some space, but it was difficult.

We have an ongoing disagreement as to whether love is hard. I assume if it is hard, with implications of behavioral engineering, that implies that someone is pretending and it isn't real, or the ulterior motives - not to say the power struggles - make it sound as

lyrical as automotive repair. Her life is at an impasse now, and our discussions are getting repetitious. I was losing interest and she commiserated with my having to listen to her "spewing all her boring stuff." The sky was overcast, an atmosphere in which your spirit drops like an elevator into the basement and stays there.

When I walked her back to her office and walked to mine I thought about it, like a let down from the day before, as if some extra love or optimism in the air one day was drained from the next. More to the point, I'm burning out on listening to women tell me their problems. They have a significant other and I don't. They don't realize how it sounds on this end, like someone telling you what sort of indigestion they have from one of their banquets, knowing that you're getting by on bread and water. They take the dirty dishwater from their dinner and dump it on my head.[39]

In the office. I thought the Attorney was in court, but they settled just before it went to trial, so he was there with a lot of work. Amendment to the Judgment of Dissolution, child support, etc.

One of the attorneys, about forty, walked by my desk after five and asked about the correct pronunciation of "donor." I said, "It rhymes with boner. It's similar to a word like minor." "You're absolutely right." I complimented him on the flower arrangement he bought yesterday for his wife, a large and elegant bouquet. He had a look of wonder on his face when he said she didn't like it, saying it was fit for one of his secretaries. She wanted more roses. From what I've heard she is a ball-buster whose father had a legal practice and that's how her husband got started.

[39] I've had some long love affairs and they were mostly positive. I know some women who are having romantic breakdowns. What is better: having a full-blown love affair in the past where you feel the lingering effects, or a half-assed love affair in the present?

That reminds me, one of the Filipina secretaries who used to work here dropped by, thin and aloof. She told someone she only got six roses from her man, instead of a dozen. V. can't stand her, and they never have two words for each other.

7 p.m. I left the office and went home. On the last few blocks I walked a gauntlet of hookers with loose morals and tight skirts.

Later in the evening, feeling a bit depressed or at a low ebb, I turned on the tube. There were ice skating couples going through the motions with their heart and soul on ice. The suspense was killing me, not knowing when they would fall. I finally turned to channel 9, a report on the tabloids - a girl fight involving ice skaters. The pussy-whipped media can't get enough of it, including *Time* and *Newsweek*. The story is spreading like a mushroom cloud, having begun as a minor event. The trivializing of the news has something to do with women readers who inhale this stuff in large doses.[40]

Wednesday, Feb. 16, 1994

10:30 a.m. Phone call from the Professor in the history department. We talked about Solzhenitsyn, how one of his sons likes to work on motorcycles. I'm surprised at the amount of criticism and bad press he has gotten. We're talking Solzhenitsyn here, and what do you have to do to get respect? There is some reason to believe his magnum opus on the Russian Revolution is tedious and longwinded. It corresponds to his having moved

[40] Consider the report on whether Michael Jackson had his hands on a boy of thirteen, and the attention it got. The means are there to broadcast any scandal or rumor around the world with a massive audience. You hear mention of how "heinous" a crime it was. A British woman reporter said it was the story of the decade or even the century. I guess it's more significant than World War II. Some people want to shield themselves from the news, and will eclipse it with these overblown stories which have the accessibility of junk food and don't require much thought. A reader feels titillated and self-important, going through the dirty laundry of a famous person. They're like one of his maids, and his family sound like hypocrites. For a *Frontline* program his parents showed their concern in an interview for which they charged $100,000.

to the United States, sequestered in a remote location for nearly twenty years (he is seventy-five), and maybe that would drain the life out of his writing. He writes every day, which doesn't leave much time for other things. The latter might invigorate the writer and the writing, but he is far from Russia, breathing the air of Vermont. There is something deadly about a writer who lives in quiet surroundings, unless he wants to write about silence – and even then, there is a heightened sense of silence when it's interrupted by a passing motorcycle.

Meanwhile, the Professor was going to mail some essays by Gore Vidal, who gave a lecture in Berkeley Monday night and I missed it. So did the *Chronicle*. Gore Vidal comes to town and it's less newsworthy than a fender-bender or a bra sale.

There was some mention of the earthquake in Los Angeles, with illegal immigrants wanting government assistance. He talked about students who are wrongheaded when it comes to pride, putting the cart before the horse. He went to the finest schools back east where the general assumption was the professor knew what he was talking about and the students should listen. The first step of the learning process is to clarify that situation, getting a stumbling block of inflated self-esteem out of the way. With any other realm of learning and apprenticeship, from being a Zen monk to a jazz musician, it would be assumed or quickly comprehended that the student is not equal to the teacher.

He mentioned a class discussion on the word "sylvan," as in "Pennsylvania," having to define a word which hardly anyone knew (it was a multi-racial class). A Latino guy stood up, angry with an attitude, and said, "Do you know what *'cujo'* means?" Like that had anything to do with the subject at hand. The Professor might have answered, "Do

you know what irrelevant means?" but he said, "If you know so much, perhaps you would like to teach the class."

On the typewriter for a couple of hours.

Went to work in the afternoon, with threatening storm clouds. I walked into the office with an umbrella. A black woman secretary said, "Is it raining?" "No, but I can feel it in my bones. Can you feel it?" She picked up on the innuendo, "Don't get me started."

Talking with V., who loosens up when her attorney is gone. I wore a dark suit and she mentioned how she liked the flower and put it in her room. Her fiancé gave her some pink roses but she wanted red. She said mine was longer, and I smiled. I said I had a dream about her the other night, which piqued her curiosity. She wanted to know about it, and wondered if it was proper or not. I had the feeling she wouldn't mind, and thought it was a woman's due that a man would dream about her. I gave an edited version (a library with a bed), and she asked if we were having lunch on Friday.

Turned out there was a lot of work. I was further delayed when I prepared a couple of things to be mailed - a package for the woman in Vienna, and an essay about fascism for the Professor.

6 p.m. I was still there when Ming called from home, continuing a note of resigned patience with her domestic situation. She admitted that patience isn't one of her virtues, maybe she is boring me with all of her problems, and how come I don't have any problems? It makes it hard to be my friend because she feels like a moron who will say, "You know me better than he does!" So much for knowledge, it sleeps alone.

We talked about a woman friend of mine who would like other women to keep their distance from me, though she only wants me as a friend or escort, like I should be an on-call celibate socializer. Being in the office I put a bitter spin on the subject, and maybe she felt implicated as a woman who is getting laid on a regular basis (okay, maybe not), but she suddenly had to go.

That left me thinking about something earlier in the conversation. She went to Headlines where she used to work and someone asked if she knew a black man who used to work there was dead. He was shot in Oakland. “Wrong place at the wrong time.” This was the man she had a passing affair with and finally cut it off, sensing he had other women. He was in his early thirties and something of a Black Muslim who would fill her with rhetoric along the lines of “Buddha was a black man.” Whatever presumptions he had about Islam, much less Buddhism, he was caught up in the status competition of middle-class blacks. He took her to a club in Oakland where she felt uneasy. It was all black people with a menacing atmosphere of stuck-up poses.

She said the man had been involved with some shady characters who were obsessed with the notion of white supremacy (a dumb and two-dimensional concept in its own right). She didn’t think he had anything to do with drugs, but somehow got caught in a shootout. We knocked around the possibility of finding out what happened, checking the police reports or calling his wife, but not sure that was a good idea.

It was nearly seven when I left and walked a few blocks to the men’s club in North Beach. The door charge of $20 was waived since I know the chef. He said I should drop by since he has been there for six months and I’ve only gone once or twice.

I stood in the lobby waiting for a call to get through to him. A polite heavy bouncer was nearby. Suddenly a door opened and the women walked out, lining up for one of their short revues, all G-strings and bras. Stormy went by and smiled, but neither one of us made an effort to talk later. Approval from the chef came down, and I headed for the bar upstairs. It has a view of the runway and its flying legs. I passed the kitchen with Michael working hard and saying he would take a break.

I had a glass of wine, large, smooth, and dark, and was not exactly suffering while I waited for him. One woman after another did three numbers on the runway with a brass pole which they polished with their breasts. It's like they were making love to the floor, the mirrors, and the pole, having an inordinate affection for the immobile while in constant motion. Some incorporated a slow progression of poses and positions, while others went for a kick above the head or hanging upside down from a pole, untying a tiny top and letting it drop. The whole routine was stylized and limited, and got a little monotonous as their torsos showed off every angle in a soft pink light.

I hadn't intended to stay long, having to meet the Actress around nine (Michael's ex-fiancee), but several factors conspired to keep me there and blow the rendezvous. I was too comfortable for one thing, after a second and eventually a third glass of wine, and it was taking a long time for him to get a break (he never did). I was getting hungry, and he sent out a plate of crab quesadilla with chopped pineapple which was delicious. When I went out around nine it was raining. I called her place to leave a message that I couldn't make it and got her daughter on the phone. I said I was getting wet. She said, "Silly, get out of the rain." The advice of a ten-year-old who knows what's what.

You might suppose the strippers were a reason to linger, but after an hour or two it gets redundant. That reminds me, the review I read a while back by a lesbian who made it sound like the men were open-mouthed and drooling like they're in junior high school. If anything it was the opposite, the women a diversion in the background while the men were talking at the bar or watching a game on TV.

There was a woman who kept me there. I had seen her before and liked her fluid moves. She understood the polymorphous poetics of herself, from her long black hair to her feet, bending over backwards with a lot of poise, a poetess among the more prosaic types. When she finished, walking by the bar with the other women clutching their outfits to their bare chests, I asked her name (Monique) and we had a few words. She said she would come back and half an hour later she was sitting next to me in a tight-fitting gown. I went into a diplomatic honest mode, saying I was a friend of the chef (and not a regular customer).

She came here from Viet Nam when she was ten, and is now in her mid-twenties. I mentioned a Vietnamese woman friend who came here at seven and is now in law school. There was some mention of the Tet Festival and the man singing Elvis tunes. She smiled and said, "Vietnamese are a little behind," and went on to describe a patriarchal culture where the women have a passive front, but a strong will underneath. She talked about her life in this country and the practicalities of "survival."

Having been scribbling a few lines on a napkin there was some mention of poetry. I'm not sure if it took a minute to sink in or if it was something else I said, but she was about to walk away, politely taking her leave, when she suddenly turned back and asked, "Are you published?" I said yes, but not very much, and things unfolded into a whole

other dimension of her. It turns out she went to U.C. Davis, studied writing with Gary Snyder, and is well aware of the Beats – Ginsberg, Corso, Kaufman, etc. I said I had met them and she said, "You don't look that old." I said, "It wasn't in the 1950's."

The conversation was more revealing than her stage routine, and having to go she said she would come back later and talk. I should have stayed, but I was tired of the atmosphere, not to mention the music. The DJ was a young black man with a stack of CDs and a microphone, but it was loud and he was stuck on Prince. I asked Monique if she chose her own music. She said she did when doing a special routine of her own, preferring the blues with smoky lyrics. She was not familiar with Billie Holiday or the Platters though, and maybe could use a musical consultant.

Three or four women came by with their friendly mercenary innuendos while I was at the bar. There was something about $20 for a private room, which Monique had mentioned early in the conversation, though a little shy, like it was something she was supposed to say. A Latina woman walked up and in a few minutes I was on the verge of doing anything she wanted. She stood next to me with her perfume and a few soft touches. I was on my third glass of wine by then, and said I was unclear on the concept of a private room. Wasn't it hard for a man to sit there with a half-naked woman undulating a foot away? It sounded like a form of torture and his hands were tied. She liked that, a torture chamber. I told her I would think about it on the way home. Meanwhile, we talked about other things. It turned out she keeps a journal and has a lot of stories from working here. In her opinion, it beats sitting in front of a word processor. Also, she has a man in Chile and is going to see him soon.

I went to the kitchen and said so long to Michael. He apologized for being so busy, and said we should meet on a tennis court next week. I went out with the rain having stopped, took a bus part-way home, and walked the rest.

11 p.m. Walking in I found two windows had been blown open by the storm (I really should have talked to Stormy). A painting on cardboard of stormy seas had flown out the window and lay in the gutter three floors down. I went out and got it and brought it back. The wind had also blown a silk scarf off a lamp.

I made coffee and was on a wooden instrument for a while, thinking it was typical that I would get sidetracked by the mind of one woman or another. The floorshow can be more erotic than you might expect, but also less. A shaved pubis is barely covered. Some of the women pushed the limits on their back with their legs spread, or rubbed it slowly on a pole, and yet their pussy was diminished in its hairless state.

Conversely, not perversely, I was reminded of an exhibition at the Goethe-Institut (Germany during the Weimar Republic, 1918 – 1933) with its cults of nude body expression and healthy outdoor feminism. “Only when eroticism is excised from naked dance will women find their corporal and spiritual freedom.” Leaving aside the question of whether eroticism can be excised from the living, I’m not sure why erotic dancers wouldn’t have some freedom, showing off and knowing they’re immune from men while they’re on stage.[41] They cut loose with alluring moves, which begs the question of who is in control here. The men are passive and the woman get their kicks.[42]

---

[41] Martha Graham, who founded the oldest dance company in the U.S., told her ballerinas to “dance from the vagina.”

[42] The atmosphere may feel mechanical or contrived, like the “Dance Machine for the Production of Ecstasy” (1924), a geometric crystal with someone moving inside it.

I wrote a poem for Monique. It could be I am out of my mind. I have a tendency to take a woman at her word, to assume it's real or call her bluff, whatever pose or attitude that she projects in my direction. It has led to some vanishing acts.

Thursday, Feb. 17, 1994

Went to work in the afternoon. Rain and drizzle. I left my umbrella in the office yesterday. The storm knocked out power to much of Northern California with forty to fifty mile per hour winds. The Attorney was gone, but had left some work. We have a case where someone cannot claim damages for emotional distress arising from a breach of contract.

In the afternoon I talked with one or two of the younger women. The receptionist is clear about the men she likes and those she doesn't like. She had a textbook from her evening law class open and wanted to know if I would do it for her.

I may have to go up on the roof to have a cigarette now. A Jewish paralegal asked me not to smoke on the balcony, it bothers him. We're talking about one (1) hand-rolled cigarette per day. The open-air balcony on the thirteenth floor is behind a closed door (two in fact, if you include the door to his office which is thirty feet from the door to the balcony). He said the scent of it lingers (and he is allegedly a Deadhead).

6 p.m. I walked to the Goethe-Institut with a passing interest in their current series with the body mover and choreographer, Susanne Linke (three videos – 50 minutes).

"FLUT" (Flood) (1981), *"WANDLUNG"* (Change) (1978), *"IM BADE WANNEN"* (In the Bathtub) (1980). The first was an elegy for cello by Faure, slow and

somber with her movements responding in kind. You could feel the strain of moving in slow motion with tense muscles and arms looking like she lifts weights. There were hard muscled legs in a sheer nightgown and long blonde hair flying around, utilizing German-clumsy or distracted movements with an intense concentration on the seen and unseen. After a while I began to wonder if she had gotten some of her ideas or trance-like interludes while on acid. In *"FLUT"* she was preoccupied with a long roll of blue fabric. When unrolled it was like a private territory she was running back and forth on, the fabric of her life, a long continuum, extending it further into the void. In the end it was taken away and she faded out while staring into the distance.

"WANDLUNG," with her bare arms and shoulders in a nightgown on the floor, rolling very slowly, sitting up, staring intently with Schubert in the background (*"Der Tod Und Das Madchen,"* – Death and the Maiden). I had mixed feelings about her minimalism - a little boring, moving, and profound at the same time, like it was choreographed by Samuel Beckett. Unconstructed choreography, but what do I know?

"IM BADE WANNEN." The center of attention was a white bathtub with her in a nightgown again. The piece began with her sitting on a black toilet, then she walked over to the tub with a towel and walked around it for a while, variations on a theme of her approach-avoidance of it, ducking her head into it, an awkward sideways stance, rubbing a towel along the side or on the floor. It appeared to be the gestures of a disturbed woman, driven to melodramatic pantomimes by overdosing on the domestic. The freedom of movement pulled her around the room as if she couldn't help it, giving in to the whimsical urges of spontaneous motion. I had the impression she was walking

through the music *("Gymnopedie"* by Eric Satie) and was obsessed with it, while a bathtub was an ordinary anchor which kept her from drifting away.

I had a workout in the pool and walked home, the rain having stopped for a while. A lunar crescent overhead, a dark wet street of old buildings. I often have the feeling that whatever I'm doing at the moment is under the sway of the permanent.

Friday, Feb. 18, 1994

8:30 a.m. Woke up with the phone ringing and not enough sleep. It was V. at the office, laughing when she heard she woke me up. She wanted me to go with her to Oakland to file some complaints in the Municipal Court, and could I get there by 10:30. We were having lunch anyhow, so it wasn't such an imposition. It occurred to me I don't have much resistance to her**.** There is something precious about a woman living in the modern world who has managed to keep neurotic gender politics at arm's length, and much of the news as well. I didn't used to think that was a good thing, but if the results are anything like her it's worth looking into.

10:30 a.m. I arrived in the office. There was some rain, but the clouds were breaking up. We walked to the underground station and took a train, sliding under the bay and coming to the surface in Oakland, gliding backwards through the shipyards with the city in the distance and the rain clouds drifting by.

The courthouse was a low-budget situation. She filed two complaints (slip and fall / hit and run). I stamped the copies, her thin wrists being fragile these days, and we left, walking through an open-air market. I tried a slice of Fuji apple, a honey-covered

almond, and a fig she bit into and gave me the rest. The little familiarities that gradually deepen, as subtle as a plant. It has that kind of effect, slow and minimal at times, and real as the air she breathes. I think that any familiarity she has with a man is not pretended, and she is cautious with it. She would no more consider the sexual hit and run maneuvers of some people than she would hold up a bank. Being around that sort of integrity is refreshing, though it leaves me at her mercy sometimes.

We took the monorail to San Francisco, flying through a tunnel under the water. The conversation during most of this excursion was non-stop. When doing ordinary things with her I find them transformed. It's the usual story where you love someone and part of the allure is how you see life from a different angle when you're together.

V. and I returned to the office and left a few minutes later, walking to the Hunan place. Smoked ham with garlic over rice and tea.

Our relationship has some of the discreet dimensions of society in the 19th century. I thought of Kierkegaard and his *Diary of a Seducer*, though seduction is too strong a word in our case. It's more of a refined osmosis between two people who conduct themselves with some restraint – she is engaged to someone, not to mention Catholic. She takes seriously the things I do, as if giving her a rose or telling her I dreamed about her causes a shift in her opinion of me.

Meanwhile, we were having lunch and talking about women's breasts. It was not something I would normally bring up, especially hers, but that's what she was talking about. She has hardly any breasts in her opinion, there is "nothing there," and wanted to know about the forms of breast enhancement. It was rather touching as she wondered which famous women or movie stars had done it. I tried to dissuade her, and went on

about how they look and feel when artificially enlarged, not to mention the occasional side-effects. I'm not sure she was persuaded, and later it occurred to me the artificial might have positive connotations for her.

It makes no sense that we get along, considering how different our lives are. It's one of those miracles of the spirit where you stumble on a hidden (if not forbidden) current of compatibility with someone and the vital components are in sync, however much the rest is impossible.

We returned to the office, the Attorney having recovered from his shock at seeing me there so early in the morning, but there wasn't a lot of work.

I spent some time editing and typing a poem for the woman at the club, along with a short note. It seemed absurd, but so are a lot of things. I want to say that "All things come to us through the Absurd," but I'm not sure if the quote comes from Kierkegaard, Camus, or me.[43] "Accommodation to the absurd readmits adults to the mysterious realm inhabited by children." (Andre Breton)

The interactions with the receptionist continue, as much her doing as mine. There are limitations to it, being in the office, but within those restraints she is a friendly heat-wave – much of it beyond the call of duty. I think the call of beauty is in her blood, and our chemistry is real. I'm not that friendly with most women, who're not shy about conveying little or no interest in my person.

When you are friends with women of other races and ethnicities you might run into some walls. There could be a tendency to stay within their racial group when it

[43] "Happiness and the absurd are two sons [I wrote songs] of the same earth. They are inseparable." (Albert Camus) At the same time, "We can regard our life as a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness." (Arthur Schopenhauer)

comes to sleeping with a man. She told me about the situation with her fiancé, not speaking in the most complimentary terms. He is "spoiled," not working, under the control of his mother, and "in our culture" when a woman marries she leaves her family and moves in with the other family, often as not becoming a "slave" to the mother-in-law. She is not looking forward to that, but said the custom is more relaxed these days.

Ami didn't strike me as someone who would go gently into those ancient customs, speaking with the candor of a twenty-something who engages in intelligent discourse. She might be testing her reflexes, the fiancé a *fait accompli*, so who does that leave for her to practice on? She walked by my desk, lingering and touching the plant.

Late afternoon I walked to the club in North Beach, dropped off the poem for Monique, and walked home. The hookers were posing on the sidewalk near my building. Last night there was a black man on the corner who was out of it, saying, "You ho's won't hep a mothafucka out. FUCK you!" I'm not sure what he meant by that, but they ignored him.

6 p.m. I picked up the guitar and had a workout which wouldn't quit. I was operating on some kind of overdrive, and planned to go to the sound room.

I finally put it down and went out, taking a crowded bus to the Western Addition, but no one was home. A young blonde knocked on the door and went away. I noticed there was a pile of things on the street, including an eight-foot-long contorted branch that I'd been storing there. I brought it up to the porch and propped it in the corner.

I took a bus back home, as if all I went there for was to move a branch, returning with a poor boy and an extra special bitter ale. An hour later I was reading the journal, thinking it sounded episodic, sodden, and prosaic, when the phone rang.

It was the Phantom of the sound room. I told him I went to his place. He said he is in Nebraska, one of his infrequent trips home. It sounded like he could be calling from a block away. He said people there are honest and don't lock their cars. He tends to be laconic about most things.

There was some mention of last weekend, an incident he was not overly proud of, but what the hell, it happened. The woman was willing and it had been a long time. Unfortunately, she is the girlfriend of a friend of his, but the couple had an argument and she went out with the Phantom. "She's a wild girl," he said, a Latina with a tendency to drink a lot and remember little. He figured he was just a stand-in, with her suggesting they go to her place, but no sex. Apparently, she didn't mean it.

He mentioned his roommate from Detroit, J., who slept with the woman who moved in recently. The Phantom thought it was okay, more power to him, but he has a diabetic girlfriend being cared for on the East Coast, which was less okay. He told her about it the next day, feeling guilty. Not okay at all.

When we got off the phone, I picked up the wooden instrument. On the tube some guys were blade running slowly at thirty or forty miles per hour around a frozen track. It was the usual coverage of the Olympics, where according to the camera the reactions of the crowd are equal to the competition itself. More so, in fact. You get more families and emotions (and commercial interruptions) than athletic events (many of which are over quickly). You end up watching other people's responses to an event as much as the event itself – as if their faces make it real for us and clue us into the fact that something interesting is going on (cut to a wide-eyed spectator), like we couldn't figure it out

ourselves. The camera has a wandering attention span, and can't stay focused on athletic endeavors.

Typing for a few hours.

2 a.m. I read the *Flyboy* essays. They're a bumpy ride with rim shots all over the place. What interrupts my concentration isn't that he loses a beat, but caught up in the attitude and the momentum he will hit a wrong note and instead of an intended exclamation point it leaves you with a question mark.

Saturday, Feb. 19, 1994

NOTES

She's a close call.

There are switchblades and roller skates in this neighborhood.

Is this town provincial? Is that a question one can ask these days, when concepts like provincial or sophisticated have been blurred by coast-to-coast television? It struck me how someone of the stature of Gore Vidal could come to town (a lecture in Berkeley last Monday), and receive little attention and few reviews as far as I know. The only things I came across were brief and unimpressed, like some mention (in the *SF Weekly*) of "Gore Vidal's paranoia" - he referred to the madness in the Senate. There was some mention in a column in the *Chronicle* about how he was introduced as one of this country's greatest living authors. His body of work is not chopped liver, but the introduction got a fair number of boos and hisses. It was not a politically correct way to introduce a white man, regardless of his contributions.

Talking with the Vietnamese woman at the men's club the other night, she said when children in her culture talk to their parents they refer to themselves in the third person. "Child would like to…." I wondered if that was a way to get around the ego and not be self-conscious. Maybe the formalities of language can provide a psychological life-raft.

When the fascist essay was sent to the Professor in Los Angeles, I put the return address as follows: Center for Epistemological Research & Incurable Inquiry – Mr. Mondo, Director.

Much was made of Bob Dylan having sold the rights to one of his protest songs to an accounting firm. “The Times They are a-Changin’.” However, it didn’t amount to much as he’s been fading from the public interest for years, not selling many records. He is a millionaire for whom accountants are as much a part of his life as any Johnny in the basement used to be when he was footloose in New York. More to the point, the song is thirty years old and he probably figures it has soaked into the culture, and its being used in a commercial won’t have an effect one way or the other. He kept his voice out of it, which sounds like a strategy of having it both ways – selling the Richie Havens version. Dylan has a nuts and bolts, or is it rocks and gravel, comprehension of the facts of life, one of the things that made him so effective (while providing him a sturdy anchor in the whirlwinds of fame). He was an old soul when he started out, and gravitated to some morbid folk songs, but he is in his fifties and his comprehension of the truth includes accounting firms.

I read an article on the P.R. strategies of his career. Dylan was more than a protest singer, the bulk of his work was not along those lines, and he was careful with it. He was still in his twenties when he said that protest songs reminded him of hemorrhoids.

That reminds me of Buffy St. Marie, whose career began to fade when she veered off from the protest mode (“Universal Soldier,” etc.). She said she had many songs, only a few of which were in that genre, but those are the ones she was known for. The writer and musician in her wanted to branch out with a well-rounded exposure, so she bared a breast while posing for an album cover, holding onto some attention with a tit. It was not how the public thought of her, who was supposed to maintain the aura of a suffering and righteous protest singer who is political all the time – all the more so as a Native American - while she was saying that she has some love songs.

Joni Mitchell posed naked on one of her album covers, but it was from behind. It didn’t hurt her career, but she was never typecast as a protest singer, unlike Phil Ochs. Dylan warned him about being cornered in that role, but he didn’t listen. Eventually he tried to break out of it, appearing in a gold lame suit that Elvis might have worn, but his career was winding down, the gold suit may have been a joke, and eventually he killed himself.

From *Homeboy*:

She lived somewhere along the nexus joining these two sustaining ceremonies (praying, cooking)… of her existence, the one spiritual and the other secular; without either mama would surely wither and blow away like one of the dry translucent shrimp shells littering the nearby beach.

Jody was the moniker all prisoners christened the anonymous lovers inevitably taken by their wives and sweethearts. The sated shadow in the female glance

> across a visiting room table, the invisible writing between the lines of censored letters, the unknown eye behind the camera at which women smile knowingly and children stare in mute confusion. The cholos called him Sancho.
>
> You can't let Jody live rent free in your head… that's hard time. If you can't shine him on, you gotta cut her loose… unless you too hard in love… not me, love's too dangerous. It needs victims.
>
> Drunk on his private mythology… it was as if the spiritual alchemy that compensated each for his handicaps had confiscated the common sense needed to survive them. Grown old with the benefit of experience, they shared the hellbent innocence of children playing with matches…. Up to the bars rolled the Pill Cart, its orderly shouting: 'Medication call!'
>
> The *Village Voice* is becoming a tour de force of left-liberal sensationalism. Not long ago the cover was in purple/black ink with large print saying GIVE ME SODOMY OR GIVE ME DEATH, or was it LIFE, LIBERTY, AND SODOMY. A recent cover has an old photo of a lynching – two black men hanging from a tree. It feels like the *Voice* is straining to hold onto the notion of black people being threatened and oppressed by the white man, but it has to go all the way back to a rural setting in 1931 for evidence of it.
>
> To bring things current with the body count, and characterizing homicides as hangings, over the last half century there would be a long line of black bodies hung from ropes, but they were hung by other blacks. Next would be a shorter line of white bodies hung from ropes, and which were hung by blacks. The shortest line of all would be black bodies hung by whites.

A lot of sleep, coming to around 11: 30 a.m. in a negative polarity of the rain outside. It washed away the construction workers. I made coffee, sitting in the stuffed old chair with a cigarette and staring out the window. A tree was going through semi-violent contortions from the storm outside (unless there was no storm and the tree was having a nervous breakdown).

I thought of a dream last night. I'm not sure if this is anything to worry about, but it involved putting a hypodermic into my arm, tapping it gently into a vein. I think someone gave me a hand, the heroin having some effect, although it was conjectural,

having never done it in real life. The next thing I knew I was on the floor and slowly pushing a bouquet of flowers.

I had something going on an ice-cold typewriter when the phone rang (there are eight windows in this room and some don't shut very well, so it's colder than a witch's opinion of my gender). Ming said two more of the flowers I gave her opened up with big sex organs.

Shaving, my reflection in the bathroom mirror, thinking "home repairs…."

3 p.m. Ming came over and wanted to go to a used clothing store. We walked there in the rain. Having been on the typewriter I was now looking at a rack of empty women's blouses, seeing how she rifles through the ruffles like an expert. I was a little out to sea, but every time I made a suggestion, pulling out a prospective blouse or skirt, she would give me a look or comment to the effect that I don't know her very well. Whatever I found was too feminine, loud, or turquoise, and she wouldn't be caught dead in pink corduroys. Well, I knew that. She was going for some unassuming stuff for the office, or old lady skirts.

We were at a circular rack and she said, "I don't like it," in response to one of my suggestions. I said "Subjectivity has its limits." There was an old woman nearby who said, "Sensitivity?" I said, "No, subjectivity." "Interesting," she replied while browsing through the blouses. "She isn't sensitive," I said.

Our rapport is given to off-the-wall responses, not off the rack, and when she had an armful of shirts and skirts we wandered over to the shoes. The place felt like a big garage sale of generic second-hand items.

She took an interest in outfitting my person, holding up men's slacks or shirts to my body, and found some brown shoes she thought would look good.[44] We went to a dressing room which was hardly more than a swinging door about five feet high and we both went in, having a lot to try on. A woman working there walked over and said it was against the policy of the store to have two in a room. There was some suggestion that we might try something of a romantic nature, so I got out. Ming wanted my opinion though, so I stood on the other side of the low door while she tried on blouses, wearing a white bra which was filled to the brim.

I showed her the shoes under the door for her opinion. When we left, having been there way too long, I had a couple of shirts and a dark sport coat which she didn't like. We walked to my place in the rain. A few minutes later we left for a Vietnamese produce market. I didn't recognize a lot of the produce. That was followed by the library, where I renewed *Flyboy* and *The Dialectical Imagination*. She finally read the Chinese novel I checked out for her, *Half of Man is Woman*, but wasn't in the mood for *The Butcher's Wife*.

We walked up the wide elegant staircase to the second floor. I was not sure what I was looking for, but finally took *You Bright and Risen Angels* by William Vollmann. He wrote about the hookers in the Tenderloin from a hands-on perspective, *Whores for Gloria*, incorporating his interviews with local streetwalkers.[45] I found a collection of erotic stories by a Latina woman for Ming, which she took, saying she has a lot of time

---

[44] "Brown shoes don't make it / Quit school, why fake it?" Frank Zappa, 1967.

[45] ""Whores for Gloria" is in the tradition of both Hubert Selby Jr.'s "Last Exit to Brooklyn" (sharing its theme of redemption through self-hatred, self-destruction and the abyss of sex) and the lyrics of Lou Reed." Catherine Texier, 'Whores for Gloria', *The New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1992. Seeking the forgiveness of your sins through self-destruction and a lot of fucking sounds like it would have diminishing returns.

on her hands. She was in a section of feminist theory and female sexuality, and found one or two books. I noticed *The Male Paradox* was pressed up against *The Female Goddess* and said, "Let's see what happens when we rub them together." Nothing.

6 p.m. We walked to the other side of City Hall in a dark drizzle and waited for the bus. There is a house-warming at her place tomorrow and she had to pick up a few things. I wasn't in the mood, but we had a plan to rendezvous later. I walked to the bookstore. Nikki Giovanni was going to be there for a reading at 7:30. I looked at her book, *Racism 101*, a thin and condescending effort. Maybe not surprising for a poet with a knee-jerk attitude, but for a tenured professor it was underwhelming. More in line with someone who taught elementary school, and I felt sorry for Spike Lee, the way she talked about him.

Walked home, and read a while with a Wagnerian opera on.

10 p.m. Phone call from B. Her and Phoebe, an old friend, were at her place, having been stood up by their significant others (a woman and a man). She said Phoebe felt sorry for herself, which is one of her main roles in life, and did I want to do something.

Then Phoebe was on the phone. I hadn't talked to her in a while, a woman in her late thirties on the fringes of the acting profession. She has a lovely house in the hills outside of Mill Valley, made of wood and glass and distant views. She is often discontented and admits to whining while B. has to listen. There is the ongoing misery of a boyfriend who wants to move in, but she needs time and space to herself. I had forgotten how well we talked together, with her fluid self-preoccupied manner of speaking. This is a woman who is blessed or burdened with a finely wrought awareness

of herself, her mind a constant analytic whirl of her intelligence and spirit, but it doesn't touch ground very often. She keeps it up in the air and unresolved. The energy and motivation that goes into the self-analysis does not leave any time for changing her life, so she wallows in a detailed and neurotic stasis.

However, at the moment she was in a responsive mood, and I was being facetious about my buoyant nature, like I don't have any problems. She said it all comes down to cigarettes, like I'm happy if I have one and not happy if I don't, so we knocked around the possibility that I am simpleminded. We went on for over half an hour (she can talk for hours). I found out later B. was fuming in the background, with Phoebe ignoring her once again. I heard a familiar voice outside, calling through the open window three floors down. It was Ming, so I got off the phone to ring her in.

It was after eleven and she wanted to relax, maybe with *The Twilight Zone* and rum, but it was too late for the show. I told the other two they could come over, but B. is not comfortable with this neighborhood at night. We cut up the lemons, heated the water, got the honey out, and poured the rum.

For a couple of hours we were talking and there was another round of drinks. She made an effort to avoid a subject she is sick of, the desultory domestic situation with the boyfriend. She couldn't help it, though, having to confront herself more than she has ever done before, realizing how complicated she is (like this is news), not to say demanding and a lousy girlfriend. I'm not sure about the last part, but she can be oblivious when it comes to her effect on men. It's a notion I have floated by her more than once, with her admitting she was careless in the past, a little surprised at herself. She operated on the assumption that her own feelings were all that mattered, and with those filling up the

foreground it didn't leave much room to consider how a man might feel. She tore the hearts out of a few men with her casual hit and run approach, assuming that if their attentions were so easy to come by she could try them out in bed and later shut off the current. You could say they were misled, if not mislaid.

I mentioned the feeling I had of living alone and hearing the complaints of someone with a significant other. It felt like they were coming from a banquet and complaining about a stomach ache while I'm on bread and water. That hit her between the eyes and she thought about it, but not for long. She said that bread and water sounded awfully good to her these days if there was peace of mind. There wasn't any evidence of a moveable feast if they're not getting along.

It seems they're growing apart, or she's outgrowing him. For one thing, she doesn't get from him what she gets from me, intellectually speaking, and that is important to her, especially when it involves being able to talk - something we do for hours on end. We were having wine, the conversation bouncing around, and not as obsessive as it sounds. 2:30 or 3 a.m. she called a cab. I walked her outside and opened the door. A big kiss and she was gone.

Sunday, Feb. 20, 1994

In the morning, not enough sleep, combined with the effects of a hangover. During the week I average one beer or less a night, but once in a while there is a change of pace where I am drinking more. The morning after is a dried-out warp that feels like death and renewal.

Work out on a wooden instrument for an hour.

Phone call from B., frustrated with the other woman, as well as with Phoebe. Both of them are having affairs where the difficulties and negotiations have gone on for months. They could go on indefinitely, with just enough to hold them together, like a broken shutter banging on an empty window and hanging by one hinge (which might be sex). I ran this image by Ming and it made her shudder.

B. was talking a mile a minute, doing a hyper New York surface monologue, a long regurgitation of mundane complexities pertaining to a legal matter on the East Coast with incompetent lawyers, her mother, and the inheritance of a large old house in the historical district of Brooklyn. It nearly put me to sleep and she finally apologized for "running off at the mouth." I wondered if there was a cause and effect, her being in a mood of frustrated love and sex, and her obsession with the dry entanglements of a legal impasse. I wonder what a Freudian analysis could do with that.

1 p.m. I walked to Ming's high-flown studio in the air with big white clouds floating around, and arrived in a noisy crowded room with a few adults and kids, a house-warming with some of her family. I sat on the floor and showed a three-year old boy how to flip a coin. The intense curiosity of kids. She said later the adults wouldn't have much to say to each other without the kids there, who are the center of attention, if not a conversation piece, around which the adults sit and watch.

Her older brother runs a small construction firm, and related an amusing incident where his young son had to pee in a hurry. His father struggled to get him to the bathroom and his pants were half off but it was too late. He turned into a fountain with his little "pecker" caught in his jeans and shooting straight up, hitting the father who had to turn the kid upside-down and aim him at the toilet.

Ming was a late addition to the family, being eight years younger than the next sister. Her parents moved back to China, having done well here but with no interest in the country itself. She feels torn on the issue of women who resign themselves to a secure continuum of husband, kids, a mortgage, and the monthly payments which assure that you exist. She will admit to some maternal instincts, but isn't ready for it by a long shot.[46]

After a couple of hours everyone left, and it was just her and me. I collapsed on the bed with windows on two walls and a view of the city with the clouds looking like they could float through the room.

An older sister dropped by with two kids, the girl maybe thirteen, looking like a sullen Chinese beatnik with long straight hair, but she lightened up. It was nice hearing Ming speaking Chinese with her sister, a no-nonsense woman in her late thirties. She said she isn't very fluent. Now and then an English word or phrase was interjected in the midst of words that were completely unintelligible to me – but which revealed another side of Ming.

I went out for some coffee, walked around, returned and they left. She was exhausted having not much sleep last night. We lay on the bed and she was moaning about her low back, so I gave her a back rub, sitting on her and going from her shoulders to her butt and legs. There is reason to believe oblivion or the subconscious resides in her behind, as she often passes out when I massage it. I said the center of her being is her butt, and she rebutted it, but passed out anyway.

She wasn't out for long, coming to in a relaxed state. I felt as lively as a doorstop, sitting in the kitchen while she cleaned up and did the dishes. We planned to go out or

[46] Six or seven years later she was married to a white man who worked on computers (the one she met in Alaska), and they had two daughters.

walk to my place, but never made it. It got dark outside and we were lounging on the floor (a thick carpet), wallowing in that capacity we have to entertain, divert, or mentally engage each other.

So much for *The Twilight Zone*, or *Manufacturing Consent* (Noam Chomsky at the Red Vic), or sitting in a hot tub or walking in the woods or working out on my guitar – which would leave her sitting there in need of bongos.

She went into the bathroom and emerged a few minutes later with a mask of white lotion which had hardened. I was struck by her altered appearance, like something out of a Chinese opera (which she hates). There was some mention of her using green mud, and a man (myself) throwing lit matches at her which would flame out on contact with the mud which would protect her. I said it would be symbolic, but she couldn't see it.

Eventually we were back in the kitchen, sitting around a wooden table under a window with the city stretching to the horizon. For hours the conversation had been drifting from the serious to absurd, while touching on the irreverent, with forays into the irrelevant. Among the passing subjects were inertia, Chinese psychology, and premature feminism.

With respect to psychology, we wondered if mental health is measured by the extent to which a person lives for the community – and not in one's own private world. The significance of the individual is over-estimated in the West (in my humble opinion), but Ming was brought up in a patriarchal world which didn't have a lot of respect for women (her father bought her mother in the south of China), and she had to hold onto her ego so she didn't feel like a second-class citizen. Now she wonders if she went too far in that direction.

I mentioned a documentary I saw about a mental ward in China. It was not a Freudian approach, more like the subconscious was replaced by the class struggle, and mental health had everything to do with being part of the collective. It reminds me how dissidents in the Soviet Union were often put in mental wards (and given medication), with the assumption that a person must be crazy to question the state, especially one that's known for making people disappear.

Ming feels distant from China, and going there was a revelation. Being a Chinese woman in a country with a billion other Chinese did not feel very special, and she realized the extent to which she stood out as a minority in this country. She was indoctrinated in the story that minorities are devalued here, but held in high esteem in the countries of their origin. She is wary of racial politics because it is so complicated, not to mention disingenuous. Her being a liberated educated woman had a lot to do with breaking away from her roots and living in California.

While sitting at the table I showed her my knife act with a pear. When dropped from a certain height it lands on the end of the knife. The other version is when I throw an apple in the air and catch it on the end of a knife, but I was not in the mood for that. Not much coordination at the moment.

She asked about the men's club, with her usual quandary of mixed feelings. She had considered working there as a waitress. I said there are men at the tables and a slender woman moving slowly in a G-string. Some people want to think it holds the men's attention, driving them into an awe-struck stupor with their mouths hanging open, barely able to control themselves, like they're ready to assault the table cloth. They're not in a brothel, though, and sex is on the backburner, while in front of them or to the side

there is an optical diversion which doesn't interfere with talking or their halibut on a plate.

That led to a discussion about pin-ups, with her voicing more disapproval than I've heard before. She had a blunt analysis of what is conveyed by a picture of a woman showing her cunt, demonstrating with her thumb and index finger how large the close-up is and the implication that the woman is dehumanized, not greater than the sum of her body parts, although you quickly find out there's a human being attached.

I asked if it would make a difference if people knew the name of a pin-up model, along with some biographical information on the side, and maybe her opinion of U.S. foreign policy. For that matter, isn't anyone who appears on a nameless basis in a magazine, particularly the ads, in a similar situation? You don't know who they are, and they're defined by what they're selling, meaning they're objectified, male or female, clothed or not.

I mentioned the notion that fame is a corrupted form of immortality, and many women are dying to be recorded. They want to be acknowledged by a magazine. It made her thoughtful for a minute, mulling it over. Also, if pin-ups are a fantasy of willingness, if not appearance, what of romance novels with their wet dream situations for women? We figured that if pin-up magazines are banned, then romance novels should be too. It's not like men are not objectified by women, according to their income, housing, clothing, bodies (including height), and standing in the community. But that's okay, the women are being practical.

Meanwhile, I was peeling an orange, having a few slices, and was down to a section of two slices with a little one beginning in between them on one end. It looked

like a vulva. I said, “What does that remind you of?” She acted like she didn’t know, while I danced it around the rim of the bowl. I was feeling brain-dead, where the mind has dried up in your head and everything is blunt and seemingly inert.

She asked about the male libido, and made some comments I took issue with, sounding like men are a known quantity.[47] We got sidetracked in epistemological concerns – how do you know what other people are like? What if women have a libido for the well-defined, wanting to inhabit a world where everything is known, however small it has to be to qualify as such, and with enough security and control to make it happen? The presumption of knowing how others think or feel becomes a habit, even if it amounts to the reduction of a person. Men are known for gravitating to the unknown – which leaves them falling off cliffs at a greater rate.

There is a common assumption (an old wives’ tale) that women know men and children and themselves, while men know machines. Women are beyond their comprehension. It is curious how conflicted women are about that. Some feel more secure if men are in the dark, while others are tired of being fumbled around by those who don’t know how to handle them.

Ming assumed there isn’t much difference between the male and female sex drive. I asked her how she would know, having never been a man – leaving aside her belief that she was a man in a previous life. I said if she existed before this, she was probably a jellyfish. She wanted to know about the pressure and the burden of the male sex drive, and was ready to be unimpressed. I said, “Let’s start with the purely biological.” “Okay.” It turned out she is vague about sperm production, where a woman’s reproductive organs

[47] Within a few months of this conversation, I fell in love with a woman who said she didn’t understand men. They were a mystery to her, which may or may not have contributed to her struggles with depression and self-medication. At any rate, we were together for ten years.

are dormant by comparison. She contains all the eggs she will ever have, and they drop, one by one, with a bloody fade out every month. Sperm cell production, on the other hand, is an active process, producing several million a day (or 1500 a second). It is not a great accomplishment, it doesn't take a much talent, but there is a pressure which requires a release or things get tense, sometimes leading to nocturnal emissions. What does she think those are about, or hard-ons when a man is sleeping? They allude to a libido.

She was sort of impressed, and agreed when I said men don't need pin-ups to see women in sexual terms. A living breathing woman walking by will do it, or not even that, just thinking of one. She wanted to know more about it, but I was tired of the subject. She has an open curiosity about sex, and God knows we have talked enough about it, but that isn't as good as doing it. It pales by comparison. Meanwhile, it was 11 p.m., so I kissed her at the door and touched her cheek, saying the lotion mask worked, but she was skeptical.

I walked home, thinking I've been spending too much time with her, like I'm falling in love with her again, which would be complicated - not that she would mind, she likes attention. I think there is an internal process where if you're in love with someone it sends a signal through your psyche and metabolism, shutting down or compromising the urge to look for someone else, whether or not you're doing anything with the love interest. I was stuck with a phantom emotion, though the woman is real enough, and so is her intention of keeping this connection on a two-way current. I sometimes wonder what sustains me, living alone, but having her around would go a long way in explaining it.

1 a.m. Reading, half a beer, and went to sleep.

Monday, Feb. 21, 1994

Typing in the morning.

Went to work in the afternoon. It was a holiday, but the Attorney called yesterday with some urgent longwinded stuff which has to be ready tomorrow. There was a lot of typing – three hours or more. It included the summary of a deposition for a new case he's taking over from someone else. It came with a pile of depositions, complaints, and counter-actions a foot high, and involves a fight between two or three men who knew each other.

6 p.m. Walked home, picking up some fish and chips. I read the journal from 1989 and crossed out a few lines. I should have been more ruthless.

Phone call from Michael in North Beach about a tennis court on Russian Hill. He said his life has settled down after the affair with the Actress fell apart (it lasted nearly a year). He is back with his books and maybe will resume his writing, for which we agreed a steady routine is necessary. He is avoiding women these days, and there was some mention of the strippers at the club. He said some of them are more intelligent than people think, including other women. He knew several with degrees in literature, and figured most of them know what they're doing. Meanwhile, he's been reading *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) by Evelyn Waugh.

A long workout on a steel-string guitar with the tube on – a man and woman skating with abandon on the ice with ready-made blades. They were an older English couple and I thought they were cheated by the judges. A younger Russian couple had some sort of rock and roll in their routine and it may have swayed the judges or dumbed them down a little. The routine was not as complicated as what the other couple did.

I was on a wooden instrument for nearly two hours, going off the deep end. It had a subconscious momentum when distracted by a flickering screen. After midnight I was on the typewriter with a full head of steam, having reconnoitered with a stream of consciousness from 1989. It sounded smoother, more coherent, and what's that say about my life if five years later it is burdened with an arbitrary fragmentation?

Wrote a page and ran out of ribbon. I went back to the journal from 1989, like a typographic form of time travel. It was curious, seeing what my mind was doing back then, including the first mention of Ming. It was painful to recall the affair with Nora, my ex-girlfriend. There were situations which were signals of a coming estrangement. There was also evidence of how nice it was, which showed up in the journal with an air of mercy. Things are bordering on the merciless these days, but I wouldn't necessarily blame it on my neighborhood.

Tuesday, Feb. 22, 1994

Went out for typewriter ribbon and coffee.

Went to work in the afternoon.

The case of the woman suing the Post Office where she works for every slight and injury to her hyper-sensitive nature. The Postal Service has been trying to accommodate her, offering to transfer her to another branch if she's not getting along with her supervisors, but no, she still wants to go through with the lawsuit and may have to call a hostile witness. We have a statement from a woman who wrote in no uncertain terms what a misery this woman is, who now wrote the Attorney about her plans to up the ante. No longer talking about $120,000, which had left us wondering about her grip on reality.

She now wants $500,000 (and that's just for "emotional distress"), $1,000,000 for breach of contract, and another $500,000 in punitive damages. That's in addition to having the U.S. Postmaster General (the chief executive officer of the entire U.S. Postal Service) testify in her case.

We have another slip and fall, a woman suing a store for having exits. The Attorney made it sound like they were a threat to life and limb, as if lined with barbed wire, broken glass, and land mines. I'm beginning to get an odd perspective of women as neurotic egomaniacs who're kind of clumsy. Virtually every case involving a flimsy slip and fall has been a woman.

The case involving a few men in a fight: they're old acquaintances in their forties. Two men did some work on a third man's house and came over for payment. He said he was leaving the country on vacation and would pay them later. Not acceptable. There was a minor scuffle between two of them which led to the debtor going into his house for his rifle (unloaded), coming out and aiming it at one of the men, then bashing in his windshield. A minute later he slammed the other guy in the mouth (which required serious dental work). The debtor with the rifle is our client (the defendant and cross-complainant).

Walked home in the early evening, feeling the friction of existence.

7 p.m. Phone call from Ming, sounding tired and silly, almost stoned. She was at a low ebb, being lonely, tense, and having violent thoughts. It was a pivotal phone call, half an hour, with her coming out of it in a better mood. We're a mutual support group of two. She wanted to work out at the pool on Thursday, with the usual complaints about her figure. "I'm fat." I said, "I keep hearing that, but you never look different." She said,

"YOU NEVER SEE ME NAKED!" which is not exactly true, but I wasn't going to argue.

She said she is worried about me. The manager of her building was mugged last night, two or three blocks from my place (Polk and Geary, 10:30 at night). She wanted me to be careful when I walk home from her apartment. The manager, an artist in his forties, is not very big. He walked by a larger black man who asked him for change. He kept on walking, then felt a tap on his shoulder, turned around, and got slugged in the face. He fell down and got pounded – now with a black eye and possibly a broken nose.

The conversation bounced around, not too serious. I mentioned her reputation for being difficult, "Excuse me?" she said. "I read it in a phone booth," I replied, and went on to wonder how we can spend eight or ten hours together with little effort. She said, "Because I'm interesting." When I stopped laughing we discussed it further, talking about magnetic fields. She thought we had the same one, more or less. I said that hers was nullifying my resistance. Not sure she liked the sound of that.

"You like to argue."
"No I don't."

9 p.m. Another two-hour work-out on a wooden instrument with the tube on. It felt like I was breaking into a realm of extra fluency, a coordination that quickens your existence and heightens the night. It's possible I just keep breaking through into the same old fluency, and falling back in the ensuing hours.

After eleven, sitting in the big chair, semi-exhausted. Everything around me seemed to glitter with an optimistic light, following an exorcism on a steel-stringed instrument.

On the typewriter for a couple of hours.

12:30 or 1 in the morning, I heard some yelling on the street. That is not uncommon, but it sounded more urgent, like a fight. I looked out the window and saw two black guys jumping a Latino, having chased him across the street. They slammed his head into the rear end of a parked car and he fell between the cars. Then he was on the sidewalk and they were slugging him. It was brutal and clumsy. A cab drove up, honking his horn and stopping. The black guys backed off, one of them saying, "HE GOT DOPE!" while the other grabbed at the Latino man who managed to half-run, half-stumble down the sidewalk while looking back. The cab drove on and the black guys were pissed off at a missed opportunity and cursed the taxi driver. They walked in the direction of the man who got away.

1 a.m. I started reading the William Vollmann novel, *You Bright and Risen Angels* (1987), 600 pages of a diabolic literacy. The writing has a dense quality, if not a writhing intelligence. I wondered how it engages the public. He is immersed in the daily grind of intellection with a literate drill bit chewing through whatever subject he wants, where I am thrown by language after wrestling for a few hours. Those guitar strings in the mind may constitute a silver lining, a resounding compensation for the exile of an "ink-stained wretch," but inhabiting the music means I'm not inhabiting the writing enough to give it legs or push it into publication.

Wednesday, Feb. 23, 1994

9:30 a.m. Woke up with the phone ringing. It was V. in the office with that matter-of-fact phone voice of hers. She can't have lunch with me today. "Go back to

sleep," sounding amused. She likes to wake me up. Five minutes later she called back with a question about a letter she was writing.

Typing for a while.

Phone call from Michael. He can't make it for tennis. An ex-girlfriend with their three-year-old son moved into the area and he felt compelled to visit them. He doesn't think that kids are worth much the first two years of their life. There was some mention of kids with too many toys, something neither one of us had. You learn to improvise. It doesn't cost much to have a rock fight (where you learn to dodge incoming missiles). He said that many of the rich kids he grew up with had drug problems and not much motivation. A father is someone you want to impress. When the father is absent, making money, he can buy you a Porsche, but it's hard to impress a Porsche.

I left the building, walking past the doleful stare of a strung-out white man in his late twenties. He looked prematurely old, like a beat-up junkie who is down on his luck. I was on my way to the Great American Music Hall, about 2 ½ blocks, and bought tickets for Friday night - The Reverend Horton Heat (along with Flat Duo Jets). There were filthy sidewalks in the morning light, along with derelicts and old brick buildings. A white whore on the corner with tanned and muscled legs and artificial hair.

On the way to work in the afternoon, the bus pulled up and I had to run for it. As I was getting on the black woman driver held her hand out and stopped me, saying "School kids only." I said there was no mention of it on the front of the bus while backing down the steps. "SCHOOL KIDS ONLY!" I stood on the sidewalk with the doors closing while

I stared at her. That was an affront for a superior person who returned it with a hate stare while muttering to herself and preparing to drive away.

I wondered what I did, except for being a white male, that would warrant such a withering attitude. (Did I mention the bus was barely half full?) I then realized I had backed off the bus without bowing or apologizing, something that would signify my deference to a person of her obvious worth and stature**.**

How insulting it must be for someone who is not her equal to look her in the eye. Maybe I'm oblivious or absentminded, but it often happens with a black person (though usually not the educated who don't seem to mind). I've been sworn at, yelled at, and physically threatened on the basis of my eyes. It makes me wonder about the Invisible Man syndrome as postulated by Ralph Ellison, that black people are unseen by whites.[48] There are black people who are sensitive when it comes to a passing glance, but when it comes to their audio impact in the neighborhood the disregard for others would take your breath away. I've been on a bus with women and children while the black students in the back (where they go of their own accord) are yelling obscenities at the top of their lungs, but if you so much as glance in their direction it is taken as a sign of disrespect. No one told them that respect is a two-way street.

I got off the bus downtown and there were two human spinal cords hanging from a pole outside a public utilities office. I thought there might be a couple of spineless civilians walking around. There was something about free spinal exams, or was it a subliminal attempt at instilling some backbone in the local population?

---

[48] *Invisible Man* was published in 1952. It is one of the more respected novels of the 20th century, and Ellison said he was influenced by writers like Hemingway, Faulkner, and T.S. Eliot. His worst critics, however, have been black writers, in case there is any doubt about the antagonistic points of view inherent in human beings.

I walked across the street, past the bike messengers and the odor of marijuana smoke. In the office the Attorney was gone, with not much work. I read the newspaper, and learned the Dead Sea Scrolls are in town.

There was a long fax from the Public Defender's office in a county north of here. A young client was looking at a year in jail for a DUI, possession of a controlled substance, and parole violations, but he left the state instead. He went to Wisconsin, started a new life, and became a responsible citizen with a job, a wife, and a couple of kids. He was caught a few years later and brought back. Ten or twenty letters from people there who know him attested to his good character. A letter from his wife on what a hardship it would be for her if he is jailed for any length of time, mentioning the sub-zero degree weather. The authorities were not impressed, recommending three years and eight months in a California prison.

V. was working late with her attorney gone and said I might as well leave without her. A few minutes she said, "Wait for me, I'm leaving at 5:30." We ended up talking in his office. She could barely contain her anger, nearly at the point of tears, one of the more endearing women I know. Her feelings are as real as the weather or her hair, and at the moment involve a power struggle with Maria which she may be losing. "She's so lazy…."

We talked about cases while she did some filing. I asked her why most of our slip and fall cases, often suspect, are women. She said it is the same with their case load, and there are two possible reasons: women are clumsy, or they just want money. She gets a wonderful look on her face, a combination of scorn and wonder, when hearing what people sue for and how much they want, blaming everyone but themselves. Like the

Filipina woman suing the Postal Service for $2,000,000 for not getting along with her supervisors (who are mostly women of color).

With respect to the man who was in a fight, he wasn't injured very much and did more damage to the others. However, his wife testified that the incident disturbed their domestic tranquility, including sexual relations (they are suing for a loss of consortium, among other things). She was asked to respond, "as delicately as possible," on what she meant by that. "A loss of interest or a loss of ability?" She said, "A loss of ability," without hesitation. I ran this by V., what with her interest in male-female relations.

6 p.m. When we left she was in a better mood. I walked home, and worked out on the guitar for a couple of hours. On the tube there was a twirling girl on metal blades, holding one foot up. It felt like she was revolving on top of my head.

Later I journeyed, or is it journaled, back to 1989, reading an old manuscript, and was out to sea. It was the day I sailed in a thirty-foot boat from Long Beach Harbor to Catalina Island with the Professor. It was so evocative that I could feel the motion of the ocean. Then Ming called, having just gotten home, and we talked for a while. There was some question as to whether she gets physical satisfaction from driving a forklift, and would I please stop believing everything she says. I'm harassing her with my credulity.

Thursday, Feb. 24, 1994

NOTES

The dead sea souls.

As God or Ezra Pound is my witness.

Service with a simile.

What if weapons are a form of psychosis?

I'm a loss student.

Fabulous womanhood: she doesn't masturbate because it takes too long.

Some black writers are rebarbative, "serving or tending to repel or irritate: CRABBED, REPELLENT." In the dictionary it is found between rebaptism and rebate… or reauthentic and rebound.

There was a reading called, "What comes after 'language' poetry? A REVIVAL OF PASSION AND LYRICISM FROM WITHIN THE MANY-JEWELLED STONE HEART OF THE 'POST-MODERN' IDOL."

Sleeping with a typewriter in the same room like you're in its force field.

You live alone while inhabiting a disembodied language.

My father is a leftwing minister. Recently he dreamed that he was near the altar in a church and an old friend, a Lutheran bishop, flew by in a paper airplane. It caught fire when it flew over the candles. My father ran after him and they ended up at a small lake. The bishop was rescued, but he had no clothes on and they tried to cover him up.

Around the turn of the century there was a sense of life being "over civilized" and languid (though probably not for the working class) (and which point of view was utterly shattered by World War I). Some sort of "wildly aggressive" behavior was longed for and allowed, but "only in controlled and orderly arenas closely supervised by powerful adults. As such, the masculinity reconstituted on the baseball field also facilitated a docility and obedience to authority that would serve the maintenance of the emerging industrial capitalist order." (Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899)).

Veblen, not a baseball fan, found it an "illusory panacea," where the addiction to sports constituted a form of "arrested development," along with an "emulative ferocity," which was "characteristic of predatory life." He also spoke of "spectatoritis" and "mollycoddles of the bleachers."

As an economist, Thorstein Veblen (1857 – 1929) had a hard time with academia, where he was regarded as being insufficiently Christian (and too Norwegian). It led to his book *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men* (1918), "a biting analysis of the consequences of business domination of universities…" (something my history Professor is

concerned about half a century later).[49] His second wife was "a suffragette, a socialist, and a staunch advocate of unions and workers' rights." He coined the phrase, "conspicuous consumption," which is not a compliment. Neither is "conspicuous leisure." He wrote an essay in 1898, "The Barbarian Status of Women" in the American Journal of Sociology. He lived and worked in various parts of the country, and even taught at Stanford for a few years (where my sister got her doctorate in sociology). He was apparently not a good teacher, and though he wrote many books he ended up living in a shack in Menlo Park, California, where he died more or less broke.

TRAINED INCAPACITY: "… the idea that certain types of education, training, experience and habit may lead an individual to be unable to think beyond a set of constraints and assumptions that they have formed." The phrase comes from Veblen. It "often refers to an acquired or learned inability to understand or even perceive a problem, much less a solution." (Herman Kahn) "[T]he training does come at some costs by narrowing the perspectives of the individuals concerned." Or as the socialist writer, Upton Sinclair, said, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it."

My sister had some regrets about pursuing a higher degree in sociology, since it required an academic tunnel vision which was heavy on statistics. More to the point: for a long time I've been wary of professionals, if not the professions themselves, for the reasons stated above: a narrowing of perspective is deadly for a writer, not to mention the books that one does not have time for (she wanted more in the way of history and literature). Even worse is the "trained incapacity" itself, where a profession comes with built-in walls, a training-compromised worldview, and not enough time to keep up on the news. The Professor has a low opinion of his fellow academics who are stuck in their specialties like a highly fluent broken record which is "unable to think beyond a set of constraints and assumptions," and therefore had little to say about the war in Vietnam or who killed the Kennedys. I've often wondered about the silence of professionals, whether lawyers, teachers, writers, or theologians, when it comes to corporations taking over the government, or assassinations with a dubious explanation, or the non-stop bombing of foreigners by the U.S.[50]

---

[49] Or as Chris Hedges notes in *Death of the Liberal Class* (2010), "Universities no longer train students to think critically, to examine and critique systems of power and cultural and political assumptions… They have become breeding grounds for systems managers trained to serve the corporate state."

[50] Flash forward to 9-11-2001, a good example of how bad it's gotten in a corrupt society where the professionals keep their nose to the grindstone of an occupation. Their concentration may be necessary to stay afloat in complicated waters, but a Building No. 7 (which was forty-seven stories tall) could collapse for no reason and they wouldn't question it.

> Various ethnic groups want to hold onto their customs and identities and common looks, like there's an anthropological validity of wanting to marry within their group and have children who look like them. I have run into those exclusionary customs time and again, especially in California where there are different races and ethnicities. I knew a mother from Mexico who wanted her son to marry a Latina, and was underwhelmed when her daughter had the child of a Jewish man.
>
> The one group which is not supposed to think or act in those terms is people of European descent. They are accused of discrimination, not to say bad manners, if they don't want their daughters marrying someone of another race, whereas the exact same sentiments are a source of pride and bonding when they come from other groups. White people are not supposed to have cultural artifacts or customs – so it's open season on anything the white man ever invented or discovered, like it's automatically universal and up for grabs. Turn it around and there are exclusionary boundaries adhering to the cultural artifacts of an ethnic group whose indigenous genius for discovery and invention can only be honored from a respectable distance so as not to contaminate their sociologic aura with the horrifying subtleties of cultural appropriation, an insidious side-effect of multi-cultural environments. People of European descent are not given this consideration because it would deprive non-whites of everything from cars and radios and computers to saxophones and microphones and telephones – so the general assumption is that those things grow on trees.

Phone call in the morning from Simone. We haven't spoken in a couple of months. She is fifty, an aristocratic woman with vulnerabilities that shake her to her roots. She had a brain aneurism a few years ago and nearly died, and recently some sort of post-polio syndrome (she had it as a girl) where she wasn't doing very well. She finally went to an acupuncturist and was revived.

Her two half-Jewish sons are twenty-six and thirty. One is in law school in New York (Wolfgang), having dissipated much of his twenties on drugs and idle preoccupations. The other has been living with his grandparents in Los Angeles. He has a gambling addiction, and won $30,000 one month and blew it the next (playing poker). He is on the other side of the political spectrum from his older brother, and enlisted in Army intelligence or the CIA.

Meanwhile, she might accept a job in Blythe, California, a small town in the desert near the border of Arizona, as head librarian at Ironwood State Prison. It's an hour or two from Joshua Tree National Monument. She wondered if I would be available to help her move, if it comes to that. She has to get a physical at San Quentin. I said I don't have a driver's license, but have a friend who likes the desert as much as I do.

This is a woman whose family goes back 600 years or more. Old Belgian lace and diamonds, and she's headed for a prison near the Mexican border. We were together for nearly ten years, from 1974 to 1983. She has a French accent which is music to my ears, and we talked for over an hour.

I got off the phone and it started ringing almost immediately, the Professor in Los Angeles. (Oddly enough, I met her through him when she lived in Hermosa Beach. Her home had a marble fireplace.) He mailed some essays by Gore Vidal on Howard Hughes and Ronald Reagan. "Is Howard R. Hughes the Most Boring American?" Reagan was a true believer in a superstitious Armageddon. I said old men in power sometimes have an unconscious motivation to bring it all down with them. They want to dramatize their final days on earth, with the curtain falling on the rest of us.

One of the more unconscionable remarks I've come across was from another true believer in the phony millennium apocalypse, Jerry Falwell. "Personally he has no fear of the nuclear holocaust because, as he said… with a grin, 'You know why I'm not worried? I ain't gonna be here'."

Vidal to Mailer: "I think there should be a constitutional amendment making it impossible for anyone to be president who believes in an afterlife." Mailer said, "Well, that rules me out… If there isn't an afterlife, then what's the point to all this?" Vidal has

a good point, there should be more focus on a president's concern for this country and our current historical period. You could question the allegiance, not to say the rationality, of a man who looks forward to the end of the world. A side-effect of such a superstition is that he doesn't worry about preserving the environment for future generations.

We went on talking. He received the essay on fascism that I mailed. He has a Marxist background which is useful for transcending race and gender politics. I asked him about this business of reparations for slavery, having read about the Commission to Study Reparations for African Americans Act.

Some of the points he touched on: the average slave owner didn't have a big plantation[51] out of *Gone with the Wind* – half of them had fewer than five slaves, and could not afford to sit on a porch with a mint julep doing nothing. The conditions of labor in those days were not good, and the hardships cut across racial lines. A poor white sharecropper was not making much more than a slave, since the former had little money to begin with and had to cover his expenses, and the latter didn't. A sharecropper could move away, however (if he had the means), while a slave couldn't go anywhere.

In the 1930's, there were 1,800,000 sharecroppers, 800,000 of whom were white, and all of them, black or white, were subject to economic forces driving them off the

[51] During the years of slavery there was a huge increase in the black population. They couldn't be too weak or they couldn't work, and were not expendable, given the cost of buying another slave. They were encouraged to propagate. It doesn't make sense to say the system was genocidal when it was in the slave owners' interest to have strong and healthy workers in the fields, whether they had three or thirty. The analogy is farm animals, which are fed and sheltered with some care because they're valuable and most farmers can't afford to lose them very often. Slavery wasn't bent on the destruction of a race, at least in physical terms, and a growing black population bore this out. From the early 1600's to the early 1800's around 400,000 blacks were brought as slaves to the mainland U.S. (most of them before it was a country). By the time of the Civil War, there were 4,000,000 black people, and there are now over 30,000,000.

land. That reminds me, a poor black farmer in the late 1930's was being interviewed. He was asked how it was during the Great Depression. He said, "What Depression?"

We talked about the Reconstruction and the 14th Amendment (civil rights for everyone), and the promise of 40 acres and a mule.[52] I told him I tried to estimate the cost of reparations for black people, but the calculations were extremely complicated. And why should people who never owned slaves be paying people who were never enslaved? He found the whole thing absurd, and couldn't believe it might come before Congress.

We touched on other things, like his low opinion of administrators, his fellow academics ("spineless… sycophantic…"), and life in Los Angeles (which he likens to the-decline-of-the-Roman-Empire-meets-the-Beach-Boys). He questions some Latino politics and attitudes. There are few countries on earth that don't claim the sovereignty of their borders (including Mexico, with its southern border heavily guarded and patrolled). Latinos are a huge percentage of the people in Los Angeles and they're coming across the border by the thousands, but some claim it isn't enough. He thought it should be mentioned what they cost the state (including hundreds of millions of dollars for those in jail or prison), along with how they benefit the state. How much are they paying in taxes if they have low wages? It doesn't justify how many are coming in, especially when immigrants from other countries have restrictions.

There was some contempt for a line like, "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us." California became a state in 1850. It only belonged to Mexico for twenty-some years, that was it. Mexico City is nearly 2000 miles from Los Angeles (by current highways), and the means of transportation were very slow back then. The desert on the

[52] The Order for redistribution of land was for the southern coastal areas, and was only in effect for a few months after the Civil War. The next president, Andrew Johnson, overturned the Order.

border was sparsely populated.[53] There was not a thriving population which was "crossed" by the border, and any native people in the area might have been surprised to know they were Mexicans, since Mexico had only existed as a country for a few years, and it inherited the territory from a foreign power known as Spain. The Spanish rode in on horses with an imperialistic presence, but what gave them any more right to California than the United States – which at least is on the same continent? They were here first, but lost control of California after the Mexican War of Independence (which ended in 1821), and Mexico lost control of California after the Mexican-American War (which ended in 1848). It was part of the Mexican Cession, where most of the southwest was ceded to the U.S. (which paid $15,000,000 for damages from the war – the equivalent of $520,000,000 now).

We got off the phone and I went back to typing.

In the afternoon I took the bus downtown and read the paper. "HUMAN ANCESTORS LEFT AFRICA FAR EARLIER THAN BELIEVED." "New fossil date shakes up ideas on evolution."

---

[53] "Alta California was not easily accessible from New Spain: land routes were cut off by deserts and often hostile Native populations and sea routes ran counter to the southerly currents of the distant northeastern Pacific. Ultimately, New Spain did not have the economic resources nor population to settle such a far northern outpost." Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (2005)

"Mexico always had trouble ruling her distant province. The last governor sent to California from Mexico City… came in 1842. His appearance triggered a local riot… Unofficially California had achieved home rule. A year later [1846], Mexico faced a still greater challenge. By then, California was home to a native population now reduced to less than 100,000 and to some 14,000 other permanent residents. Of these, perhaps 2,500 were "foreigners," whites of non-Hispanic descent, and of these, probably 2000 had immigrated from the United States since 1840." "Mexican California", *Library of Congress* (www.loc.gov)

An article on life emerging in the ocean 4.5 billion years ago. The sun was about 70 percent as hot as it is now, and the seas were frozen to a depth of a thousand feet. There were "celestial bombardments" with meteors melting through the ice. "Amino acids – the building blocks of life – would be created by the energy of a lightning blast in an atmosphere of methane and ammonia, which scientists once believed was the atmosphere of the early earth." Now they think it occurred under frozen seas. "In the warmer depths, the organic chemicals would have found a hospitable environment to assemble themselves into more complex molecules capable of reproducing themselves…," and later organizing into political self-interest groups.

In the office, working for a few hours. The law is a wailing wall.

7 p.m. Went to the pool and rendezvoused with Ming who had changed into shorts and a sweatshirt, somewhat in a funk. Relations with the live-in boyfriend have become a low-down tangled impasse giving off negative signals and friction. It is wearing her out. She can't believe that it is going wrong, having moved in a month ago. Meanwhile, I was upbeat, pulling out essays by Gore Vidal, tickets to the Great American Music Hall, and tobacco – she wanted a cigarette.

We went downstairs to our separate locker rooms and then into the gym. She wanted to work out on the equipment. Twenty on this, twenty on that, forty leg lifts, followed by some push-ups. I left her there and headed for the pool which was nearly empty. One mile, with a little more iron in my muscles, having been lifting weights and feeling weightless in the water.

I met her in the lobby and we walked to a Vietnamese place. She had spinach and tofu over rice. I had a bowl of sweet and sour catfish soup which was large, like they

threw in everything they had – pineapple, green onions, etc. We were there until nearly 11 p.m. A few Vietnamese waiters and friends were playing cards at a table in back. A few Latino sex changes – man to woman – walked in. She had some comments on their buoyant bosoms which were hard and artificial. “Mine are sagging.” I said the fake ones don’t move like real ones do.

There was some reference to the quandary of her domestic situation, with her feeling bitter and bemused. It comes with sensory deprivation, as they share a bed but that’s about it. She lays there, and it’s hard to fall asleep.

I walked her home. No beer.

Friday, Feb. 25, 1994

12:30 p.m. Met V. in the office and went to the Hunan place. Kung pao chicken and tea. We somehow got on the subject of whether one should “do it” in the morning. She isn’t opposed to the idea, and likes the notion of a man waking up with an erection. Most of this was talked about in somewhat veiled terms. One thing holding her back: wouldn’t one or both parties have “bad breath” in the morning?

Our conversations are not exactly saturated with sexual topics and allusions, and when it does come up it’s usually with some discretion. However, she has an active curiosity in these matters as an earthy-delicate and practical young woman. I am careful not to force the topic on her. It’s more interesting if it comes from her.

5 p.m. I walked to the law firm where Ming works at the front desk. There she was in black slacks, an emerald blouse, men’s black shoes, long black hair partially tied back with a pin, and lipstick. Yesterday she was tense and angry with the woman attorney

she works for, who it turns out is a “condescending bitch” who orders her around, and Ming with not much patience for that sort of thing.

I waited for her, reading the paper. It had some skewed priorities, where TONYA SOBS had a bigger headline than MASSACRE AT MOSQUE – 40 DEAD. What are forty dead Muslims compared to the tears of a young American woman? She’s a commoner princess of the realm, a shallow soul on ice.

We headed for my place and picked up a few things on the way – red snapper, salad – and there was some mention of another bad night at home. She hits him with her doubts and concerns and wants to “talk about” what’s going wrong, and why her needs are not being met. I’m not sure what those amount to, but wanting affection and attention is not too much to ask. If you have to ask for it, much less negotiate the terms, then something is off. He gets home late from work (shucking oysters), tired and not in the mood, and it leaves her sinking further into discontent. She feels dependent, which she doesn’t like. It sounded like their station is off the air and there is dead air in between them.

Meanwhile, we fried the snapper and I had the OIympics on. She has no interest in television, but found it diverting. There were comments on a skating race. “He totally pushed him!”

It was nearly 10:30 p.m. when we finally left. I wore the sky-blue sport coat over a blue cowboy shirt and black slacks which she was looking askance at. We walked a few blocks to the Great American Music Hall in a sinister drizzle with some shady characters along the way.

There was a line, but it was sold out. We missed the first band, and were still at the bar getting a beer when the rockabilly trio walked on and tuned up. The crowd was already tuned up. This was rockabilly on speed and marijuana and the people in front were forming a mosh pit. We edged our way to the side and almost to the front and were nearly thrown to the floor once or twice by surges in the crowd. The reverberating Reverend Horton Heat – he's from Texas and has a dry manner, referring to this town as San Francisco, Texas (I liked that). Redefine the territory and the borders.

Fender amps and a Gibson hollow-body guitar with a monster whammy bar, the way he used it. He has rockabilly in his blood and good reflexes, a gin and tonic sitting on the side to cool him off, and a roadie who kept walking up to keep his cigarette lit on the amp (there was an amplified ashtray). Hair slicked back, white shirt and tie (later removed). The drummer and the guy on stand-up bass had thick arms with tattoos, the drummer with long straggly hair.

They went through a few numbers without stopping, like they were in a stolen car, a FUCKED-UP FORD. I was jealous of his technique, which was polished off with reverb oil. It reminded me of a silversmith, the intricate sonic patterns in mid-air, pulling chord progressions out of the blue with a sleight of hand that a magician would like to have.

A good beat, and they could slant the rhythms in the direction of surf or punk. The lyrics of one fast tune: "I CAN'T SURF… I CAN'T SURF… BUT NEITHER CAN YOU!" A smoky slower tune: "I'll see you in your wildest dream…"

"THE DEVIL CHASING ME" towards the end of the show had a tasty instrumental break with the Reverend cutting to a quiet jazzy interlude, up and down the

neck with a light touch, before slamming and crashing back into a destruction derby of a tune. The guys in the mosh pit were ripping off their shirts. I think a few girls were ready to, and the Reverend wouldn't mind. There were several songs for the encore.

They were onstage for an hour and a half. We were sweating, worn-out, and stumbled over to a table and chairs on the side and sat there in the after-shock. I wondered what happens when you give a Texan drugs, along with a bottle of gin. Get the women and children off the street, and bolt the doors and windows. He may have hurricane weather in his nervous system. Here it's tremors and a pacifying Pacific. There are no great storms in this part of the country, and here was someone recreating life with lightning bolts in a primordial atmosphere of smoke and alcohol.

The club was trashed, beer bottles on the floor, and we were panhandled as soon we walked out the door. The street was dark and wet and there was a mattress on the sidewalk. I considered lying there for a minute.

1 a.m. In the apartment with rum, hot water, lemon and honey. She was working on a watercolor for a while, a spontaneous composition which looked vaguely organic. I picked up the guitar, an idle effort at first, but got absorbed in it. To play like him, I said, I'd have to practice for the rest of my life. She thought I was almost there, which didn't go to my head, but maybe my fingers. I figured she doesn't know much about the instrument.

Somehow it got to be four in the morning. The hours dissolve with little effort when we are together. She admitted she was in no hurry to go home, as things were miserable with the boyfriend. She left a message around one, with him not expected at home until two.

I walked her downstairs where a cab was waiting and kissed her goodbye.

Twenty minutes later I was thinking of going to sleep when the phone rang. It was her and it sounded like something was wrong, a wonder in her voice. He hadn't come home and she realized his toothbrush was gone. She couldn't believe it and was getting tense. We talked for a while and she took a bath, still on the phone, and talked me into doing the same thing, which wasn't hard considering how cold it gets in here.

5:30 a.m. I went to sleep.

Saturday, Feb. 26, 1994

Not enough sleep by a long shot, maybe four or five hours, (hearing nail guns at a construction site).

10:30 a.m. Ming called, and came over an hour later. Her life was not quite falling apart, but her domestic situation was. She called his mother's house and got him on the phone and asked him what was going on. He said he didn't feel like coming home, he couldn't take it anymore, ran out of patience and everything else. He ran out of love, from the sounds of it, and said he is moving out.

She was numb and in shock, with conflicting emotions running through her, hardly knowing what to think and expressing things in the worst terms. "HE DUMPED ME!" It's like when someone cuts the high-tension wire between two people, leaving one end whipping around on the ground, throwing off sparks and wasted energy. You don't know which way to turn, it's all pouring out, every angle and perspective on the other person, understanding him one minute and calling him a weakling jerk the next. (By the

next night her feelings had grown into a withering anger. On Monday night she referred to herself as an overbearing bitch, and the terms got worse.)

We sat around and talked about other things, but it kept coming back to the break-up. She didn't get much sleep. We had soup and bread and she lay down for a while, feeling lethargic. We both thought she needed a jump-start, so I plugged in the Strat and went off for a while. It was moody with some penetrating high notes.

In the middle of the afternoon we went out, walking in a drizzle and ready for the woods. We passed a sex-change hooker leaning against the wall, a Latino with a tight shirt which was half open. He had two swelling breasts and large nipples. Ming hardly looked, but a minute later remarked on how dark his nipples were and didn't like it (hers are dark).

We walked towards the Civic Center and caught a bus, riding out to where Golden Gate Park begins. A minute later we were strolling on paths through a wet dripping grove of trees, the placement of which was more or less choreographed. Every tree in this three-mile-long park was put there by someone who knew what he was doing, a connoisseur of trees, importing them from the far ends of the earth. It was a relief to be out of the Tenderloin.

We walked past a long Victorian hothouse (the Conservatory of Flowers), and headed for a hidden pond with prehistoric fern trees. I leaned against a soft bank while a white crane stared intently at the water. There were a few ducks on the pond, and Ming was in the mood for a joint. We had a small one and took about two hits each – it had the caliber of champagne. I hadn't smoked in a couple of months, and our capacity for disjointed conversations was expanded.

She wondered why the mallard ducks have beautiful blue-green heads. I said, “Because the males are prettier.” She didn’t find that a reasonable explanation. I said, “For preventing lesbian ducks.” “What?” (laughing).

A wandering discussion which touched on evolution. Did the mind evolve hands and feet in order to get around, considering how evolution runs on paranoia, not to mention trial and error? Or did the body evolve a mind to get a life? She wasn’t sure and went into a monologue, thinking it was the latter, but her reasoning was convoluted and confusing. I was blinking hard just to follow it.

We watched the crane on its long spindly legs at the edge of the water, a curving neck with a long beak. I wondered if it had the poise of the incompetent, as animals are not necessarily good at what they do. Lions, for example - only one out of twenty hunts are successful (and they sleep a lot). On the other hand, there has to be some competence or the species would have died out long ago. Some people threw bread crumbs on the pond and the ducks swam over like they were of one mind. I found a small amount of trail mix in my bag, but she didn’t think it was good for them.

I thought of a poem and recited it in its entirety, but I don’t think she was impressed:

> I can’t wait
> to mutate.

We took a trail through the ferns like a rain forest, half expecting dinosaurs, and arrived at a rhododendron grove. There was a close encounter with white flowers – every petal had a drop of water on it. It filled up the foreground of our attention and was eclipsing other things, like our jobs. It reminded me of Warhol’s flower-shocked silkscreens.

A little further was a tall tree with bare branches and thick pink flowers. Some of the petals were on the ground like pink tongues. She touched one, and I put another in my pocket. We continued to where the woods give way to an art museum with an ominous sign: DEAD SEA SCROLLS. There was a fountain and trees with stubby branches, a few of which supported seagulls. Later we walked through a tunnel. I said something about dark and humid feminine tunnels, but she took issue with the concept.

We passed the Japanese gardens with some trees that were expecting cherry blossoms. A few had airy explosions like baby's breath. The trail took us to a small lake with an island. We walked around the lake and paused with a few ducks web-footing it in our direction on the water. Things were getting hypnotic, but I wasn't taking leave of my senses. I was gravitating further into them.

She found a branch that looked like a TV antenna and said, "It looks like a TV antenna." There was some speculation about bringing it home and tying it to my television. Maybe it would pull in some nature shows.

The aerodynamic iridescent head of a duck with the finest feathers, and no, that's not a cock ring on his neck. She carried a few stems of jasmine as we crossed a hundred-year-old stone bridge to a steep hill and took a dirt road that wound around to the top and found a small ruins. It would have been a nice place for a pagan ritual with a view through the trees and the ocean in the distance.

I urinated on a tree, then walked over to where she sat on a bench with a suspension bridge in the suspected distance. I took out a beer and a cigarette and relaxed. We kept slipping into absurd associations. A nearby tree had some vertical folded slits in it. She said she could see things in it. I said,

"Big vulvas."
"That too."
"If a man was in love with that tree, he might feel inadequate."
"He would just need to find a smaller hole."
"Excuse me, I meant spiritually."
"Oh right."

When it was getting dark we walked down the road with the city lights through the branches and arrived at the waterfall. We stood on a wooden bridge with tons of water pouring out below, a mythological power stance.

The two of us sat on a rock for a while, and then continued on the winding road until it leveled out. A few minutes later we were at the art museum with people arriving in formal attire. I went to the door to see what was going on. The Commonwealth Club was having a private affair. I was vaguely of a mind to crash it, but we didn't look the part. I talked to the doorman, who said the place can be rented for $10,000 a night. We stood there for a minute, not far from the Dead Sea Scrolls - some dried-up propaganda from a desert tribe a couple of thousand years ago.

We continued, passing the hot house which glows in the dark. Eventually the park ran out, or we ran out of park (a hazard of the ambulatory), but were in the Panhandle for a while. Our legs had taken us three or four miles without much effort. It was only a block to Hayes Street, and a bus pulled up. We rode to the Civic Center, got out, walked to the bookstore and looked at books, like an automatic thing to do when you pass a bookstore. I read about a young woman in Red China. She had her hand in the shirt of another woman (a cadre leader), maybe checking if she had a heartbeat. The translation was a lesson in psycholinguistics, and the insults were brutal. "Pig shit head." "You louse on the body of a corpse." I went looking for Ming. When I found her I said, "Where's your watch?" "In my butt."

We walked to my place.

8 p.m. Relaxing with the opera on and a bottle of Italian wine. We phoned out for some food. I had coffee, more wine, and regretted missing the Chinese dragon writhing with electric mythomania on the street. She had no interest, saying she had gone too often as a girl. Things were getting comfortable. We lounged on the bed with her under a Mexican blanket, watching ice skaters on the tube, and then a woman who was pulled over by the police outside the window.

10 p.m. She leaned her head on a cushion and fell asleep, which was a blessing. Any sleep is hard to come by, so I was quiet. Even then, over the next couple of hours, she would open her eyes, lift her head, and say something. I wouldn't respond and she would go back to sleep. She said she does that, a light sleeper who is in and out of consciousness, like maybe she is shallow (her words).

I ended up watching a movie with Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn (*State of the Union,* 1948) and didn't go to sleep until two in the morning. She woke up, got under the covers and I got in next to her. There was not much room on a single bed, but we were tired so it didn't matter.

Sunday, Feb. 27, 1994

8 a.m. Woke up, with her bounding out of bed, putting her jacket on and ready to leave. Then she didn't, as I got up slowly in a bathrobe and made coffee. She said she dreaded going back to an empty apartment.

9:30 a.m. A big kiss and a hug and she was gone. I tried to go back to sleep, but it didn't work. The last couple of nights I didn't have enough sleep, and was something of a

zombie for most of the day and into the evening. During the afternoon I lay down, but a procession went by on the street with a small dragon and guys throwing firecrackers. They were scaring away the evil spirits in the Tenderloin, but that might require a cannon.

Late morning, a phone call from my parents. My mother is going in for surgery on her eye tomorrow. A cornea transplant. A patient watches while the thing they're watching with is being operated on.

I drifted through the afternoon, carried along by words and music.

Early evening – there were two or three calls from B. who wanted to go out. I wasn't in the mood. I was reading the journal and a little tired. Both of us were operating with some automatic tendencies - her when it comes to going out, because she can't stand being alone, and me with an addiction to the written word.

She said her girlfriend was bedridden with an awful migraine. B. has held on to some half-assed relations with a few men. One of them left a drunken message, assuming she is seeing another man and should "give him a hand job." Little does he know that she is womanizing a woman (with both hands), although it is the most edgy and suspicious affair she ever had. She can't be spaced out or distracted without the woman demanding to know "What's wrong?" The alleged concern would seem to be a covert controlling tendency. Reminds me of the Marlene Dietrich line, that women are better lovers but you just can't live with them.

10 p.m. I was reading a paperback I found downstairs, *Up and Down with the Rolling Stones*, by their drug dealer I think, when the phone rang. It was Ming, and we had another long talk, an hour and a half. She has hardly any women friends, but called

an ex-roommate, a student whose relations with men aren't very good, and on hearing about Ming's problems she said she'd be right over.

They drove to Mendocino and spent the afternoon and drove back, passing some wreckage on the side of the road. Ming had an angry tone in her voice concerning the boyfriend, and while we talked she took down his stuff from the walls and shelves.

Eventually she tried to relax and went to bed, still on the phone. There was some mention of how nice it was yesterday at the lake, ducking our responsibilities. I said B. thought we were having a romance, given the time we spend together and sleeping over (if it was anyone else, we probably would be). She stumbled around for a minute, all too conscious of the line we have been walking for years, although it waivers in its variations on a theme of being soul mates, bosom buddies, comrades, but never lovers (taking baths together and massages don't count). Given her turbulent history with the men she has slept with this is not necessarily a bad thing, and she says as much - I'm seeing her at her best. It is something she has alluded to before, the longevity of this connection has a lot to do with there being no sex. Any man who sleeps with her should know his days are numbered. At least that's how it looks in retrospect. On the following evening she picked up the theme and said she was shocked at how she had gone from one man to another. "That isn't me." I said, "Who was it?" She said there is a difference between making love and having sex, how come they can't see it? I said, "They aren't machines." "Oh."

Monday, Feb. 28,1994

Finally rested with enough sleep, and was back on the typewriter for a few hours.

Went to work in the afternoon.

Walked home. I found a message from Ming, sounding ironic and morose, saying she was going to have a hot bath and a good cry.

8 p.m. I called her back. She sounded subdued, but it turned into one of our epic conversations – over two hours. For much of it I just listened, with occasional comments as she ran through the whole gamut of emotions, analyzing every little nuance, reliving the past, and how it was she had arrived at this unfortunate stage in her life. Someone she thought she could depend on had vanished, and she is not sure what to do about the future, a subject of immense concern.

I was amazed at what's inside a woman, a verbal current which went on for hours, a relentless analytic awareness. I thought of a 19th century writer who is known as the father of the psychological novel (Stendhal). He said he learned from women in that respect, the blizzard of emotional impressions in their minds, going around and around. It can drive a man away if he is tired of hearing the same old thing, but maybe it wouldn't be the same old thing if he was holding up his end of the conversation.

I don't know how many times I've been on the phone with a woman and listening to a nonstop monologue. It's a joke when women complain about being interrupted by a man – he would die on the vine otherwise. It goes along with the complaint about men who won't listen, but it's a toss-up as to who's at fault: the man for not being more attentive, or the woman for being boring and self-centered. Some women find a man who's conversational and relegate him to that level of usefulness, while going elsewhere for a lover – a man of few words.

It would be interesting if the legendary need of women for a sensory interlude to get them in the mood – soft music, candles, a massage – is not so much a physical

encouragement as a mental one. Having so much on their minds (not necessarily of intellectual consequence), it takes a while to focus on the situation, calming the doubts and fears that dog their every moment. Ming was going off the deep-end, and the self-criticism was getting brutal. There are women who are so emotional it interferes with their bodily functions. They will worry something to death until they can't sleep, their stomach hurts, and they miss a period.

We managed to touch on other subjects, including how sleepy she was. She lay in bed with the lights off, but kept reviving herself with yet another idea or tangent. Eventually she was winding down, nearly falling asleep on the phone, until we said goodnight. It felt like I was putting her to bed by telephone.

I read for a while and then the phone rang around midnight. It was the Phantom, and there seemed to be a delay in his responses. I think he was stoned. He has a broken bass string, but wants to have a session in the sound room in a few days. He talked about Nebraska, having been there recently, the family home in a quiet part of Lincoln. It was covered with snow and he went out at three in the morning to look at it with a cigarette and some wine, listening to the snow. He said it looked like cocaine.

There was an old man who lived next door who killed himself not long ago. He took a hostage who was trying to prevent him, and then shot himself. Tired of living. The Phantom said the FBI had been in the house. When he was going to college someone down the street was running a coke and call girl operation and he didn't know it, regretting his naivete. He would see young women driving in and out and think they were the man's daughters or something.

Tuesday, March 1, 1994

Phone call in the morning from the Professor in Los Angeles. We talked about everything from Gore Vidal to dead Muslims. The latter was a shocking occurrence which had us going for a while, that a man would walk into a place of worship with people on their knees bowing and praying and start shooting with an automatic rifle, getting as many as he could (around forty, with 200 wounded) before he was finally overcome by people armed with chairs and beaten to death.

There was a riot and the Israeli police shot fifteen more. The police were useless in stopping or preventing the shooting, and it had to do with Israeli settlers on the West Bank who hate the Palestinians (whose land they stole). You would think the injustice of the Israeli occupation makes them all the more vicious. The assassin was an American - a doctor, oddly enough. It seemed like an extension of American imperialism.

The Professor was going on about "crazy Jews" (and he's half-Jewish). He said the U.S. gives so much to Israel, over $3 billion a year for how many years (a foreign aid pipeline engineered by the Israeli lobby, making sure no politicians are elected who would question it). He thinks he should be able to go there whenever he feels like it, given how much of our tax dollars have been siphoned off by Zionists. I mentioned a CIA mole who was spying for Russia, and now funds that were supposed to go to Russia have been held up. Funds going to Israel are never held up, even when Israeli spies are found out (Pollard, for example). It's a small country, but it gets more from the U.S. than any other country, including those in dire need of foreign aid.[54]

[54] Oddly enough, annual government spending on childcare, per child, is much higher in a country which is heavily subsidized by the U.S., where the figure is $500. In Israel it is $3,327 (as of 2021).

We talked about Vidal and the mutual animosity between him and professors, though this one has the utmost respect for him. He had his phone number in Los Angeles and wanted to invite him to speak at his college, but lost the number.

There was some mention of his disillusionment with academics, like they're middle class to a fault, and objectivity is a hard card to play (some would say it doesn't exist). People have an inclination to myth and bias, like they're polarized between fact and fiction. There could be a car mechanic who believes in angels. Intelligent people put a thin wafer in their mouth and consider it the body of an ancient prophet – something which amazed him in his college days at Georgetown (a Jesuit school).

Then he had to go, having a meeting with the college president who he has little respect for – a bureaucrat using the college as a stepping stone to further his career. I forgot to ask him about *The Unheavenly City*.[55]

On the way to work in the afternoon I got off the bus and walked a few blocks. I had a vision of people like a Macy's Day parade, their giant egos bumping in the air as they walk along feeling buoyant from the hot air of their own mythologies. There is room for everyone in the physical sense, but not for their blown-up beliefs which crowd each other out.

In the office the Attorney was sharing the fight case with a Jewish lawyer in his late thirties. The latter wrote a letter to the other side which was so provocative it made him sick. He doesn't operate like that. "We will litigate to the hilt," demanding they cease and desist or we will bring a case for malicious prosecution. Our client owes money to

[55] Edward C. Banfield (1970) – a conservative political scientist who thought that forcing students to stay in school who don't want to be there and are learning nothing is compromising the education of others.

two men, but they are the ones with injuries and damages. He now wants $2,000,000. It's too absurd for words, but there is a box full of words which have accumulated in the case.

I sometimes question these cases, and the Attorney accused me of being a legal conservative when it comes to large monetary awards for relatively minor incidents. He also said (on another occasion) he dismisses Chinese people during jury selection because they're stingy when it comes to big awards, so maybe I'm part Chinese.

7 p.m. I walked to the pool and met Ming in the lobby. She looked nice in a long skirt and nylons, and both of us were tired (I had been working on a complicated workers' comp procedure).

She told me about a case where she works. A woman brought a sexual harassment suit against a man in her office. Having read the woman's statement, Ming was unsure about it. The man was a creep, but there was some duplicity, if not a vague complicity, on the part of the woman. She didn't tell him to knock it off – the insinuations and the double *entendres* – and it got to the point that he would pull out his organ in the parking lot and masturbate and she would just stand there (another version of "Stand By Your Man"). Even worse, she went to a hotel room with him during the day as if it was a business meeting. The minute she started to unbutton his shirt she should have realized it wasn't business-related and left, but she let him take his clothes off and according to her statement gave him a hand with his male organic effort. There was some ambiguity about whether she took her clothes off as well. Her hand was naked, maybe that was enough.

Ming wondered how dumb can you get. The woman is suing to have him fired, but why did she go along with it? It's shaky from the legal standpoint if the circumstances became harassment in retrospect (she's a married woman, incidentally),

and she never complained to her company. Some situations are thrown into a different light if a woman feels she was misled as to the man's sincerity. A consensual act is redefined as assault if it turns out he lied about promoting her or loving her. Ming works for the firm that is defending him.

We headed for the gym downstairs, where we went from one weight machine to another. She wants to have a mutual work-out program involving sit-ups and leg lifts, doing 200 of those. There were pushups, followed with a few more weight machines. I left her on a conveyor belt and went for a swim. Afterwards we walked a mile to her place, feeling revived. A long swim leaves me tuned up like a violin.

It led to a calm debate around the kitchen table which had some pessimistic implications. I played white devil's advocate, taking seriously the views of black people with an intense dislike for whites. Some hide their animosity, but feel that way in private. They would just as soon I didn't exist, in other words. Integration is a lie for those who want to integrate with the amenities and means of the white man, but not so much with white people, who they put up with as a necessary buzzkill. The old routine about equality is masking their assumption of superiority. I had to keep telling her I'm not making this up, it is broadcast, forecast, sermonized, terrorized, and three-part harmonized from sea to shining sea, and that includes the Motor City.

However, she doesn't read a lot of black writers, or listen to rap very much, or follow the Black Muslims - who believe that white people are a genetic mistake, an inferior offshoot from the "original human race" of black Africans, that sort of thing.[56]

[56] The calls for racial unity (for any race) are full of discrepancies and hypocrisies, if not a lack of compliance. There are endless fissures and estrangements which appear in any body politic. To see the so-called white race as a unified force would suggest that someone never heard of World War II, or even World War I. It undermines the credibility of whoever makes that claim. It

She wanted to refute what I was saying, but couldn't deny the evidence. She simply didn't want to think in those terms. In wanting to have a more benevolent perspective she refused to acknowledge what many black people say and feel about those of European descent. A lot of white people don't take it seriously either – like they can't imagine that anyone would hate them, or it's uncomfortable to know they're being mocked and threatened. It complicates the situation if you're supposed to be open and welcoming to people who hate your Eurocentric guts, and don't even mention the statistics of robbery and homicide. At any rate, she said, "You're no better than them if you just reflect the hate." I said, "Why should I be better? I thought we're supposed to be equal." She said I'm under the influence of the books I'm reading and the Tenderloin.

Meanwhile, we were finishing our meals. She looked with horror at my curry chicken salad (with golden raisins, chicken, and apples). I said according to the rules of ethnic immunity she's not supposed to criticize it, but she did. Meanwhile, there was her own concoction which was almost inedible, being suffused with pepper, but that's the usual thing with us. She looks askance at me if I put honey on bread, while she pours tabasco sauce on everything. It seems that our metabolisms are different.

I had a beer and a cigarette and stared out the window. Ming washed the dishes while we talked (she said it was "his turn"), wearing tights and a loose T-shirt with nothing underneath it. She was bottoming out, having lost her boyfriend and been forced to give notice with her life up in the air, some tension at work, and it's her period.

The subject of my relations with women came up, and she insisted I not be pessimistic or think they use men. I said I have no problem being friends with women,

---

reminds me of when the Japanese invaded their neighbors with the excuse of racial unity against the white man (whose presence is a fate worse than death).

but sometimes it feels like I am skating on the surface. She said that being with someone can be problematic. We went back and forth on that, lying on her bed with a view of the city. The workout left me in a rarified state which produced some dry and cutting comments. It left her momentarily at a loss for words, which is saying something.

There was the acidic absence of the boyfriend to contend with. It rubbed her the wrong way all day and half the night. She would say she loved him – even a year ago – when she loved him so much she left him and was sleeping with two or three other guys. It makes you wonder what love is, and if it's anything like a dream. That would make it all too easy to keep it in her mind while doing something else with her body.

It was nearly 1 a.m. when I left. A few blocks from home there were some surgically-altered men on the corner, men with breasts. Maybe I should put that in quotes (come to think of it, a bra is like quotation marks).

Wednesday, March 2, 1994

12:30 p.m. In the office, talking with the receptionist. One of her lawbooks was open. She asked me, "What's Latin for 'broke'?"[57] V. came in looking for me and we walked to a small park on the edge of Chinatown, sitting on a bench and having lunch.

Back in the office, looking over some notes on what to ask policemen in a DUI trial, noting certain procedures when pulling over a suspect. They will shine a bright light into the rearview mirror of the suspect in order to disorient him, in case he's reaching for a weapon. The way the Attorney worded it you'd think they do it on the freeway. His point was if a suspect appears disoriented, it could be from being pulled over by the

[57] No money = *non pecuniam* (I had to look it up).

police and given the white light treatment, rather than from drinking – another case of the observer (the police) affecting the observed (the suspect).

It seemed like a weak excuse, but so is "probable cause," it being the word of the police against that of the suspect. The usual allegation is that the suspect was "weaving."[58] The bottom line is the breath test, with a margin of error of .02 (the blood test is harder to beat).

8 p.m. At home with a wooden instrument and a documentary on the evolution of human beings which went on for hours.

Hominids or Homo erectus preceded Homo sapiens which have only been around for 100,000 years or so. There is evidence that Homo erectus was alive 2,000,000 years ago, having two-thirds of the brain of modern humans. It's a missing link between monkeys and Homo sapiens. We're talking mutant hybrid species here, half animal and half human, or is that the current situation?

More eerie to consider and hard to fathom is other evolutionary branches which died out, like Neanderthals. The experts are not sure what happened with them - they existed for over 200,000 years in Europe, then faded out when Homo sapiens were coming into their own and taking the high ground as it were. Did they interbreed and disappear? For that matter, there is still some question of "Whether today's races still

[58] I was on the freeway at 2 a.m. on a Saturday night (returning home from one of Ming's parties a few years ago) when the CHP drove up behind me and turned on their flashing lights. I had to execute a high-speed maneuver which involved my changing lanes, figuring out the nearest exit (positively Fourth Street, near the court house and the jail), navigating the off-ramp, and pulling over on the side of the street so I wasn't blocking traffic. When the policeman approached the car I wanted to tell him that maneuver was more complicated than anything I would have confronted on the way home, and he should let me go since I had passed their spontaneous driving test. I didn't have the presence of mind to say as much, probably due to the vodka that night.

carry genetic echoes of regional Homo erectus and other such lines" (from a related article in the paper). That would explain a few things.

There is evidence that evolution was more complicated than the over-simplified story of human beings emerging in Africa. Fossils of hominids have been found in Indonesia, China, and southern Russia from 1.6 to nearly 2 million years old. In other words, a previous evolutionary stage was fanning out across the continents for one or two million years before Homo sapiens made their evolutionary debut 100,000 years ago (approximately), so Homo sapiens may have evolved on whatever continents the species they evolved from were found – which might explain the divergence of the races. The out-of-Africa theory loses ground in this respect. Many old fossils are found in the Rift Valley, but that is partly because the fossil-laden strata are more exposed (it being a geographical rift).

It weakens the belief (or the significance of said belief) that we all came out of Africa if what we're talking about is a sub-species going back a million years or more with much less brain capacity and more like packs of monkeys. They were adept at walking, migrating, and finding out how rocks, especially sharp ones, can be useful. Homo erectus was diminutive, a migrating scavenger slurping termites on a stick like any monkey would. They relied on roadkill – the carcasses of animals that other animals had killed. It wouldn't be much when the vultures got through, but ingenuity is in our bones. They found the marrow in the bones of carcasses was nourishing (a source of protein). To paraphrase Shakespeare, it was "to marrow and to marrow and to marrow…." A sub-human species went through animal dumpsters for any scraps they could find, gnawing on the bones.

I should read up on the theory of human beings emerging from all over the place, whether or not a sub-species first appeared in Africa. It seems unlikely that the races evolved with all of their divergent characteristics over less than 100,000 years – especially if the sub-species we evolved from was spread around the world. The migration of Homo erectus was not hard to manage over thousands of years. Entire continents have drifted for thousands of miles.[59] Hominids had plenty of time to migrate. Moving a hundred miles a year they would be 10,000 miles away in a hundred years.

There was some mention of the Middle East as a kind of bus station for incoming and outgoing migrations of people, and the foundations of anything approaching civilization began when someone discovered how to make beer (probably in Egypt). It required an organized approach to growing the grain to make the beer. There were subsequent efforts at beer distribution which fomented trade and the formulation of laws, with some beer busts getting out of hand. The determination of alcohol content required scientific methods, and a written language was required for the labels, not to mention glass-blowing for the bottles and metallurgy for the beer cans. Then there were the Euclidean aspects of a right angle when it comes to postulating a liquor store on the corner, if you don't know what a corner is.

Not implausible, though I'm making it up, which is to say I'm listening to the genetic echoes in my blood, being descended from an ancient family which goes back 100,000 years, most of it unrecorded (and not much in the way of property rights), but I'm recording it now.

---

[59] The subcontinent of India broke off from eastern Africa and drifted away (one foot a year x 10,000,000 years = 1,894 miles). It eventually collided with the Asian continent, pushing up the Himalayas very slowly.

The documentary showed some scientists in a convention hall with arguments breaking out, hitting each other over the head with bones and microphones. There was a sign: MODERN HUMANS, with arrows pointing in both directions, either the MAIN HALL or OVERFLOW, and why does that sound familiar? Some of us are flowing over the damned.

10:30 p.m. Phone call from the Actress which tore me away from the evolution of the species I belong to. I said I was evolving from a million years ago and at the moment was in a cave.

She had been in the Bahamas for a week. 85 degrees. Maybe a little too much pineapple rum, but she liked it and had a "mini-affair" with a man from Katmandu. Spent two nights with him. She then asked about my social life - any women? I said, "I'm not sleeping with anyone, if that's what you mean."

There is a phenomenon I've heard about and felt: the letdown of returning to this part of country. When I have flown back from the East Coast, not to say Europe, or even from Los Angeles, arriving in the airport I'm adjusting to an atmosphere which is the opposite of highly charged.[60] I spoke with B. the next day and she said the same thing from another angle, with her constant search for blow-out parties. Coming from New York it was a letdown in some respects. I wondered if the climate has anything to do with it, if "mild" or "foggy" is a condition which penetrates the population more than we

[60] Maybe the experience of coming home is watered down by one's familiarity with it. Cities are thought to be revitalized by fresh blood (I don't mean the murder rate), with people coming from elsewhere. New York City is known for this, and so is Paris. Given the reputation of this town for being a cul de sac of lackadaisical bohemians (which might explain the dirtiest streets in the country), and the possibility of my colluding in the mood, it stands to reason that it's time for a move if I can drag my typographic anchor to another time-zone.

realize. There are not much in the way of electrifying stormy parties and the connections those can generate.[61] You're not going to find "a man for all seasons" if there aren't any seasons.[62]

11:30 p.m. On the typewriter for a couple of hours. I was interrupted now and then by voices on the street – black people arguing with themselves or the police. This neighborhood is highly charged, if only by an atmosphere of drugs and theft and the suspense of those who have been arrested or mugged in the past.

Thursday, March 3, 1994

NOTES

> A short article on biases amongst minorities. We often hear about white bias, so this is not uncalled for. More than 4 in 10 blacks and Latinos and 27 percent of whites concur with the stereotype that Asian Americans are "unscrupulous, crafty and devious in business." (That sounds like Wall Street, actually.)
>
> Nearly half of Latinos and 4 in 10 blacks and whites agree that Muslims have a thing about terrorism. (The U.S. and Israel have a thing about terrorizing Muslims and to a far greater extent, given the weapons involved.)
>
> "Large majorities" of those polled "rejected the stereotype that blacks have less native intelligence." That view was only held by 12 percent. (Never underestimate the intelligence of those who hate your guts.)
>
> 80 percent of blacks believe their race lacks the opportunities enjoyed by whites (never mind that people of European descent have a long tradition of organization and invention which were instrumental in generating those opportunities). What

---

[61] I should amend that sentence. This is definitely a party town, although there is an ebb and flow of the extremes, not to mention one's own social limitations. I have weathered some mind-altering extravaganzas, and in a few months would go to a warehouse party in Oakland where I met a woman writer from Baton Rouge. We were together for a long time.

[62] A couple of years later a friend of B. moved here from Manhattan, an artist with a freewheeling sex life (who contracted a sexually transmitted disease from one of the Lounge Lizards, John Lurie). Her paintings slid from surrealism into abstraction and back again. It wasn't long before she felt the letdown here, not getting the attention from men that she was used to. Even worse (in her opinion), was when women came on to her. She said she would rather have a dog humping her leg.

does it do to their credibility if those same people believe they could fly when they were in Africa, or that King Tut was a cousin on their mother's side?

The gulf between belief and fact is wider than the ocean. There are people who believe they're going to heaven.

Letter to the editor (of the *San Francisco Chronicle*) from a man of Italian descent. He was responding to a letter from a black woman about reparations, his family having come to this country in the late 1920's.

"I personally don't feel that my tax dollars should go to fund any cockeyed commission or to pay reparations for something that happened long before my family came to this country.

I wonder if (Ms. M.) is aware that many of the people that were brought to America as slaves were sold into slavery by their own black brothers & sisters in Africa. They had been taken as prisoners by warring tribes and subsequently sold into slavery. In light of this, where might reparations come from?

Due to affirmative action and many other governmental giveaway programs, I think reparations have more than been taken care of.

I am of the opinion that anyone claiming personal hardship because of something that happened to an ancestor over 100 years ago has a screw loose…"

(1) Actually, the claims cover a 400-year period, even though the U.S. wasn't a country for much of that time, making the legal responsibility for slavery (and reparations) even harder to determine. It was only a country for eighty-nine years before slavery ended in 1865, and the early years were pretty shaky.
(2) He mentions affirmative action and giveaway programs (welfare), but not the cost of crimes by black people. From property theft to rape and homicide, along with legal costs and those of prison, the amounts are astronomical and should be included in the equation – the complexity of which would outdo the Theory of Relativity. And the period of grievance was extended to include the years of segregation and its economic side-effects. However, that would open the door to anyone with grievances over the last century or so when it comes to unfair housing practices, job discrimination, etc.
(3) I wonder how many people in this country are descended from ancestors who came here after the Civil War. My mother's parents were born in Denmark, and migrated to the U.S. in the 1920's. On my father's side, they go back further, but I don't think they were here before the Civil War. The majority of the population is descended from people who didn't live here when slavery was happening - and it was mainly in the South. To what extent are they financially responsible for slavery in this country? Slavery was a financial

benefit to the country, but how much of that was wiped out by the costs of the Civil War (including over 700,000 dead)?

(4) The U.S. wasn't a sovereign country with a constitution until 1789. By then, there were already five free states (out of a total of thirteen) – beginning with Pennsylvania and Massachusetts in 1780. The country soon became more evenly split between free and slave states, until 1861 (when the Civil War began) there were 19 free states and 15 slave states. The rhetoric of racial politics has become so obtuse with its generalities that the very existence of free states, constituting approximately half of the country long before the Civil War, is conveniently ignored – in order to tar the entire country (and all white people – whether or not they were even here then) with the brush of racist oppression.

(5) How many black people in this country have benefitted from electricity and machines? At what point does the credibility of blaming white people for everything, and never giving them credit, start to wear thin, given the fact that black Americans have a much higher standard of living than blacks in sub-Saharan Africa?

I did four loads of laundry instead of going to work.

5 p.m. Phone call from Ming, who was still at work. "What are you doing at home?" She said the ex-boyfriend had come by the place yesterday while she was at work and removed his stuff, so she needed a few things. Radio, phone, plates. I have an old phone she can use, and dishes. The clock radio and the boombox are hers.

7:30 p.m. I walked over with the stuff, but when I got there I was thrown off and came close to leaving. Not sure what caused it. The place was rearranged, eradicating any reference to the boyfriend, and she even moved the bed. It looked clean and neat. I lay on the bed with the windows open and the fog blowing through. Maybe it was obscuring the view, but there was something depressing there, if not inert. I may have been tuning in her mental state. (I sometimes feel uneasy around an infant, like I'm sensing its frustration with being helpless and unable to communicate while sitting in its own piss.)

I had nothing to say and stared off into space, while she tried to keep the conversation going. We have been spending a lot of time together lately. I was falling in love with her again [writing this on Saturday and she just called], but most of the time I know it wouldn't work.

It took a while to come around. I'm sometimes at a low ebb in the early evening, but eventually I was in the kitchen while she threw some things into a wok with a nice scent. I had a beer and was responding with comments which were calm, but which she found disturbing – like when we talk about the relations of men and women and it seems to be implicating the two of us.

I talked about evolution, and the conversation wandered. There was some mention of Thomas Edison. Evolution involves a lot of trial and error, and he had to test 4000 materials before he found one that worked as a filament in a lightbulb. I said that I was doing something similar, looking for a woman who could hold the current. She was concerned, and said I shouldn't be so pessimistic, though she often is. Her love life tends to be a mess, which she freely admits, and she is doing me a favor by not putting me through that. The more I know about her the more I see her point. Unfortunately, love isn't known for being very rational.

At some point I was flipping through a book of erotic stories and poems by Latina women. She said she didn't like it, too flowery and euphemistic. I found a long poem and ran a few lines by her. "Does this mean anything to you?" "No." For example, "My soul chattering to my cunt…," or "cool cut of a cunt…." I said it would be interesting to submit this poem under a man's name and see what sort of criticism it would get for

writing about women in terms of "ripe melons," or associating them with nature and talking to their private parts. Ming said that isn't how it works with her.

We went out for some wine, walked back, and had a nice meal. Red snapper and rice, with her trying to force some tofu on me and it didn't work. There was an old Velvet Underground tape with Nico (1938-1988) singing "Femme Fatale," such a tease. I said I saw her in a small club in North Beach some years ago (1979) and was underwhelmed, partly because she was alone onstage with a weak harmonium.[63]

We ended up on the floor with a large drawing pad and got absorbed for a while, a combined effort which looked psychotic, with two hands reaching out and throwing off sparks and lines of force.

It was nearly one in the morning when I left, walking home in a heavy fog past the prostitutes. The other night on the way home there was a man sleeping on the sidewalk and a sex-change hooker with an older client in a suit who was pissing on the wall. My evenings end on such a romantic note.

On the radio was *Nocturnes* by Debussy. I read about the Rolling Stones for a while. The Vollmann book didn't hold my attention. I tried to go to sleep, but couldn't. There were people yelling on the street, and some rancid-looking white guys standing around a beat-up sedan at three in the morning. Small-time crooks or addicts, rejects from a David Lynch movie, who knows?

---

[63] One of the hazards of keeping a journal is when you read it many years later and barely recognize yourself, or regret the wasted time, the missed opportunities, the blown affairs. I'm sorry I didn't talk to Nico when she was at the Mabuhay (where I saw Devo, the Cramps, the Mutants, and others). It was a slow night, but I didn't stick around after she played. I didn't expect her to show up with Lou Reed, but having no band at all put me off. If I had known more of her background, I would have tried to meet her (not that she was easy to talk to). A German woman who was seven when the Third Reich crashed and burned, she had high cheekbones and a low voice which got her roles in *La Dolce Vita,* as well as with the Warhol crowd. Her songs are bleak and morbid, and there was a slow decline which the heroin had a hand in.

Friday, March 4, 1994

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office and we walked to the Hunan place. She has an active involvement in these rendezvous, speaking freely, and will mention if she's having cramps. There were some questions about the love life of my women friends, as well as mine. She knows I don't have a girlfriend. "So, do you do it yourself?" I was at a momentary loss for words, never sure how innocent she is, considering the things that come out of her mouth. She was sitting there, pretty and demure, but there is more to her. She doesn't like what lots of women do, sleeping around on a casual basis, and thinks that sort of thing can lead to turbulence and heartbreak for everyone involved. Nevertheless, she has an undying curiosity and admits to being "a gossip." She may be restrained, but that doesn't mean she doesn't have a sensual outlook on life.

I'm used to women who speak about me in familiar terms, while they retain a more elusive status. I wouldn't ask about her sex life, and I usually compliment her appearance. She on the other hand was saying something about my hair - not just that I need a haircut, but given the evidence of silver hairs I should consider dyeing it, especially since, "You look like you're fifty." Maybe it's the singer and not the song. She could say almost anything and I would see it in a positive light. I said, "It's not what you look like, it's what you can do," and she replied, "Dye your hair," without hesitation.

It isn't like she isn't critical of herself, like other women I have known, but that makes it all the easier for them to turn it against others – being used to a critical voice in their head. They have a magnified perspective of themselves, but any imperfection is

magnified as well. Who knows what sort of derelict I look like if she views her own looks with occasional disdain. "I'm fat."[64]

"Love conquers all," and that is how you float a situation over the neurotic automatic disapproval of a woman. Last night with Ming I said some women have relentless mental currents, and getting them in the mood for romance has as much to do with relaxing them mentally as it does physically. She more or less agreed, saying it's good if I respond to women as mental beings, like it constitutes a hidden dimension which a man ignores at his peril. I said it leaves me interacting with their minds, which leads to endless conversations. I'm on close terms with some women, but it tends to leave the physical out of the picture. She said that isn't a bad thing. I said tell me that after you have been sleeping alone for a few months, something she in fact is intent on doing. We talked about her libido, and if she controls it or it controls her. She can put it on hold, but there is still the libido of men to contend with. It is coming at her all the time, like a readily available force if she wants it. A man who puts himself on hold will probably stay that way. There was some mention of the low opinion many women have of women who are sluts. They know it doesn't take much work, and they worry about their men being led astray. The whole routine of getting laid could happen with the woman being practically unconscious (which doesn't say much for the man involved). At any rate, she hopes she won't "slut out."

Meanwhile, V. and I returned to the office with her telling me what famous actresses were pregnant, including the one with "big boobs." She is up on the latest gossip.

---

[64] 105 pounds.

The Attorney was in court and I had nothing to do. Half an hour later she wanted me to go to Oakland with her to file a complaint. We walked to the underground monorail station. I was in a tired daze with not enough sleep. The train glided through a tunnel under the bay and surfaced in Oakland. We passed the loading docks while sliding backwards.

The 12th Street station, with a metal escalator to the street. We walked to the city government office, filed the complaint, stamped the copies, and left. The train slid through the town, her glances and expressions smoothing out a dreary commute. We disembarked on the other side of the bay with the train pulling out a foot or two away on a fatal rail. I stood between a shockwave and her.

In the office talking with the receptionist. She said some Chinese restaurants leave her recoiling. There are certain smells she can't stand (like grease), and doesn't eat fish for similar reasons. I wondered if that contributes to her being thin. The smell of tobacco doesn't do much for her either. I asked what scents or odors she is comfortable with. She said, "You might find this odd, but gas, tar, and a certain kind of mud," which took a minute to register. I asked if there are perfumes which convey those scents, like Eau de Petroleum or Mud No. 5, but she didn't know.

5 p.m. I walked to the station with V., who is going to Lake Tahoe for the weekend. There was some mention of people who camp out in the mountains. She would never do that since she has to have her own bathroom, or at least one of those portable toilets, and could not believe that men and women wouldn't have one in the back country. Also, she can't live without her hair drier.

Walked home.

7 p.m. I took the bus to the sound-room flat where the boys were hanging out in a marijuana-vodka-video daze. The lazy ways and means of several roommates who for better or worse are not too discriminating. One of them (a recent addition) is a flaming homosexual with an affected accent that is practically a caricature. He is always in character, laconic to a fault, and something of a middle-class TV addict. I wondered if there is a correlation between homosexuality and over-exposure to television (the former has been around a long time, but TV programming may have generated another version).

The other roommate, J., also in his mid-twenties, was on the floor with a drawing pad, sketching a magnification of a coin ("In ganga we trust"). There was a vodka bottle nearby. It was a way of killing time, a heavy drinker who keeps a manic-depressive journal written in a tortuous tiny script. He joins us in the sound room now and then, playing drums with the fury of a Michigan *sturm und drang* running through him.[65]

The Phantom is nearly thirty. His main social skills have to do with bumming cigarettes and scoring drugs on Haight Street.

I hung out for a while, suffering a disorientation of the senses with a big screen television. It was hooked up to a speaker system like a prelude to the sound room. I can handle Star Trek, but not commercials since I don't watch TV very often and half the time it's Channel 9 (a public station). If it's another channel I turn the sound off during the commercials since they are unbearable. As Solzhenitsyn said, they're "spitting at us." The roommates were heaping abuse on the projected fake phenomena on the tube, and building up an anger which was channeled through the amplifiers in the basement, which we finally got to.

---

[65] I was storing a few things in the flat after the fire last year, including a metal filing cabinet. One night I was there and saw it was dented. The Phantom said that J. came home from work so angry and frustrated he was banging his head against the filing cabinet (he works in a bank).

8:30 p.m. We went through the garage with the torn-apart motorcycles and pinups on the wall and into the sound room. I was hooked up to a Les Paul and that was it for the next two hours. I don't let go of the current. It's like one of those machines where you hold onto a metal handle with an electric current running through it and see how much voltage you can handle. In this case, the music is modulated by your nervous system and it's nearly unconscious. The hand is quicker than the mind. There are invisible sound-waves and improvisation, and I don't need anything else, caught up in the physical dexterities of a sonic force field.

It was one of the more random multi-faceted sessions we have had. J. sat in on drums and the two of us took off for a while, a nice jam, with the Phantom having disappeared as he often does (getting high on Haight Street).

He returned twenty minutes later with an older black man who was missing a few teeth. They were stoned and a little drunk. This was Charles, a good friend of his who lives up the street. A few months ago, he was nearly beaten to death in his own kitchen by his half-brother (an ex-con) wielding a baseball bat. There were broken bones, and the assailant is still at large. The Phantom handed Charles a microphone, having earlier mentioned a black friend of his who could sing. I soon realized this wasn't him, but he had a certain enthusiasm with his drunken half-forgotten lyrics coming through a warp. For nearly an hour I continued on the guitar with chord progressions, a few tunes, and back-up sound-effects for their vocal experiments as they handed the microphone back and forth. J. was not bad when it comes to a low and growling stream of consciousness.

Eventually it was Charles and the Phantom (having found another mike), and the latter went off the deep end with his vocal expressions, sounding like a madman jumping

around while Charles had a more melodic approach. I sat on a stool with the Les Paul and provided some counterpoint.

They took another break, but I don't stop. They plug me in and leave me there while people come and go, jumping in on drums or vocals (the bass had a broken string). At some point the Phantom messed with the sound equipment and changed my sound. I could slam a chord and strangle it to a full stop, hitting the brakes with an echo bouncing off the wall. It worked out nicely when one of the fellows who lives on the ground floor walked in, the drummer in a band that plays in clubs. I found out later he quit - the woman bassist was a letdown. He wanted poly-rhythms and spontaneous combustion, but she was a drone.

We have done this before, and having a telepathic connection we took off for a while. He has a wide range, not just the power drive of someone in a thrash band. He adapted to what I was doing, getting atmospheric and meandering, a little jazzy for a while, then succumbing to the modulated train wreck of a tune. It was eerie how the sound was changing course in mid-air, as if done by sonic intuition, the guitar and drums bouncing off each other.

Then the Phantom walked in, having been out. We were winding down and he announced that we had to stop, he was tired and getting nervous. I don't know if he thought we sounded too good without him, or wants to keep his hand in so we'll remember whose sound room it is, or what, but he takes away as much as he gives. He is instrumental in instigating the proceedings, and is instrumental when it comes to interrupting or adulterating the sound.

Went outside, exhausted, drained, and satisfied, sitting on the steps on a cool night with a cigarette and coffee, having had one beer and no smoke. It has become my modus operandi for these sessions. Any smoke tends to mess up my timing, and who needs liquor when you're in a dimension of telekinetic sound-effects?

The drummer's roommates were talking with a girl. The guys looked like hardcore beatniks of the 1990's with short hair, goatees, and tattoos. The drummer (Shane) is more intelligent than you might expect, being a rough-edged person who was working on being an actor, and he reads books. He saw *Demolition Man* and thought it was dumb and amusing. I mentioned the Reverend Horton Heat and he lit up, saying when the Reverend got started he went around the country with a back-up band, dropping in on clubs and bars until he built up a following. That didn't take long since they sounded good and he was able to fund it, coming from a well-off family.

The girl sat next to me on the steps for a while, but I hardly noticed and she left. Around eleven I took a bus back to the studio.

Saturday, March 5, 1994

Typing for a few hours in the morning.

There was a phone call from Ming – she wants to meet later at City Lights. I hung up and a minute later the phone rang. The Czech woman wants to get together this afternoon. I said I couldn't, maybe next week. She told me about an incident last night with a woman friend in a bar (the Czech woman was turning thirty-one). They had a few drinks, and a man she didn't know accidentally spilled beer on her. She got angry and he responded with a rude remark about her looking like she should have beer spilled on her.

That made her even more angry. She is generally polite, but it can build up a repressed temper which is something to contend with when it cuts loose. Her girlfriend (a Swedish-Jewish psychologist around forty) thought she was over-reacting, and maybe didn't hear the man's last remark, but my friend threw her beer glass at the guy and then slugged her girlfriend. She doesn't remember doing the latter, but the girlfriend claims it happened and isn't speaking to her at the moment. She sounded gratified that I took her side in this.

3:30 p.m. I arrived at City Lights and looked at books, then felt a tap on my shoulder and there she was in a black sweater and black tights. She went downstairs while I remained where I was, looking at *Marble Skin* by a Croatian journalist, essays by Martin Amis (*Visiting Mrs. Nabokov*), and a book of social theory with a dry analysis of still-lifes which left me unmoved.

I flipped through *The Fermata* by Nicholson Baker (who wrote *Vox*), the writing (wrote wiring) with a fine edge. A reviewer said it is high-grade porn. It's like bringing an educated adult mind to juvenile obsessions. Even worse, it is sex at some remove. In *Vox* a man and woman have over-heated conversations on the phone. Here a man was living out a young male fantasy of stopping time and removing the clothes of pretty women who have been stopped in their tracks, allowing him to jack off I suppose. This seems to be a writer with a middle-class insulation who is something of an audio-visual misfit. There's a lot of that going around, but it seems vicarious and ineffective. One way of dealing with the libido is to channel it into evaporating realms of masturbatory thought, a nice place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there.

Also, I was put off by his technical effete preoccupation with women's bodies, like an adolescent voyeurism which is more demeaning to men than to women.

I went downstairs and found a line in an art book, "gray-scale expression of hue, lightness and saturation," which I could use as a subtitle for the journal. A Gray-scale expression of human lightness and maturation. I found Ming in a section of women's books and spiritual concerns, and looked at something on temples around the world. I showed her some hieroglyphics from *The Book of the Dead*.

We walked back through Chinatown, passing through a couple of shops. Dead fish and kitsch commodities. There were drums and firecrackers around the corner: a one-man writhing dragon blessed the doorways of one shop after another, accompanied with a small group of men in black, including a couple of white guys hitting a large drum and cymbals and throwing strings of firecrackers, chasing away whatever spirits are bad for business. We took a bus to her neighborhood, passing through mine, with some discussion as to whose place to end up at, but she was adamant. We picked up Cajun catfish and a bottle of Chianti on the way.

I cooked dinner while she relaxed, or tried to. Rice, fish, and salad. I ended up spending the night, more or less at her suggestion. Things were getting comfortable with some ethereal music on the radio and the conversation had a certain bounce. I may have left my bitter edge at home. She bought some sage to smoke out any lingering traces of the ex-boyfriend.

It was after midnight in a room which felt like it was floating over the city. I was in a borrowed robe while she wore red pajamas with feet in them and a backdoor flap. I think she has multiple personalities – I've brought it up before.

"Do you think you have multiple personality disorder?"
"No… yes… maybe…."

But then she's used to my questions and comments. "Did you know that, according to scientists, the female orgasm isn't necessary for the propagation of the species?" I haven't figured out the personalities inside her, and I'm not sure she has either, although we talked about what she wants to be when she's thirty, and those might be a reflection of her multi-faceted being. (She got a look of horror when I suggested she is in her prime at twenty-four.) No wonder she is in a quandary about the future, not sure who to be with or who to be - the options include an activist, a lawyer, a lesbian, a married mother of three, a successful entrepreneur, and a pothead. There was also some mention of a femme fatale, a café owner, and an artist.

She admits it will take someone who is equally complicated to handle her and make her happy. There are women who are so imbued with their autonomy that being in love with someone is fraught with echoes of a retrograde direction, like being vulnerable or even, God forbid, meeting a man halfway. A weaker man is easier to control, but with the drawbacks of a weaker man. A stronger man has more of her respect and is more interesting, but less easy to control.

She has sworn off men for a long time, and speaks in terms of healing herself. She is getting rather pious about all of this, which is surprising for someone who has left a few men twisting in the wind. It is something we touch on once in a while, the one-way street of a subjective point of view. I said something about customizing her awareness and she said, "Of course," like what else would one do with it? It should conform to your being-in-the-world. Only "mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the mid-day sun" of an objective point of view.

It's hard for her to see things from a man's point of view (even though she was a man in a previous life) and I've run into this before. Women who don't even blink when dumping a man, but it's a crime against nature if it happens to them. I said one way to get a perspective on the situation is to reverse the circumstances. If a man was jerking around a woman, trying her out in bed, dropping her flat, then going back to an ex-girlfriend because the sex was good and she was waiting for him, but he would never marry her, he wouldn't look so good.

She is still puzzled about the ex-boyfriend walking out on her like a weakling who couldn't take it – and yet he proposed marriage a couple of weeks ago. Later he said he made a mistake. He was mistaken about the level of her affection for him, with her having left him once and slept with others, and then when they were back together he brought up marriage and she didn't know what to say, not even thinking in those terms, as she now admits. I said, "Don't you think he picked up on that? It's like saying he was good enough to shack up with, but not good enough to marry."

That stopped her cold, muttering to her herself, "I'm such a bitch."

Sunday, March 6, 1994

Woke up early, 8 a.m., with sunlight flooding into the room as it rose over the Oakland hills and crossed the bay at the speed of light.

We lay there for a while. She was moaning and stretching, with her usual stiffness, lying on her side with her back to me. I finally gave her a back and shoulder rub. I used to lift her up in the air (while lying on my back), and flip her around with both of us hitting the floor sometimes. It would bring her to her senses, but she had another

agenda at the moment. It had to do with taking a long walk and she was in a hurry. I was barely able to eat something, having some cold coffee and half a cigarette before we were out the door.

A bus to 33rd Street, where we walked half a mile to the cliffs near the Legion of Honor on a clear morning. It turned into a meandering seven-mile walk, taking the cliff trail around Land's End with the ocean stretching to a calm horizon and her a little jumpy about running into the ex. I was in a good mood, just a few sardonic comments, though I did elude her in the woods for a few minutes.

We went past the Cliff House, overlooking a long stretch of Ocean Beach with its overlapping incoming waves and sat there for a while. She decided she would fast for the whole day, and was getting edgy. When we made it to the sand, we took off our shoes and walked barefoot through the cold receding waves. I picked up a few shells (feeling grounded at the edge of the water like an air-head in the sunlight). I could have lingered out there, but she said, "I have to pee," so we walked into the woods of Golden Gate Park and she ducked into the bushes.

We lay on the ground near the windmill. She lifted her shirt up, airing her stomach, and grabbed a handful to remind herself that it was too much. I was getting restless and we continued on a trail where a few men loitered in the undergrowth. She said it is a "boo-foo" hangout (butt fuck), and was glancing into the bushes.

We didn't stop until we got to the lily pond, half-hidden in the fern trees. She brought some bread crumbs and the ducks walked or floated over, jostling for anything she threw their way. I suggested holding her hand out with some crumbs on it. She tried it

but was nervous, pulling back. The ducks were nervous too, but one took it and she screamed.

A couple of turtles climbed up on the bank and were motionless. It was getting hot out. We watched the ducks, standing on the edge of the pond with semi-furious interactions. One duck jabbed another in the neck (with an iridescent head of emerald/indigo feathers). Their routines are similar, done in unison, and following a frenzy of the bread crumbs they washed up, socialized, and sat down for a nap.

We walked to the road, past the long white Victorian hot house with people lying on the ground and soaking up the light. Others went by on rollerblades like a pedestrian power glide. We found a secluded meadow with small white flowers and big trees and lay under a tree, the branches casting a contorted shadow. She fell asleep, and I lay there with my mind on idle.

Half an hour later she woke up. It was quiet, but someone took it upon himself to crack a bullwhip (he was practicing). She had to pee again, and usually is demure about it, ducking behind a tree with the flash of a pale behind while I'm a lookout. This time she was less particular and so relaxed from her nap she just squatted against a tree, dropped her shorts, and a stream hit the ground at a 45-degree angle before I realized I was supposed to be a lookout.

She walked up, fastening her shorts, and told me what an immensely satisfying experience that was. We proceeded, reaching the end of the park with a heavy old cargo plane going by, and continued through the Panhandle, passing an apartment where I lived twenty years ago while going to San Francisco State.

I want to get to the point where time fits like a well-tailored suit, which may have something to do with thoroughly inhabiting the present. It's like something you grow into. Time hangs on you when you're younger, like it's several sizes too big. The more smoothly it operates, the more it's going by with not much effort (and some people generate difficulties in their lives in order to hit the brakes and slow down time). One day you walk by a place you lived in long ago and you're not sure what you've done with the ensuing years, though you're surrounded with trees and light and the presence of a magnetic woman.[66] You might wonder what you have to show for it, and if a preoccupation with writing has left you spinning your wheels at some remove from the material world with its substantial causes and effects. At any rate, I'm not married and living in the suburbs. It would seem I don't want to be, if character has anything to do with fate [writing this at 2:30 a.m. Monday night when the voice of Kerouac came on the radio - something about riding the rails and having "insane conversations with Negroes"].

We took a bus to her place and relaxed. There was some talk of whether I should go home or not, what with her being tired. She wanted me to stick around, saying I could read the paper or the poetry journal. I figured I would leave in the next half hour, but things kept sliding into place with each ensuing half hour, and I didn't get out of there until 10 or 11 p.m. I had a sense of her wanting to see if we can spend time together, but maybe she just wants someone there, feeling wounded and uncertain. It would be interesting if our presences are beneficial to each other. What a concept.

---

[66] The radiant aspects of a situation may not come into focus until you have some distance. You encounter something with the tunnel vision of the present, and only later do you see it from a wider perspective. You're looking back, but it is not just nostalgia (which used to be considered a mental illness).

I showed her the literary journal, *Poetry Flash*, having told her about my approach-avoidance of poetry. I wanted a second opinion, though. Was it me or was a lot of the writing in this publication so personal and pious that it went right by us? She commiserated in a minute, having less patience with it than I did – thinking of it as self-important non-events. I didn't tell her it was edited by a woman. The sensibility coming through is steeped in a prosaic blank verse, informed by the senilities of the gentle. Now and then there is an air of premature enlightenment.

One discussion we had (or was it the night before) - she took issue with my comment that the increasing presence of gossip tabloids, user-friendly news, and romantic scandal is evidence of the culture becoming womanized. It is a reflection of women as an influential market. She thought the things I mentioned are universal, like men are just as much into them. I said, "Everything from supermarket romance novels to the *National Enquirer* are bought mostly by women." She said, "Housewives." I said, "Those aren't women?"

One point we agreed on – there has been a trivializing of words like "rape." I read a review of the movie *Naked* (which both of us liked), with a woman saying the main character was "raping our fantasies" on his "train to nihilism." She actually said his "philosophical wordfare and his caustic asides… is [are] at least as ugly an act as physical rape itself." I said there are women who would have preferred his caustic asides to being thrown on the ground and assaulted. If you dilute the meaning of a word like rape it lessens the seriousness of the act, and when does it become like crying wolf?

She was in firm agreement, a literal-minded woman who thought the reviewer was a half-wit, who also seemed to have gotten it wrong. If I recall, the main character

visits a strange woman he saw in the window one night. “Johnny brutally bites, tops, and possibly rapes her.” In fact, she lets him in, offers him a drink (wearing a slip I think), and finally begs him to do what he wants to her. He doesn’t do anything, and just sits there.

And yet, “He’s raped us. Are we supposed to like it?” That’s like saying there’s a shoot-out on the silver screen, and members of the audience need medics because they’re wounded. It’s even more misleading when you consider the willing women, or the one who refused him, and the fact that the men in the film are more dysfunctional or disturbed than the women – with the possible exception of the main character.

Meanwhile, we were reading the paper on the bed. There was a long article on the goddess (Sophia) which seemed like another controversial non-event. It was in the context of organized religion, a conference where the goddess was invoked as the “traditional feminine embodiment of wisdom.” The Virgin Mary isn’t? It should be encouraged in this country. Not many men would object to women being benevolent and wise – it’s better than a calculating machine with Lysol in her blood. There were, however, “unorthodox prayers” at the conference, and this could be where things got controversial, with modern women under the influence of suggestive poetry.

> Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image… with the
> hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life… with
> nectar between our thighs we invite a lover… with our warm
> body fluids we remind the world of its pleasures and sensations.

I don’t know if that sounds like Methodists or not (a religious joke: “Methodists are Baptists who can read”). It’s curious in the context of a church, since I don’t think there is a male equivalent with men intoning prayers about the hot fluid in their organ

which gives new life,[67] or inviting women with what they have between their legs, along with semen, urine, and sweat, or is it blood, sweat and tears – which sounds like a bad date.

There was some mention of "forty-three centuries of spiritual poetry by women," and "rediscovering the lost feminine in Christianity." Was it lost in the sense of not seeing the forest for the trees? It always had an immensely feminine aspect to it (that includes the homosexuals who were power-tripping in a costume drama of the Catholic Church), from the incense and candles to the invocations of the mother and caring for the weak, the celibate men in robes. It is an atmosphere imbued with an assumption of men's guilt, and a suggestion of passivity and forgiveness - a far cry from macho.

Where was I, in Ming's apartment with her having broken her fast. She couldn't stand it anymore, making tea and noodles and then lying down, feeling exhausted with a headache. The tension of last week was catching up to her. Eventually I was sitting on her, giving her a neck rub with her moaning with relief, saying how good it felt to have it worked on. It led to a long massage (or was it short, her being 5'4") from her neck to her feet, wearing a T-shirt and shorts, and not forgetting she loves to have her tailbone rubbed. I was barefoot with an open shirt and pants, and felt at ease.

10:30 p.m. I was about to leave when she got up, kissed me at the door, and I was gone. I dropped by a cafe and picked up a hot pastrami on sourdough, the sort of thing she can't stand. She doesn't mind dried seaweed with tofu, and then tells me how foul it is, my liking Russian soup.

---

[67] This is conjectural on my part, as I'm assuming life does not spontaneously combust in those wonderful wombs which have no need of male input.

11:30 p.m. Home with a few messages on the phone machine. There was not a drop of alcohol tonight, which goes well with a seven-mile walk.

Monday, March 7, 1994

Woke up in the morning. My mind was clear and so was the weather. Typing for a few hours.

1:30 p.m. Went out in the usual tie and slacks, but headed for a different bus. I walked past a few guys huddled next to a parked car, smoking something. Further on a white guy with a baby had its bottle in his back pocket while carrying on a furtive conversation with a black guy. Who knows, they could have been discussing formulas.

I took a bus to the north end of town, near the water. I was supposed to see how my old apartment looks, having been rebuilt (along with the rest of the building). The fire was nearly a year ago (March 18, 1993).

I walked to the front gate and a fire truck went by with sirens and flashing lights. I thought that was a nice touch. A minute before, crossing the street while staring at my old building, I was nearly hit by a car. Not a nice touch. Things were different and the same. The lobby with black and white squares on the floor, the purple carpet on the stairs, the 1920's light fixtures. I said hello to the owner, a kindly older woman whose husband lacks the social graces, and walked up three flights to Number 11.

The last time I was here a couple of apartments in the back had gone up in smoke and no longer existed (they may have been reconstituted in heaven). The sky was visible through the blackened remnants of wooden beams, the railings on the stairway burned to a crisp, the hall blackened all the way to my front door (on the other side of which there

were a lot of rough drafts on smooth paper). The kitchen was half-burned, the ceiling wrecked, the place a mess.

The wooden railings in the hall were identical to the old ones, like there had never been a fire, and I was having *deja vu* when I walked into the place I lived in for fifteen years. It was rebuilt with wooden floors and black window fixtures with blinds. I walked slowly through the place, groaning when I saw the kitchen. It used to have a layout from the 1920's (including an ice box for a block of ice before there were refrigerators) and a cat door. It now looked slick and modern, but nothing I couldn't live with.

The bathroom on the other end of the place had also lost its historicity with modern fixtures. The place looked a bit sterile, which wouldn't last long if I was there. I was thrown by the size of it, compared to what I've been living in. There were French doors with glass panels which open between the living room and bed room, with the kitchen on the far end. The length of the place is 57 feet, with twice as much room as my studio in the Tenderloin.

I was not sure what I would do with all that space, or even if I liked it, since I'm underwhelmed with the neighborhood. It feels vacant or lightweight, and nothing like what I'm used to on Hyde Street with its rundown character of old brick, wrought iron, and much higher buildings. It was a dilemma, the pros and cons of moving back. If I didn't, I would lose the place, and there was nothing comparable at that price. Having been a long-time tenant it was relatively low ($540 a month with rent control).

On the other hand, I'm comfortable in my place on Hyde and Eddy. It fits me with a wrap-around proximity, a corner studio with eight windows, a tree swaying right outside, and a southern exposure with the sunlight coming in. The comfort level may be

undermined by whatever is tense or disconcerting on the streets. I've gotten used to it, but friends of mine, mainly women, haven't. It is possible I'm isolated in the Tenderloin, and it is not as good for parties.

I sat by the windows which angle outwards over the street, having a cigarette and trying to imagine living here again, if that was retrograde or not, and how it would affect the writing. I went up on the roof, one flight up through an open door, and found a large wooden deck which wasn't there before. It had a small fence around it. In the distance was a long suspension bridge connecting two counties with a fog bank moving in. I wondered if this would tip the balance, giving the place an airy topspin which would favor my living here again.

I went downstairs and spoke with the owner. The building has been in her family since the 1920's. If I move back in it would be next month. When I was about to leave the owner introduced me to an older gentleman who will rent the apartment below me. We shook hands, and the only thing he said was, "Don't make noise."

I walked to work through North Beach, less than half an hour. The Attorney was in court. I typed up the digest of a deposition, the case of the men who got into a fight over non-payment for home improvements. We've been getting boxes full of papers and documents related to the trial. The overkill is something else, as people bring their longwinded complications to a relatively mundane matter**.**

6:30 p.m. I walked home, about four miles today. There were articles about demolition, tantric sex, and controversial testing in the paper.

I have a catalog for Anatomical Products which I found in the office. It's for lawyers and forensic scientists and anyone who might need a human spine carrying case. A pinched-nerve model. A disarticulated skull (sounds like a form of writer's block). Real skeletons which meet "rigid standards." A sympathetic nervous system. An autonomic nervous system, more dissectible than delectable. Unpack the organs and see how well you're organized. I have a gut feeling my autonomy is autonomic. A human stomach on a stand. Cut-away views of male and female reproductive organs. A removable vulva (life-size), made from "bio-like" materials like the real thing, though possibly more expensive. $400 for a male pelvis (12 x 11 x 8 inches). $4000 for an enormous ear (which can hear what the people are saying next door). $2295 for a real bone skeleton on a hook (5 ½ feet tall).

There was everything for the beginning medical student, practicing on anatomically correct dolls or models. "Spread the flesh-like vulva, locate the urethra and pass a lubricated catheter into the bladder." Sounds like an objectification of women, but you can't argue with BIO-LIKE synthetic tissue with a "visco-elastic nature." I thought it might lead to sex dolls, considering where things are headed.

An advanced childbirth simulator, casualty simulation kits**,** and a penis on a smoked Lucite stand for condom demonstrations ("includes adaptable flaccid and erect state"). An intramuscular injection simulator. A "lumbar set with herniated disc," the vertebrae in trouble, they're degenerative. It's for spineless degenerates who need a lawyer.

I paced around the room for a while, having a brainstorm about the old apartment and feeling infected by a floor plan. I turned an idea over in my head, looking at it from

every angle. Ming needs a place and doesn't have much money. There was some possibility of our living together. It could magnify our differences as much as our rapport. It would be nice coming home to a woman, whether or not we're sleeping together.

Tore up the guitar for a while, and then there was a phone call from the Phantom.

10:30 p.m. I was resting when the phone rang. It was B. and it went on for two hours, during which my attention faded in and out. The doubts and questions still continue when it comes to having an affair with a woman. I hear about it because she is reluctant to confront Ilsa and is dying to talk about it, but there is no one she can trust. She thinks her straight friends would disapprove, and doesn't want to become an official lesbian, whatever that is. She said she can't stand the condescending private club mentality of many lesbians, and when she runs into a couple of two hundred-pound dykes with crew-cuts in boots and leather it turns her off.

Meanwhile, it was a typical weekend. She went to a play with Ilsa on a whim (*The Secretaries*) and was way off on what to expect. She can seem dizzy at times, but thought it would be a lighthearted situation of men in drag. A few minutes into it she said, "That one looks like a woman." Ilsa said, "They're all women." It turned out to be a parody of lesbian stereotypes, except they got into the stereotypes a little too wholeheartedly, while managing to gross her out. There were women working in a saw mill who would cut up men. The closing scene included the sound of a saw, men's screams, and the women reappearing covered in blood. Ha ha. Not to mention some awful moments (in her opinion) involving everything from removing tampons to a woman going down on another woman. "Doing another… orally… know what I mean?" I think I do, and during

which interlude she bit her where it hurts. Did I mention it wasn't written by a man? It nearly ruined her night.

Or was it the next night when Ilsa wanted to check out a floating sex club (which was semi-legal). B. was disgusted by the whole idea, so they compromised. Ilsa would leave early without telling her friends why, so they wouldn't think she is "pussy-whipped," as she put it. She returned around eleven and told B. about it. There was a large room on Market Street with a few hundred women and some kind of wrestling mat on the floor. It was covered with Saran Wrap, something to do with not being exposed to bodily fluids. A woman went around with a flashlight in the dark corners of the room, checking on the amorous couples with their wrapped attention. There was a $20 cover charge, BYOB, and lousy music. She didn't think there were lots of women writhing on the floor, though more were getting down, so to speak, as the night wore on. The whole thing put her off, and Ilsa was not that interested.

They got into some friction however, with B. getting jealous and inquisitive about a woman who is after Ilsa. The latter said, "It's none of your business" whether she slept with her before meeting B. This is someone who sends romantic cards when there's an alienation of affection - something she is good at. B. was hurt. She is supposed to have no secrets, while the other woman can remain a mystery.

I mentioned a woman friend at work who asked me if I did it myself (not having a girlfriend). It was amusing, but there's no way I would ask her the same thing - she would be recoiling into next week. B. thought she had some nerve, but it seemed more like an innocent question.

I thought of a quote from *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* by William Gass, with the woman talking:

> There's no woman who's not, deep inside her, theoretical. That's why we love, in men, not them, but place and reputation – money, honor, age, effects, and aura – radiation; not them, but their love, we love – our idea and transubstantiating notion of them.

This rings true, albeit written by a man. I've often felt I was a blur in the middle of material circumstances which were what a woman really liked or wanted. During an argument you understand how few of your thoughts and words are coming across. Some men end up lashing out in their frustration when they're only seen as a status object or a walking wallet. It gets a woman's attention, but unfortunately is a way of losing her.

Where was I? B. was sending some duplicitous signals to the other woman, planning to spend the next day with a man who has been after her for a long time. B. thought nothing of it, but what is Ilsa supposed to think? I said as much, and it took her a while to get it – how her actions might appear to someone else. It is something I learned the hard way, when you're with someone the mere appearance of ambiguity is damaging. You know good and well that nothing is going on, but the other person doesn't. For that matter, I've been accused of "psychic infidelity," which is hard to argue with (it involved a woman I have known since high school). I ran it by Ming recently, saying I was surprised that a woman I was with would be shook up over one of my platonic high school friends. I've usually had an easy time being friends with women, and didn't think it was a big deal or threatening. Ming said on the contrary it's a rare thing, men and women who are close friends, and another woman would know it. You could even postulate that sex for a lot of women is no big deal, like a gymnastic massage, and often

not that hard to come by. What they find more precious are those psychological connections, a spiritual rapport. The woman who accused me of psychic infidelity said it meant more to her than if I went to a prostitute – again, putting sex on a lower level, with psychology more important.

That reminds me, walking home tonight there was a young woman on the corner. She didn't look like the usual prostitute, but when I walked by she turned and said, "Hiiii…" in a lilting voice.[68] I managed a half-smile and a glance and went on walking, while she said, "So shy!" and giggled.

I also mentioned the dilemma about moving back into the old place. B. was all over me in a second, exclaiming that she would do anything to get me out of here and how could I doubt for a moment that staying in the Tenderloin is a bad idea. She threw in some mention of a woman friend who was mugged at Fifth and Mission where she works (near the *Chronicle* building). A black man tore her necklace off and ran away.

12:30 a.m. I was off the phone and finally on the typewriter for a couple of hours.

Reading for a while. I don't know why I've gotten absorbed in this paperback about the Stones by their personal assistant/drug dealer (Tony Sanchez). Part of the suspense is how much heroin can a man absorb before he has to have his blood changed? What's it like to have a wife who is addicted, bitchy, and Satanic? How paradoxical can it get, this business of millionaire revolutionaries? They're a good example of the quote concerning women who don't love men for themselves, but "place and reputation – money, honor [fame]… aura." Is that objectifying? I remember reading how the Stones were not that popular with women before they had a hit record. Later it was more like,

[68] Or maybe it was, "High…"

"We're gonna come around at twelve with some Puerto Rican girls that's just dyin' to meet you…."[69] Their dealer was shocked at how some of the Stones would treat the women around them, easy come easy go, but not surprising if they knew what the women were after. Those encounters were a merry-go-round of mutual exploitation. Since the men were playing the tune, the women were thrown off the ride sooner or later.

Tuesday, March 8, 1994

8:30 a.m. Woken by the construction outside, maybe five hours of sleep. I sat up and looked out the window. There were half a dozen cement trucks with their mixers revolving. Two of them fed a large contraption on wheels with four leg supports that unfolded from the sides, an insect-like monstrosity. There was a pneumatic beam about four or five stories high reaching over and down with a long tube which a workman directed over a grid of iron supporting rods. The construction site across the street was slower and not so organized as the one under my window. They poured the foundations last week with wooden forms along the side, since removed. I'm impressed with the multicultural cooperation of a construction site. No sociologists or politicians who want to leave their handprints in the wet cement (the closest they come to manual labor), just people building something and erasing their presence (it will be a children's playground).

Typing for a few hours in the engine room (it's loud outside). Talk about a neighborhood in transition. It corresponds to those models of the Visible Man, where you see his bones and organs. A black man on a scaffold laying concrete bricks with a T-shirt saying JUST DO IT.

---

[69] "Miss You" (1978)

Went to work in the afternoon.

The Attorney being semi-dysfunctional insisted he had put an Order Denying Motion on my desk. I said he hadn't. He said he had, and who knows what happens when he isn't here. I finally found said document on the floor in his office underneath a pile of dropped files and other papers. No comment from opposing counsel, who is opposed to any suggestion of his fallibility, and posing as a lawyer is a large part of the job.

Talking with Ami at the front desk. She said one of our clients walked by with the Attorney and she heard him say something about the "pretty receptionist." She now refers to him as a pervert.

There was a lot of work, from a collision to a dissolution of marriage (wrote disillusion), which is taking longer and with more attention from the woman than went into the marriage itself. The receptionist said it drives her nuts, the rude imperious women on the phone who demand to be heard. The Attorney might be in a conference or on the phone, it doesn't matter. According to the law of subjectivity, if they're feeling something intensely at the moment everyone should drop what they're doing and pay attention. I had a call from the adulterous floozy who couldn't get through to the Attorney (who was busy), so I got the full brunt of her anger and it was picking up steam. At one point I held the phone away from my head, looking at the receiver while the voice coming through unloaded a shrill and repetitious monologue. HOW DARE THE ALLEGEDLY ABUSIVE MARRIED MAN THAT SHE IS HAVING AN AFFAIR WITH AND NOW HAS A RESTRAINING ORDER ON RETURN THE SENTIMENTS WITH A RESTRAINING ORDER ON HER! It ruffled the heavy feathers of her dignity to no end, and she finally said, after much swearing and vitriol like

the Attorney and I are responsible for this, that she isn't to blame. I said, "Neither am I," and hung up.

Meanwhile, the Attorney owes a lot of money to one of his cronies and has to send him exorbitant monthly interest payments on the loan. Sometimes he doesn't have it, and the man is furious. I had to listen to a few of his calls with him referring to the Attorney in the most vicious vulgar language I have ever heard (which I duly noted in a memo, "and then he called you a …."). He was constantly on the Attorney's back about the money owed him (tens of thousands of dollars, going back to when the Attorney was sued by a client for malpractice). He'll never get it though, because he died the other day in his office (a heart attack). He was a tense and angry man, and where did it get him?

7 p.m. Walked home.

8:30 p.m. I called the Actress who answered immediately and recited a memorized passage from Moliere with her professional diction in a sing-song verse. She had been rehearsing it with her daughter who wanted to say something, so she handed her the phone.

I was now talking with a ten-year-old who has the wit and mannerisms of a twenty-year-old. I wouldn't want to underestimate her intelligence. Maya told me about her injuries - climbing something, slipped, a bar hit her in the neck. She was speaking in a low voice. I said her voice is changing (she laughed), and what if she is turning into a boy? She couldn't imagine a more horrifying thought. Also hurt her foot in gymnastics and had a stomach ache.

I said something about how precious necks are and she agreed. I said, “That’s what necklaces are for.” “What?” “Protecting the neck.” She was skeptical. “Or acknowledging how precious your neck is.” “Okay, maybe.”

I said I had a sand dollar with a barnacle on it for her and she was interested. Some mention of whether she is silly, apropos of what I don’t remember. She thought she was. I said, “Anything to do with your mother?” She replied, “It’s inherited,” and handed the phone to her mother.

9 p.m. I called Ming. She was reading and sounded okay. I told her about visiting my old apartment, but it was soon apparent she was depressed, a little surprised that this is hitting her so hard. Who would believe it, though she did her best to throw him away and sleep with other men and leave the state entirely last year, and then resumed the affair two months ago. However, they were out of sync, especially when they moved into a new apartment together. She was constantly on edge and now he’s gone, ten days without a word. She is confronting one of the more disconcerting things about love, that it may continue with a life of its own when the loved one is gone. It’s like a limb is amputated, but you still can feel it.

Meanwhile, she is in a quandary about next month. She has to move out, and sounded tired and distraught, so I floated the possibility of our sharing the place for a month or two until she knows what she is doing. It is affordable and has a deck with an eternal view. Ming seemed to soften a little, mulling over the idea, like it was a good one. She asked if I thought I could live with her, knowing how difficult she is. I mentioned my disturbing habits - typing and guitar - and we knocked it around for a few minutes.

Wednesday, March 9, 1994

NOTES

The other day Ming and I were returning on the bus from a long walk. It stopped at Fillmore and a lot of people got on. Then nothing. Two buses went by. People started muttering, how come we're not moving. We were in the back with some older black men and they were not mincing their words. The driver was a black woman who was talking on the side with another black bus driver. One man wondered if they were getting overtime, and another did his "motherfucker" routine.

I was reminded of how the animosities and suspicions of one race for another are often grounded in the animosities and suspicions amongst themselves. It sets a precedent, a critical attitude, especially when those negative currents are running close to the surface, and it doesn't take much from someone of another race to set them off.

From what I have heard and read, there is a hyper-awareness amongst black people as to skin tones, and there is so much black-on-black crime that you could make the case that the occasions of black-on-white crime aren't necessarily racist (or racially motivated), since it is so common within their own community.[70] It's more like a habit, and a rich multicultural experience for the rest of us.

Ethnic divisions are prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa where there are tribal wars all the time. Liberia just got done with an ethnic conflict which wiped out 150,000 people, a country "formed by freed American slaves in 1847." When those freed slaves moved to Liberia, they formed a hierarchy where the returning freed men felt superior to the locals and established a discriminatory government. Things are still shaky, and "an interim government composed of the factions that slaughtered, raped and looted throughout Liberia for 4 years took power yesterday…."

I remember working with a legal secretary a few years ago, a nice woman from Ethiopia. She was capable and dignified, around thirty, dark-skinned, and made the distinction that Ethiopians are "not a Negroid people."

---

[70] Like the Minister of Information for the Black Panther Party said in his book (*Soul on Ice*): "I became a rapist. To refine my technique and modus operandi, I started out by practicing on black girls in the ghetto – in the black ghetto where dark and vicious deeds appear not as aberrations or deviations from the norm, but as part of the sufficiency of the Evil of the day – and when I considered myself smooth enough, I crossed the tracks and sought out white prey." In Cleaver's case, it was racially motivated.

A letter to the editor in the *Chronicle* from a black woman in Oakland. She was responding to a letter from a white woman which had some commiserating liberal sentiments, with her "white face pressed against the window of her Black experience." The black woman refused it and was amazed that "one who is grunting [?] so many complaints against our culture seems to spend an inordinate amount of time indulging in African American entertainment." She said the white woman was having a "cultural identity crisis; or perhaps the poor wretch is confused." Slightly pompous, but it's not uncommon for black people to complain about this country while "indulging" in its entertainments, a few of which are not exactly Afrocentric in origin. There are black people who watch TV and movies, or listen to records or the radio, play the piano or the saxophone, etc., all of which are cultural artifacts of people of European descent.

She ended her letter with, "You have my pity. See, I know that I am the product of a 'chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a called out people.' We are doubly blessed to be children of Jesus Christ, and heirs of a mighty race! Our racial integrity and personhood has remained strongly intact since Nubia stood along the Nile; and when your kind has finally been faded by absorption into the true master and original race, it is only then that war, violence, pestilence and pervasive mental weakness [!] will be eradicated, and evil will no longer be a factor in the human race."

In case one had any doubts about how far the self-mythologizing has gone with some black people, these are not uncommon sentiments – I hear and read about them all the time. They come with an attitude, like when a bus driver has little patience for having to give us unholy types a ride. I come across these beliefs and think if black people had any more self-esteem they would explode. You might think that such a mighty race could handle letters responding in kind, like someone given equal time, but I've never seen a letter from a white person going on in this manner – how blessed and mighty is the racial integrity of being white - much less suggesting that a lot of violence and mental weakness would disappear if black people went away (like there's no war or pestilence in sub-Saharan Africa). For that matter, I was under the impression that the "racial integrity and personhood" of black people had been damaged by slavery, but what do I know?

Given the narcissistic mental weakness of the letter, it sounds good if you don't know anything about history. You would think there was no violence or tribal conflicts in Africa before any Europeans set foot on its royal chosen shores with the mighty personhood of a people capturing their neighbors and selling them as slaves. You wonder where she gets off claiming Jesus Christ to be on her side, these being decidedly unchristian sentiments she's expressing. And what priesthood is she talking about? Everyone in West Africa is related to priests? Were they the ones fathering all the kids? Where does she get off claiming the Nile? Her ancestors were mostly likely from West Africa, like Senegal for example, which is about 3000 miles from the Nile (Nigeria is about 2000 miles). That is pretty far, especially a few centuries ago when people were on foot or

camels, there were few roads, and the terrain could be pretty severe (the Sahara desert, for example).

With those kinds of megalomanic geographical claims and my own racial background of northern Europe, I could claim everything from the Volga River to Spain and ancient Greece and all points in between. It sounds ridiculous, especially since most of the countries contained in my sweeping claim would deny any connection with my historical background, as have modern Egyptians when it comes to the spurious claims of black Americans on the pyramids – a rather massive attempt at cultural appropriation.

It's ironic if I take their superiority complex seriously, thereby showing more respect than those who ignore it, assuming it is hot air from a superstitious people, or they don't really mean it and it's not worth clouding our sunny liberal dispositions over. I think they do mean it, and I don't have a sunny liberal disposition.

An article on Eldridge Cleaver, fifty-eight. He had a crack cocaine problem for a while, and was found stumbling around in a daze, knocking on people's doors late at night. He had some crack on him, and it turned out someone had hit him in the head and there was "bleeding on the brain." There was a "five-hour operation" which utilized non-Afrocentric techniques, though it may have been an Afrocentric blow to the head. "Mystery still surrounds his brain injury" (not to mention his mind).

You wonder if the black community doesn't share some of the blame for how things turned out for him, given his position with the Black Panthers and his book, *Soul on Ice*. How come he ended up with so little support from the community, sounding like he was more or less broke and alone? (He turned conservative, but so what?) The archives of the Black Panther Party had been in storage but he couldn't pay the monthly storage bill and they were finally rescued by the University of California. He left the country in 1968, fleeing prosecution, knocked around North Africa, and returned a changed man in the mid-70's. He was "unhealthy mentally," according to his ex-wife. He was in other countries and realized he wasn't in Kansas City anymore and that shook him to his American-born roots. He returned to face the music, and became a Republican.

Typing and guitar. Went to work in the afternoon.

The Attorney was in court, so there was not much to do. I read the summary of deposition concerning the wife of a man involved in the fight (he was hit in the mouth

with the butt of our client's rifle). She is suing for loss of consortium (adding to the complaint for damages), saying his sex drive has noticeably diminished. This is a woman in her early fifties whose son accidentally killed himself at twenty-one when he was drunk and fooling around with his gun. "She was a virgin when she married her first husband in a Catholic 'dream wedding.' Then she found out he was an alcoholic bisexual drug addict who beat his wife and children. 'After our child was born, he couldn't touch me any longer, because he had a problem with his mother.' She did not leave him until she found him beating their 16-year-old son." She stayed that long?

I talked with an older attorney about the Middle Eastern man who opened fire on a van full of Jewish students, killing one. Why would he be charged with second degree murder and not first? Like it was a heat of the moment situation? He didn't mean to kill anyone, he just didn't like the van?

It's a provocation having militant settlers who "claim a Biblical right to these rocky hills." That's like saying, "We were here 2000 years ago, could you all please leave now?" Given how much of the Old Testament was made up, it couldn't support any real estate claims larger than a burning bush. And when you hear things like, "One million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail,"[71] it makes you wonder what religious chauvinism does to your sense of proportion.

A picture in the paper of an Israeli soldier knocking a woman down with his rifle on International Women's Day.

A Jewish settler with some classic denial: "This is not killing!" (bodies everywhere). "This is revenge… we must struggle to liberate our land," (Our land?

[71] A rabbi at the eulogy for Goldstein, the man who shot forty praying men in the back. So heroic. His mother, however, is proud of him.

Liberate?) "… the land of Israel, and to take out the imperialistic Muslims!" (Take out to lunch? Kill them all? How can they be imperialistic in their own country? But then, "Islam is the poison of humanity." That sounds a little biased. Read the Bible if you want some poison – murder, rape, incest, it's all there (along with some dubious land claims), and half the time it's sanctioned by the Lord.

What got me about the second-degree murder charge (the attorney speculated they plea bargained), we have a client in prison for a drunken heat-of-the-moment argument in which he stabbed his girlfriend, who died. He got second-degree murder, although there were ameliorating circumstances compared to a sober man opening fire on a truck full of people.

5 p.m. On the way to the train station I asked V. if she is hard to live with – thinking of Ming who said she is. It was a question she took seriously, pausing for a moment. "I think so." "Why?" "I'm so neat." She doesn't like messes or clutter, and prides herself on her ability to nag a man relentlessly. Ming found herself doing that, and hated what she was becoming.

I went to the pool and spent half an hour on the weight machines before swimming a mile.

Thursday, March 10, 1994

B. dropped by around noon and we walked to the apartment complex of her girlfriend. The weather was overcast. It's typical how she operates, her mind in a distracted whirl. We got into the building and she wandered around with no idea how to get to the court, a building she has been in many times. I made a straight line to the back

door which opened on the court itself. She thought that was a smart move, but it had more to do with being simple-minded and I said as much. The simple is direct. It is the sort of thing that makes the typewriter and guitar accessible on a daily basis, which she thinks is an awesome discipline on my part. She's been trying to write for years, and lately has been taking guitar lessons, and was astounded when she heard I practice every day. She's supposed to, but can't fit it in, what with her constant distractions and emotional turbulence. When you're living and breathing words and music you enjoy them and employ them all the time. She is living and breathing social arrangements.

B. is still in a quandary over the affair with Ilsa. It doesn't fit into her straight social life. I'm not sure why that matters. We had a nice workout on the court, one and a half hours, during which a heavy drizzle came and went, and we worked up a sweat. She's a strong coordinated woman on a tennis court, wearing shorts and a thin tennis shirt, her long dark hair tied back in a pony tail.

She will admit that she is dizzier these days, and never felt so up in the air, being unemployed and having an affair with a woman. The affair is bringing out a vulnerable side of her. The girlfriend has a butch mentality and drinks too much, while making cutting remarks.

We finished on the court and went to her girlfriend's apartment on the second floor. It was a cozy mainstream layout with a waterbed she doesn't like. She told me to try it. I lay on it as it gurgled and moved, and didn't like it. She said one of her nosy women friends (Phoebe) asked if she is having "bed problems." B. said she didn't know the half of it. Phoebe said the two of them could come over to her place some weekend -

a house of glass and wood on the side of a hill with a guest room. B. thought that was amusing.

Over the waterbed there was a large framed photograph of a model (Lauren Hutton) leaning back in a one-piece suit with one breast exposed. Over the sofa was a framed photo of a naked woman lying on her side with a boa constrictor getting familiar with her contours (Nastassja Kinski). On the refrigerator were clippings and a comic strip that B. had given her, something to do with a lesbian couple snoring and drooling. The woman who lives here has pictures of herself with her ex-girlfriend, but none of B.

The VCR had a few cassettes – one of them was "Get Bi Tonight." I said, "Is that one of those instructional tapes?" She said she hasn't seen it and doesn't want to, but it's probably a sex film. I thought of alternate titles. "Good Bi," or "Bi: The Way."

In the bathroom I stood in front of the toilet and noticed a male organ reflected in the vanity mirror sitting on the back of the toilet.

I had some banana pineapple juice and B. heated up some bagels with salmon and cream cheese and made coffee - one of those scented brands for the estrogenic set. There are women who like whatever is sweet and pretty, not because they're made of those things, but because they're not. They're about as lyrical as a notice from the credit card company. It requires regular infusions of the floral, soft, and scented to make them more human. As Norman Mailer said, "You don't know a woman until you've met her in court."

We were there for half an hour. I sipped my coffee and lowered it half an inch, during which time she gulped down two whole cups and sat there smiling sweetly. I thought that was odd, I'd be sick and wired if I did that. Maybe she has a cast iron

stomach and a slow metabolism. On the other hand, emotional problems don't interfere with my metabolism very much, but hers go right to her stomach. I mentioned it to Ming later. She said it might have something to do with women having a slower metabolism. They have a tendency to put on weight and not burn it off, having more patience than men, up to and including sexual urges.

I said that Ming might need a place to stay and maybe we could share my old place for a month or two until she got more focused. B. likes her, but said I'd better be careful. "You know how women are," not just dominating the domestic, but "they like to wrap a man around their little finger." I was going to say that some men like to wrap a woman around their organ, but I didn't. She takes it upon herself to warn me about the fair sex, like they are possessive and you can't trust them.

Later that night I was talking with Ming and she said she doesn't trust men. Not because they lied and said they loved her just to go to bed with her, but the opposite. They promised they wouldn't fall in love with her if they went to bed with her, who wanted to be detached. Four guys, including the ex-boyfriend. She said that all of them were mistakes, they got emotional and weird, especially when she had to end it. All she wanted from them was sex, and maybe some companionship. When I said it sounded like she was using men for sex she said, "So what?" Then changed her mind, not because she hadn't been, but didn't like the sound of it. Anyhow, weren't they using her as well? Maybe her and a man objectified each other to the extent their physical bodies came into contact.

Meanwhile, B. and I were sitting around, distracted by a couple of cats. "Wouldn't you like an animal?" B. asked. "You mean a girlfriend?" I said. I don't mean

women are animals and men aren't, but affairs between them have an animal basis which accounts for much of the allure – the body, copulation, sleep, and getting into someone's hair. Elemental, my dear.

We walked to my place and parted on the corner with a couple of kisses. She has no intention of sleeping with me, but the kisses and the hugs, the constant touches on my arm, are a little mystifying at times.

Late afternoon, I went to work.

7 p.m. Rendezvous with Ming at the Museum of Modern Art, walking past a hole in the ground for the new library, an excavation for deep thinkers. A network of right angles made of steel is forming in mid-air.

We went in and got absorbed in forty years of work by Jess, who used to live with the poet Robert Duncan. The collages had us in their arbitrary-meticulous grip. You realize the limitations of the optic nerve when trying to take it all in and you can't, especially with a four by six-foot composition. It was covered with random images cut out of magazines, some as small as a thumbnail, a complex hallucination with the objects taken out of context - even as they're taken out of context when remembered in the mind. The forms in their informal riffs, informed by one man's jewel-like psychosis.

It had a lysergic profusion, and was inspired by the cosmic simultaneity of all things (or the Hindu notion that a spark of the godhead exists in everything). A composition coping with a cornucopia of sightings in a non-utopia.

Ming was so inspired she wanted to go home and make collages,[72] especially with this method, applying random images (a kind of recombinant semiology) to a blown-up photograph, say of the Himalayas. It would be a breathtaking background for a visionary breakthrough. Jess had cut up and accumulated images for twenty years, a span of time she couldn't imagine. I could, but I've been around for quite a while, accumulating sentences.

We went from "The Unentitled Graces" to "*De Macrocosmifabrica*." With some of the collages we would kneel on the floor for a close-up, seeing more the longer we looked. There was a half-hidden wit to much of it. A strand of necklace coming out of the sound hole of a guitar. A white bird on a motorcycle. An ordinary man in clothes with a Greek statue coming out of him like an ancient alter ego.

We walked into another wing of the museum, and it was one of the more inconsequential segues I have come across - going from those complicated compositions to an airy empty room of empty canvases. They consisted of white paint. I had told her about it, and how the work of Ryman didn't do much for me. She said maybe it was worth seeing and I was being too judgmental. However, walking in, she said, "Oh dear." She had less interest in it than I did. It occupied two whole wings, these variations on a theme of white paint. It looked like a show where someone had forgotten to hang the pictures, leaving the frames. She said it was insulting how effete it was.

I thought of someone in the horror film, *The Shining*, the writer who got stuck in his mental illness which was manifested by his writing the same line over and over again.

---

[72] The other night she had the water colors out and was doing a free-form composition inspired by the internal organs. There was another picture where she tried to render actual objects, but it didn't work out (an apple and a coffee cup). I said something about the lush capacity of her subjectivity, while being less in touch with reality.

The next minute Ming said, “Reminds me of *The Shining*.” More horrifying than his being in a museum was the fact that this was all he ever thought about artistically for many years. I suppose that gives the work some credibility for the critics - if you do something long enough someone is bound to take it seriously.

I wonder if it constitutes an intermission for the critics who’re confronted with all sorts of sloppy meaningless compositions dredged up from the pseudo-unconscious lagoon of shallow primates, to the point that seeing these white paintings would hit them from an angle of purity and relief (like when you have a test and find out it was canceled). There might even be a connotation of the spiritual if there is nothing there. I said as much, but she didn’t get it. White means pure? Give me a break.

The written comments on his work were a tour de force of making something out of nothing. There was some reference to the “unusually rich range of visual experience he has conjured” (it was the opposite). The fact that that would apply to the work of Jess with far more credibility is interesting, considering how different their work is. The language is a whorish medium which can mean anything you want, as people bend the meanings to fit their own agenda. There goes “a luscious meandering squiggle,” here comes a “broad, emphatic swipe.” We’re talking white paint here.

> Seen close up, the attack, speed, and assurance of his hand are amazing demonstrations of spontaneous control and responsiveness to the sensory and emotional charge of superficially inert materials.

I think he used a roller in some instances, and you have to wonder when there are comparisons to everything from a cellist to Matisse. “Like the work of Matisse… [it]…goes to great lengths to appear simple and effortless.” But it is simple and effortless, and the great lengths must refer to how many miles away his studio is. If it was anymore

simple and effortless the canvas would be bare, and this is insulting Matisse. You could also say that like the work of Rembrandt it involves the medium of canvas and paint and is hung on a wall. As far as cellos go: "… precise physical changes in inflection determine a sound's tone and duration." Somehow he operates on a similar wavelength of "optical resonance," although it's more like the diminishing returns of a resonating silence with no strings attached, which is furthermore referring to the profundity of how it is attached to the wall. "His exploration of what he calls 'fasteners'…" That is pushing the envelope of effeteness, and how far a white man can go with a self-negating presence before he vanishes into the purely inconsequential with such panache that institutions shower him with honors (and people wonder what's the point).

We made up a few titles for the squiggles and broad white spaces: White Larva in a Sugar Bowl. Seagulls in a Snowstorm. A Metaphor of White-Out for the Big Mistake of Modern Art. I had a purple plum in my bag and wondered what would happen if I threw it at one of the "paintings," or at the wall (in its sympathetic whiteness), an act of someone who's plum loco.

There were other things in the museum. A somewhat vacant Dali called "Unsatisfied Desire," which she liked, and a gorilla skull by Francis Bacon, a diaphanous blur of white against a dark green background with the barest hint of some Euclidean straight lines.

Occupying the main rotunda was a large machine contraption, "Project for a Glass Factory," which was ostensibly a metaphor of someone's mind, reminiscent of something by Marcel Duchamp. I checked the program and it said, "…reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's Large Glass," although there was a semi-dysfunctional aspect, having

“conveyor belts that lead nowhere, troughs that are disconnected from their sources, and “disjunctions…” All of which could be a comment on modern civilization.

It was nearly nine when we left, walking a mile to her place. She said she called the ex-boyfriend at work yesterday, and couldn’t stand the brutal silence any longer. It didn’t amount to much, a banal five-minute conversation. He is living at his mother’s place.

We had a bottle of wine, sitting in the kitchen at a wooden table where the skyline seemed to pull up a chair and sit at the table with us. I was in a loosened tie and in a fairly good mood. She was struggling with her life and moods and isolation which has hit her with a sulfurous reality check. After a while we were speaking in point blank terms, like when someone is wounded and you don’t avoid it. I was being as honest as I could while she questioned her history with men.

I wondered if some of this could be explained by her competing with men. The first one to fall in love – even the first one to come in bed – is the weaker one, leaving the other (usually her) with an empty victory.

She has some buried resentments over how she was brought up, being made to feel less significant as a girl, and it seems to be wreaking havoc on her love life. I thought of an ice berg. Not that she has ice water in her veins, or is a threat to shipping, but there is a hidden dimension which can tear the bottom out of a relationship if a man gets close enough. She admits to having a surface persona, like a carefree California type which some men find attractive, but it hides a more complex dimension - including her genetic Chinese background. I said she is psychologically near-sighted and has to get close to a man to see what he is made of. She sort of agreed with that. Sooner or later he might

think it signifies romantic feelings, but then he runs into a wall which says, “I’m not an easygoing girl, I am a domineering Chinese woman.”

She likes being friends with men because she was a man in a previous life. I’m beginning to believe her, seeing as how she is a little vague about feminine behavior. But our lives are complicated enough without having to worry about the psychology of who we were in a previous life.

I forgot to mention, before going to the museum she went to look at a room a few blocks away (in Hayes Valley). It’s a comfortable old flat that she would share with an artist woman in her fifties who smokes and loves flowers. She likes the place, though prefers to live alone.

Other topics touched on during the course of the evening: her anger at being left in this situation, not only sleeping alone but having to find another place. She wants a home and some stability in her life, while muttering that she might become “a professional masturbator.” She can always find a man to do the honors, but it might be problematic. They have an annoying tendency of having thoughts and feelings of their own.

Midnight, we were lying on the bed and she was starting to fade out. I had some black cherry tea, having finished the bottle of wine. She said she found a new scent, Egyptian musk, and would like to open a café with a friend, one that is “safe for women.”

It was nearly one when I walked home. The surgical prostitutes were on a horny corner, posing for the auto-erotic drivers as they drove by slowly.

Friday, March 11, 1994

11:30 a.m. Phone call from V. in the office. She wanted me to go with her to file a complaint at City Hall. She likes to have me at her beck and call, while testing my reflexes.

I met her in the office and we walked to the train, glided to the Civic Center, and levitated to the surface, walking past a fountain and reflecting pool. There were some derelicts reflecting on their lack of prospects. We went into City Hall through a metal detector and filed a complaint for personal injury. She spoke in her own language to the Filipino man behind the counter (and later said there was a rumor that the Vice President of the Philippines had been shot).

We walked to the underground station and stood near the tracks waiting for a train. I saw a mouse near the rail. She said there are rats in Manila the size of cats, and there was some mention of polluted canals, political corruption, crime, and rich Chinese (her mother is half-Chinese, and she has a Spanish surname). It was curious how it made her shudder, mentioning the rats, and yet she can sit through the most horrendous horror films without blinking. She has a well-grounded sense of what is real and what isn't.

In the afternoon the Attorney was gone. There was some work, and another phone call from the floozy about the restraining order being brought against her by her ex-boyfriend.

I spoke with the receptionist, who went off on a tangent about the traditional Indian wedding she is planning in June, talking about saris and having to live with her mother-in-law. I wasn't about to bring up the subject of bride burning, but she did - shrugging it off as a fading custom. It depends on the caste. She combines her Indian

background with a modern California foreground, swearing under her breath when the phones are getting hectic or someone is rude to her (often as not a woman).

She talked about her night classes in law school, and if she still wants to be a criminal lawyer. We knocked around some topics in the paper, like the woman in a wheelchair who claimed she was raped on an elevator in a BART station. It turned out the elevator takes barely thirty seconds, no one saw anything, and her claim about the man pushing an emergency stop button was undermined by the fact it doesn't exist. It now looks like a "false report," unless she has taken to heart the increasingly amorphous definition of the word "rape." It can include a man looking at her the wrong way, not to mention the possibility of being "raped" by a movie (as a woman reviewer claimed).

It was an idle conversation with some brutal facts of life and death. There was a pickup full of illegal immigrants which drove off a road in the desert. Bodies everywhere. 12 dead, 8 injured. Forty praying Muslims shot in the back. A "charming" man confessed to having killed four women years ago. These nightmares are incorporated in the morning news like the weather report or stock market fluctuations. Morbid facts that one encounters from a distance, but they become as much a part of one's existence as a wristwatch or earrings.

5 p.m. I walked with V. to the station, who alluded to a deep personal problem. I'm not sure what it was, but it has come up before, saying sometimes all she can do is pray. It might have something to do with her uncertain future or elusive wedding plans. She says her clock is ticking and wants to have kids, but can't do it by herself (not a feminist in that respect).

Walked home and relaxed for a while, then took a bus to the sound-room flat near the Haight. I sat around in the open area with the Phantom and a couple of young women who gave me some stir fry. One was his roommate, the other visiting from Colorado, looking fresh and innocent with short hair and morals. The two of us were having a beer and making remarks with the TV on. “I heard there is no smoking in Colorado.” There was a crumpled bill on the table and I said I had one just like it.

We went downstairs and into the garage where the guys on the ground floor had another wreck to work on, along with deconstructed motorcycles and a jeep with the front end bashed in.

In the sound room I was hooked up to the Les Paul with him on drums. It was a long workout, an hour or so, and then we switched. I haven’t been on drums for a while, but it didn’t take long to get into the rhythm, and there were more of them from an old drum set he had lying around - two bass drums, five or six others, several cymbals, and a high hat. I got some rolling thunder going on the tom toms with a bass drum keeping up. I realized I could use one leg and then the other when one got tired. You can wear yourself out on the drums if you’re not used to it, going on for half an hour or more. It was not an uncoordinated syncopation, there were variations on a theme, along with rim shots and whatever combinations I could come up with while keeping the beat.

The Phantom drifted into his Pink Floyd sound effects, flipping switches and buttons on the equipment. Then we took a break and had a cigarette in the garage, sitting amongst the greasy wreckage and the motorcycle parts, neither one of us having any more interest in cars than knowing where the ignition is.

Back in the sound room, I was on the Les Paul which had gone from an edgy distortion to a clean and quiet sound. I got into a subtle jazzy thing, sitting on a stool with him providing a subdued percussion. We kept that up until the power shut off. Someone in the garage hit the wrong switch and we decided to call it a night. I went outside and had a cigarette on the steps, feeling immensely tired and relaxed after nearly three hours in the sound room.

Saturday, March 12, 1994

A slow morning, especially with the typewriter. It took an hour or more to get something going. I wondered if the drumming last night had torn some mental ligaments, if there are such a thing.

It was a warm afternoon, but I wasn't going anywhere. I lay on the bed for a while with sunlight pouring through the window. If I leave this place, I'll lose the southern exposure. I read the paper. Brutal news that has gotten to the point of sequential photos on the front page. A man pleading for his life, then one dead and another wounded next to a car. A third photo shows them being shot by a man with a rifle, and the last one shows the bodies lying there with blood in the dirt. The *Chronicle* is in the red. The dead man was white, a segregationist in South Africa, the policeman black.

Getting almost equal coverage on the front page was a controversy over a couple of stories by Alice Walker. They were removed from a reading comprehension test for high school students. I'm not sure I care one way or the other, but the rhetoric on both sides is something else. It's hard to call it censorship if the author is published coast to coast and her works are not exactly unavailable to any student who wants to read them.

Even worse, there was a hearing where the whole thing was reversed, a hearing "so emotional that an NAACP representative accused the board of behaving 'lower than Nazis' for withholding the stories." I want to collect examples of rhetoric so bloated, histrionic, and misleading it puts the speaker on the level of a cheap hustle, if not a psycho. It is further evidence of what happens to the language, not to say the rhetoric of oppression – which is undermined when the same words and expressions are used for something like this. There are claims that billboards advertising beer in the black community are "genocidal."[73]

There were millions of people in concentration camps and mass graves who might like to know that a black woman was worse off in this country because a couple of her stories were deemed unsuitable for a high school reading test. Such oppression boggles the mind, and makes the resistance all the more heroic.

The arguments for removing the stories are kind of weak – one woman thought a story was too "violent" (a snowball fight). Consider the endless homicides that high school students have been watching on television for their whole lives. And Alice Walker had an "anti-meat eating" message which was thought to be disturbing (to the meat industry). I read her story, "Am I Blue," in the paper. It was another example of a story being assessed for something other than its literary qualities, and as a story by a living writer it's a good case for reading those who're long gone. There are stories, including by some dead white European males, which have qualities along the lines of structure, characterization, and balance which students should be exposed to, rather than this chopped liver of proselytizing prose. It read more like an editorial or a column in the

[73] This might explain the declining populations of certain European countries where beer signs are ubiquitous.

paper where the writer pivots off a warmhearted reference to a horse into every politically correct issue she can think of. It's like a sermon which is sophomoric as a literary effort, with the author telling the reader what to think, rather than demonstrating something through a character. I'm not even sure how accurate she is as to the feelings of horses, getting close to the Anthropomorphic Fallacy.

"Those who have been taught that animals actually want to be used and abused by us, as small children 'love' to be frightened or women 'love' to be mutilated and raped…." Say what? I was never taught that women love to be mutilated, I must be out of the loop. This is sloppy with its generalizing and presumption, and for that alone the story doesn't deserve to be on a test.

A stud horse was allegedly suffering with a "look so human" when the female horse who was his "friend" (initially he "appeared to be afraid of it") became impregnated and was taken away. I'd like to know if stud horses form an emotional attachment to the mares they are presented with, and if they copulate with more than one. If one is taken away, does the look "so full of grief" in the male horse's eyes have more to do with wanting to copulate some more, and if you brought him another mare would the grief would go away?

The story is even more weird when you consider the final message. "As we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks." Not exactly horsemeat, but she transfers whatever noble sentiments and emotions she found in a horse to the meat of a cow. People don't usually eat horses, but she mentions "munching hamburgers advertised by bulls of integrity who seem to command their face." What does that mean? She takes a bite of her steak and then in a gesture of freedom and justice for all decides to

"spit it out." This in a story which is steeped in racial reference and the black experience. I thought of all those greasy rib joints, and the possibility that more whites than blacks are vegetarians.

In which story she manages to touch on slavery, Indians, the multilingual, loud music, meat eating, rape, and mutilation. It took up less than half a newspaper page.

There were dusty old cliches about "white children who were raised by black people." I don't think that's very common these days, and if anything it's the other way around, given the welfare state, adoption programs, and the lack of black servants in private homes. And how dare a white woman say she doesn't understand blacks, "They're so different from us." It makes her look dumb or worse, and yet that has been the most pervasive strident message being broadcast from black rappers and writers for many years – that anyone who isn't black can't possibly fathom how profound it is to be black. In other words, "It's a black thing, you wouldn't understand." You see how an opportunistic universality (we're all human and equal**)** is combined with a dubious exclusivity (get your hands off our separate and superior culture), and more hypocrisy than you shake a radio at.

Even worse, there was this controversy about her being censored when at the same time she was being given the Governor's Award for Literature (refused, then accepted), and will be declared a "State treasure" at a ceremony by the Governor of California. How self-righteous can someone get before it undermines her credibility, or is the latter a moot point in a country of the self-invented? There is not much of a sense of proportion when the Board of Education is "lower than Nazis," and the Governor's Award = censorship.

Late afternoon I went out, making the rounds, and bought a typewriter ribbon. I walked to the library and dropped off some books. I wanted to check out a few, but there was a problem. They sent me a notice which was returned, needing a verification of my address. For my zip code they had 00000. I told them the zip, not good enough. They need to see it on something. I showed them my passport (my ID was stolen by a young black man last year). No go. I had to leave the books behind.

I went upstairs, looked around, and noticed a book by the black woman journalist for the *New York Time*s and read some of it.[74] I felt sympathy for black men if this is what they have to deal with. She talks with a straight face about her "tremendous ability to enjoy sex," like that's so hard. She refers to the men passing through her life and compares the latest one to a cockroach. Her family views him as a minor passing phenomenon, but she goes to visit him (a black mortician). On arriving she wants to "make sure to rub my breast on his chest," so he knows she is there (though thinking it will be the last time). His eyes "get sexual." In the next line she puts him down. "What I love about men and pussy, it makes them so predictable."

I'm thinking, what's wrong with this picture, with its pretentious and controlling attitude? It sounds like the man can't win. If he responds in the solicited manner, he's predictable. If he doesn't, she could call him any number of things. Later I ran it by Ming on the phone. She said that women are capable of objectifying men, but wasn't sure that "predictable" in this context was a put down.

---

[74] Jill Nelson, *Volunteer Slavery* (1993)

The woman has an ego bigger than *The Washington Post*, and managed to belittle her job there. Is this a defense mechanism after black people were left out for so long? The Civil Rights movement wanted integration and jobs and schooling, but as black people have gotten into schools and jobs the old image of a noble suffering man or woman is often replaced by a petulant arriviste. Whatever position was struggled for is suddenly not good enough, or is too obviously the product of people of European descent (who have the nerve to inhabit their own institutions), so she has to put it down.

She also manages to belittle blackness, talking about her "authentic Negro experience," by way of a boring middle-class perspective (where black men don't come off very well). Maybe everything is reduced when pushed into the background, while her ability to enjoy sex occupies the foreground, sounding like the skewed perspective of a modern woman with her head up her cunt - in which position it is harder to appreciate or even read *The Washington Post*.

I walked home.

7:30 p.m. Phone call from Ming (I left a message). She sounded upbeat, having driven with a woman friend, M., to a swap meet in Marin and then Bodega Bay. On the way back M. was distracted on a small road and ran into a trailer in front of her which had stopped. Her front end was crumpled a bit.

There was more talk about their plans to open a café someday which is "safe for women." I wasn't sure what she meant by that, aren't most cafes safe for women? Are there cafes where women are assaulted or abducted? She said it would have plants and wood and artwork, so maybe it would be aesthetically safe, and function as a place for

organizing. I asked if it is just for women. Well no, they want men's business too. I said if it's geared to women to such an extent that women would notice and appreciate, wouldn't that discourage some men, and if it wasn't, how would women know it was a café with their own interests in mind, whatever those are? She was just as vague about the financial side, though we knocked around some numbers. That reminds me, when she was in college she said she wanted to be a consultant. "A consultant for what?" "I don't know, just a consultant."

Her and M. considered filing as domestic partners in order to get a tax break. I said, "You might have to live together." "Oh right." They would have to prove a lesbian relationship, and how would that be done? M. is almost out of college and on the bookish side. Ming said she is critical of men, and hardly ever has one.

We talked about astrology, with her having gotten a book on it. She is not that familiar with the subject, but is looking for guidelines anywhere she can find them (the ex-boyfriend is a Virgo). She gave me the rundown on Scorpio and Aries and their mutual planet (Mars), as well as a mutual planet which is shared by everyone (Earth). I said I see astrology as a metaphor of the interlocking complications in our characters, with the sun and moon and planets in their endlessly shifting combinations. She wants to have her chart done.

Then she read a description. "Oh dear." There was the usual stuff about Aries ruling the head and Scorpio ruling the sex organs. The latter kept being mentioned, along with references to being difficult. There was some mention (again) of her having been a man in a previous life, which she thinks explains the contradictions in her life, being unclear about the eternal feminine for one thing. She would just as soon wear flannel

shirts and drive a forklift, and she has a phantom penis (which she told me about). She said she hadn't thought about it in a while. "Does it come with batteries?"

The conversation was stretching into epic proportions with an opera in the background, and I was relaxed. It eventually bottomed out with her reiterating what she has been going through, having been abandoned by the boyfriend. She isn't crying anymore, but is torn with conflicting emotions, blaming him and blaming herself. There is a lot of friction in her, and some unsuspecting man will be on the receiving end. "I feel sorry for my next boyfriend."

I heard about her agenda for the future. It was goal-oriented to a fault, although I shouldn't fault it, I could use some of that myself. There is a lot she wants to accomplish, while insisting there will be no room for men, and would like to do without them for a couple of years. "I'm insatiable anyway."

The conversation wandered all over the place. During an intense moment in the neighborhood five or six fire engines pulled up down the street, the red lights reflecting on my walls with screaming sirens. A long ladder reached to the top floor of the Hotel Senator. I thought it was a false alarm until I saw smoke pouring out of a sixth-floor window.

We were on the phone for over two hours. She suggested I come over, have dinner, and spend the night, but we went on talking. I finally got off the phone and walked over around eleven with a bottle of wine, ground coffee, and some old magazines she wanted to cut up. The conversation was more subdued in person compared to the intense connection on the phone, or maybe there wasn't much left to say.

We had wine with the meal and went to sleep around 2:30 a.m.

Sunday, March 13, 1994

7:30 in the morning with the room flooded with light. Ming bounded out of bed, made coffee and tea, and did some sit-ups. I was slower. She stood at the foot of the bed in shorts and a T-shirt, lifting her shirt up and sticking her stomach out. She showed me a picture torn out of the paper of what she wants her hair to look like, being bored with its present state. There was an article about girls discriminated against in school which made her grumpy.

Mid-morning, we walked to the Civic Center for the farmers' market. It was getting hot (breaking records, reaching 81). She loves it there, with its echoes of an ancient custom, strolling through the oranges, honey, nuts, and flowers, and the dead fish still in shock. We returned to her place where I made an omelet in the wok, with her throwing in too much broccoli.

In the afternoon things reversed themselves as far as who had more energy. I was ready for the cliffs, but all she could manage was the roof, which is where we ended up. She lay a blanket down with a view of the city, though nothing compared to sand and rocks and waves. She couldn't believe how lazy she was being, compensating for her stress by lying in the sun in a bra and panties with a straw hat. I followed suit in a pair of men's briefs with her providing the lotion.

We had a pile of newspapers. She likes to read entire articles aloud, including a report on the Lorena Bobbitt trial (a little behind on her reading). She has no sympathy for either one of them. There seemed to be a theme running through what she read aloud, mostly sexual stuff from the personal ads. The ones by women were as dumb as those by

men, in her opinion. An advice column by Isadora: A woman wrote in saying she likes smaller penises (four to five inches when erect) because she likes rough sex and also when it comes to blow jobs. A smaller one is more convenient.

For a woman who claims to have a critical distance from the feminine, her lingerie is giving her away. The bra was a floral lacy thing (36-C) which was not unwomanly. Her white cotton briefs had a little bow with a floral embroidered pattern in front, and see-through lace with her black pubic hair showing through. Occasionally, to reassure herself, she would lift up her briefs and peer down.

Late afternoon we went downstairs and hung out for a while, negotiating the next phase, and she consented to going to my place.

6 p.m. We left with her mountain bike. I wrestled it into the elevator, descended seven floors, and got entangled in the narrow hall, turning it around, though hamming it up, and by the time I rode out the front door and nearly hit a tree she was laughing, and insisted on handling the bike herself, saying she was worried about me.

We walked to Polk Street, picking up a few things. I got hold of the bike again when she was shopping for curry, which led to a bicycle burlesque routine the rest of the way. Weaving on the sidewalk, not used to the brakes, and she claimed I nearly went through a window. I don't know if I would risk my life in order to make her laugh, but she could use some relief.

At my place there were messages from B. and the Czech woman. Ming thinks there are women whose attentions I'm resisting. Maybe so, I'm not very motivated unless it feels like true love, having (for better or worse) known that before. It's what I'm used to, almost since I started sleeping with women. I said I wasn't interested in a half-assed

routine, an affair of convenience, and she nodded. I mentioned I've been sleeping with women for as long as she has been alive.

7 p.m. *60 Minutes* on the tube. Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista movement. The Mexican government has not been treating the indigenous people very well. Marcos, a writer and professor, was in a ski mask, and he has the integrity of someone working for the people. We were being informed, however, that Mexican women think he's good looking (even in a mask), and have dreams about him which they don't tell their husbands about. "I dreamed I met a revolutionary in my Maidenform bra… his efforts to improve the lives of the poverty-stricken make me hot."[75] It doesn't have much to do with the bleak survival conditions of the Mayans. Men have dreams about phantom women, but what does that have to do with the price of bread in Mexico?

A segment on a boy with a terminal disease given massive doses of radiation so NASA could find out how much a human being can absorb (twenty-five years ago).

A segment on a paroled convict (homicide) who got out after seventeen years, went to law school (in the top four percent) and passed the admittance test. There was a controversy though.

For dinner she made a curry concoction with too much grease and oil. I made rice and fried the ling cod with green peppers. Ming had a Bloody Mary, using a bottle of Finlandia vodka which I've had for a year or two. After the meal I made a screwdriver. Vodka and orange juice compared to a Bloody Mary, we have our differences.

Dinner by candlelight with the tube on. *Dead Again,* with her in the mood for zoning out. There was vodka on a Mexican blanket and an arbitrary mystery to get her

[75] This is conjectural on my part, and not an actual quote.

mind off her problems. You wonder if films are convoluted to divert attention from a stressful job or lousy love life. The dramatic plot twists of a movie reflect the effort of pulling a viewer away from their private concerns.

When it was over, we sorted out the storyline about previous lives and karma. A man and woman were reincarnated in their next life, but didn't know each other, especially since their genders were reversed. We sat on the bed, leaning against the windows. I was finishing my first drink while she was finishing her third, and reiterated something she brought up recently - that I'm in touch with my feminine side. I said, "It's true that I'm intuitive," but she was skeptical. "What if I said I'm not in touch with my feminine side?" she asked. "That would explain a few things," I replied.

When it was time to go, she took the mountain bike to the elevator, descended three floors, and went out the front door. There was a warm kiss and she rode off into the night. Back in the apartment I picked up the wooden instrument and got absorbed in a vodka-modulated effort for an hour.

Monday, March 14, 1994

I met V. in the office and walked to a small park on the edge of Chinatown. She wore a skirt and brought her certificates of achievement to show me, signifying how well she did in accounting, for example. The last thing I think about, in regards to her, is accounting. There was also a picture of her at fifteen in her Catholic school girl outfit.

In knowing her it seems like I am staying in touch with love, or the reflex at least (if you don't use it, you lose it). And though she is restrained, there is something coming through. The other day she brought me some leftover sweet and sour sole she made the

night before. I had it on Saturday afternoon. Things tend to slide into a perfect moment when I'm with her. There is a sense of completion, even at a certain distance. We are chaperoned by an office, and yet sympathetic connections can evolve in those repressed conditions. Depending on the circumstances, love could be a momentary fading glimmer or a full-blown fire that goes on for years. It could be generated in a formal setting, or a wavelength which two people have to lay down to remember. It's rejuvenated by the turning of the earth.

It has a mind of its own, with a legendary capacity for wreaking havoc on ambitions, plans, and categories. It is transcendental in that respect, cutting across the lines of race and income while not caring who is married to whom. It shows up like a breast of fresh air in unlikely circumstances and – like air – it is so subtle you might overlook it. It can border on the telepathic and is effortless in that respect, but the consequences are disturbing. When two people have an ethereal evanescent current being generated between them, like a beam of jasmine-scented light, it's one of the higher pleasures. It is thought to be a drug, which is habit-forming, and when you lose it the withdrawal symptoms last for months. It is someone else's soul you're breathing in and out, and they're inhaling yours. Some essence of their spirit gets into your bloodstream, circulating through your mind – it lifts the burden of your own existence.

In the office things were getting urgent towards the end of the day. The Attorney was stuck in a trial out of town (Superior Court), but he neglected to tie up some loose ends here, such as having a court appearance in another trial tomorrow. I had to call the office of the Judge and talk about it, who was not impressed with the Attorney's plight. It

was the usual story of his having had warnings, supposed to file a Motion for Continuance and hadn't, and was only notifying them today.

Early evening, walked home.

7 p.m. Phone call from Ming, which was unexpected. She sounded enthusiastic, having been talking on the phone to the older woman with the flat in Hayes Valley. They decided she should move in and she was stoked. Ming has a profound luck when it comes to finding a room. It was the first one she looked at, and just what she wanted (outside of living alone), not wanting to be around younger people or college students, much less male potheads who're looking for a girlfriend. She wanted an older woman in fact, someone who was "immersed" in what they do and not too "needy," being self-reliant. This business of immersion is a constant refrain of hers. She wants to be immersed in something (beyond her bath).

The woman with the flat is from New York and sounds like a successful artist. They get along, she smokes, and the place is funky and beautiful. She thought I should come over and bring some beer. Half an hour later I showed up with four Mexican beers and a sprig of potent jasmine blossoms which I tore off a tree as a police car drove by with flashing lights.

I sat on the bed with the room a complete mess, the lair of a girl who throws or drops things everywhere, revealing a certain turmoil in her life. I noticed a half-empty tube of something by the bed and picked it up. I said, with her in the kitchen, "What do you use LUBRICATING JELLY for?" She walked in and didn't hesitate, "It's for my bike." Then she said it's for her vibrator.

Red beans and rice with whole wheat tortillas, salad, and Mexican beer.

Then we were on the floor. She had a large pad and I had a couple of pens. We started a spontaneous composition, not too rational, but she didn't mind. On the radio was a special on the bluesman, Freddie King. After a couple of hours on the floor she lay on the bed, regressing to a little girl, wanting to go from the absorption of a composition to the absorption of oblivion. She was fading out while I got my things together, turned out the lights, said goodnight, and left.

Tuesday, March 15, 1994

In the morning there was a phone call from B. Her last message sounded shaken, at the point of tears. Things are not going well with the other woman. They had another fight on Sunday night, which she is still trying to come to terms with. It's the first time she has been with a woman, and has had enough of her sharp tongue, condescension, and emotional flux.

I don't think that B. has ever had a full-blown love affair, and there seems to be a woman-to-woman dynamic which is falling short of GODDESS SQUARED. The only other person she has mentioned this affair to (however circumspectly) is Phoebe, who told her that women train a critical eye on others in order to avoid their own chaos.

I'm getting a view of women like the shot in *Blue Velvet* where the camera zooms in on a suburban lawn until it is in the grass and you hear a manic insect buzz that is a far cry from benevolent. I sometimes wonder if that is what's inside of women. What if they are full of static, a form of paranoiac self-protection with some psychobiological causes, not to mention guises (I wrote guesses). A woman's body is a "hostile environment" for a man's seed, attacking it with white blood cells. What if she is psychologically a hostile

environment as well, and given to the artificial (like the Bride of Frankenstein, whose marriage prospects were admittedly not very good)? Rather than expanding her horizons she would rather cut a man down to size to make him manageable, discarding whole vectors of his character and life. She ends up with a walking reduction who will not distract her from the comfortable assumption of her own superiority (it's rhyming with security).

I postulate some harrowing views of women which are not unrealistic, but that doesn't mean I am immune or couldn't fall in love with someone. I've been fortunate in most of my experiences,[76] and haven't encountered any castrating witches (I know, there's still time). They probably wouldn't bother with my ambiguities, rough edges, and low income.

B. said her girlfriend accused her of being absentminded and not listening. Some things don't take hold in her mind, and there is a constant struggle for some discipline and focus, having a very active social life.

I thought of one of our clients, the overweight floozy who dropped the rape charges against a man in order to get back together. She has a capacity for hysterical monologues, and I began to wonder if body fat has anything to do with it, if it's a kind of insulation which preserves a stagnant form of self-importance. Something is protecting her from an objective view of things, and she is spewing her reactions while not listening to the facts. I called her last night to let her know the hearing on the restraining order brought against her (by the boyfriend) (which she found infuriating) was postponed. I

[76] A childhood memory just floated up – a small town in Wisconsin where my father had a church. I was five or six and playing outside with a few kids. An older girl walked up and hit me on the side of the head with a muddy club with a nail in it. It was my first encounter with a feminist (this was in the 1950's). I was bleeding, and had to have stitches in my ear (the scar is still visible). I don't know why she did it.

was in a hurry and wanted to let her know so she could relax. It wouldn't occur the next morning, and the Attorney would get back to her. It was like talking to a slow-moving whirlpool that couldn't assimilate straightforward information. She had to move it around and around in a shallow redundant manner before something would sink in (like she had to stir it into her mind). I had the impression it didn't register when I said, "The hearing is postponed." That is what she wanted, but she didn't believe me. "Are you sure…does the opposing counsel know… does the Attorney know?"

Typing for a while.

Phone call around noon from the Actress. She was at work and sounded bemused, if not morose, having blown it last night. She called the ex-fiance (it's been four months), the affair having crashed and burned. She wrote him a long and vicious letter which blamed him for everything. I think she had a hand in driving him away, and yet the lack of him has had an impact on her.

The dynamic of the affair was such that she was 150 percent of her usual self when they were together. Filling up with his energy and presence made her over-confident and cavalier with her criticism of his habits. (Her women friends recognized the symptoms and were waiting for the fall.) When he finally cut out after numerous fights and arguments (not saying he was easy to live with), she felt reduced to 50 percent of herself. That makes it hard for her to understand her feelings now, having run out of insults, so why does she miss him? Or does she miss a way of life which had its pleasant moments? The emotions get so tangled and contradictory you can't sort them out.

I mentioned the old notion of love having a life of its own, where an aura lingers after the dream has fallen apart. She made it worse by calling him after a long time with

no communication, something she can't stand, but hung up on him. He sounded neutral or indifferent. She found that depressing, and asked how long it takes to get over these things. Do they linger more when one is older, like physical injuries? Your life may level out in your thirties, with the good things being constant, but the bad things have a slower recovery period – not days or weeks, but months and years.

She said she won't be opting for her old methods - when an affair was over she would find three other guys within a month to fool around with. She could have one-night stands every night if she wanted, but it doesn't interest her, having done it before (the thrill is gone). She needs a heavy dose of the authentic to get on with her life, but it doesn't come around every day.

I went to work in the afternoon. The Attorney was in a court out of town, but there was some work. He is on the verge of blowing appearances in two other cases.

Walked home.

7 p.m. Phone call from the Czech woman. She was getting off work and said she would drop by. Half an hour later she showed up with two large bottles of Kirin beer. We sat at the round wooden table with her looking like a crazy woman with her recent hair change. It was black and frizzy, sticking out a bit, with her in an animated state, nervously smoking clove cigarettes and drinking both bottles (I had half a glass), and saying how insane her life is in the United States. More and more she wants to return to Prague.

She magnifies the ordinary, or is it just the people in her immediate vicinity. Some things are blown out of proportion, like the incident in the bar last week. It still looms large in her mind, though she doesn't remember slugging the guy or her woman

friend at the Elbo Room (they have made up). All she remembers is a young white guy spilled beer on her. She had an angry response, and he responded by saying she deserved it and she lost her temper.

Her friend is a Jewish woman from Sweden, a psychologist who claims to be thirty-one. The Czech woman thinks she is forty or more, but won't say anything. And sorry to admit it, but she keeps running into women with a double standard when it comes to dishing out criticism, but they can't take it. The psychologist took up with a cousin of the Czech woman's ex-boyfriend, who the Czech woman thought was beautiful (he's from Chile). Then she heard her friend putting him down, saying, "His butt is too big… has a small dick." It left the Czech woman wondering how she can say those things, like her own body is perfect. She was being tactful, but said one could find imperfections in the woman's body without looking too hard, even with her clothes on.

She referred to the man's cousin who she had an affair with some years ago, also good looking, but with little compunction to be nice to women. I said he probably didn't have to, knowing they would come after him for his looks and he might have a slight contempt for that. She looked stunned for a minute.

There was some mention of another ex-boyfriend, the poet from Mexico who killed himself a few years ago (because of her), and since then she hasn't been with anyone on a significant level. It took the wind out of her sails, not realizing how serious he was about their relationship, and what it would do to him if she walked out. When she broke up with him a second time, he took some pills and let his mother find the body.

We talked about what a strange life she has had, having grown up in a country occupied by the Soviets, though relatively comfortable (her father is a pharmacist). She

has a strong sense of identifying with the working class, but living on a low income in the U.S. is a drudgery, especially with a ten-year-old son, and she doesn't like Americans very much.

She told me about a Czech writer who wrote *Love and Garbage* (a bad translation, she thought). I know the book, but never read it. I prefer Milan Kundera, but she said he's sexist, and mentioned her preoccupation with Bagwan Rashneesh.

She asked what I've been doing lately. I mentioned doing this or that with Ming and she had a wry response, reiterating her belief, or was it accusation, that I'm in love with Ming. It's obvious that we love each other, considering how much time we spend together. It's hard to figure out where it's going, but maybe it doesn't have to go anywhere, it just exists, a responsive dimension we commune in. Ming is careful not to compromise it by getting too close. The rapport exists and flourishes at some remove with breathing room. She knows how things get twisted and possessive when she's sexual with a man. Few of those connections in the past have lasted very long.

The Czech woman left around ten with a kiss and a hug at the door, saying we should get together more often.

Wednesday, March 16, 1994

I met Ming downtown for lunch. She was having a nice morning in the office, then made the mistake of calling the ex-boyfriend. He sounded neutral and unconcerned, and it left her in tears. Now in a bad mood.

I went to work. Towards the end of the afternoon there was a phone call from the Filipina woman with a lawsuit against her employer, the U.S. Post Office. It went on for

three-fourths of an hour and I was walking a diplomatic tightrope. She wanted to know about her case, with the Attorney gone and not communicating very much (he was on the verge of blowing an appearance in her case on Friday, being out of town). She was asking questions, but it's not for me to give out legal advice, even if I could. I diverted it by having her review the case, and disguised my skepticism by suggesting how the court might view the charges and requested damages.

I found myself saying, "You don't think $500,000 for 'emotional distress' is a bit much? Do you know how much $500,000 is?" That's along with $500,000 in punitive damages, and another cool million for breach of contract. She said in fact it isn't enough, she is going easy on the government. The woman has absorbed the full-blown rhetoric of discrimination and harassment. It wasn't sexual or racial – it was her not getting along with other women, most of whom are black or Hispanic. But it constituted a conspiratorial oppression of a woman who is standing up for her rights and assuming she is as important as the entire U.S. Postal Service – even saying she doesn't know why the "bigshots in Washington D.C." didn't fly out to observe her trial. I was at a loss for words, considering the subjective egomania of this woman. She wants $2 million for occurrences like a woman saying, "You're unbearable to work with."

And she is, from the sounds of it. Not just hyper-sensitive, but thinking in terms of petty power struggles and vague conspiracies, combined with an overbearing sense of entitlement. Another woman called her a "5-letter word beginning with 'b'" (I was going to say, "Banal?"), but in Spanish. A woman accused her of not having a washing machine, I mean really monumental stuff, which for some reason the U.S. Postal Service

is responsible for, having nothing better to do than engage in a conspiracy against this woman (not the other women, just her).

Other forms of harassment: She was on leave for a funeral and was asked to bring some verification of it. Or when pregnant, asking for "light duty," the black woman supervisor said no, it would be discriminating to give her special treatment.

You would think most of this could be settled, even if she has a valid grievance, through the usual channels. For that matter, the Post Office has tried to be accommodating, offering to transfer her to another branch. I brought it up, which amounted to calling her bluff. She said they would discriminate against her there as well. I finally asked, as tactfully as I could, if she is hard to work with, since all of these people seem to think so. "No, of course not."

We were finally off the phone, but it left me wondering about her worldview. She has an inflated sense of her own importance which is magnifying any trivial slights to her tremendous dignity as might occur from time to time with fellow workers, but it's kind of extreme to bring a massive lawsuit for it. I told her the Attorney I work for talks a lot worse to me – should I sue him? I mentioned it later in a memo, saying for punitive and compensatory damages I would settle for $100,000.[77]

In her complaint there are allegations like a few years ago she wasn't given five minutes to wash her hands. I said it would be ironic if she got $2 million and wouldn't have to work again for the rest of her life. She said, "That's just what they want." Say what? There are boxes full of paperwork, including depositions, on this flimsy case which the government has to take seriously or it would be accused of mistreating a

[77] The person who worked here before me was a woman and he had to be careful how he spoke to her. He can speak freely having a man working for him (one reason he is reluctant to fire me), but it goes both ways.

minority person. God knows how much in attorneys' fees it has cost the government, and why she deserves more than a transfer and a symbolic award of $1000 is beyond me.

The emotional lacks a sense of proportion, but I'm not sure the law can operate on that basis, or take into account the fluctuating magnitudes of a plaintiff's subjectivity.

It reminds me of the trip and fall cases which are mostly from women. A sidewalk has an irregularity of one inch and a woman trips, suing the city for $10,000. In her magnified view of things one inch would seem to be life threatening, a dangerous obstacle which needs a warning sign. Most people would consider it minor and hardly worth mentioning, but is the government responsible for those subjective magnifications? There are feminists who decry this sort of thing, when litigious women portray themselves as being so fragile that the slightest thing becomes a problem, if not a cause for litigation. Who would want to hire them? Not long ago a woman sued a government office to ban the use of scents and perfumes because they bothered her.

7 p.m. I met Ming in the hotel where the pool is. I was in a coat and tie, while she was wearing black tights and a sweatshirt, being in a harried mode. It bothered her that she is suffering and the ex-boyfriend isn't (I think he paid his dues somewhere along the line). She wasn't in the mood to work out so we left, headed for my apartment and picked up something on the way (burrito, fish and chips, a bottle of wine).

We dropped into a hole-in-the-wall place for used books and tapes. A girl band had a naked sprawling doll on the cover. She listened to Peruvian and flamenco tapes, then wanted me to hear them so we were touching heads with the music pouring into our

minds. She wasn't interested in the books I suggested, from Salinger (*Franny and Zooey*) to Solzhenitsyn (*August 1914*), and just wanted to zone out at my place.

We watched a B-movie involving drugs and violence and mercenaries in an Asian country. When it was over she passed out on the Mexican blanket for a few minutes, then got up, walked to the phone and called a cab. Half an hour later she called from her place, lying in bed and talking until she was sleepy again. I stayed up typing, having coffee and finishing the wine.

Thursday, March 17, 1994

On the typewriter in the morning, looking out a window behind the desk (a horizontal black door). There was a crane lifting and lowering steel girders into place in the concrete floor (D7 girder into D7 hole). It was a barren forest of girders not ten feet away. Some of them were the height of the window (on the third floor). Then heavy cross girders were elevated with a forklift and bolted into place. An airy geometry was being erected, but it will eclipse some of the sunlight and a Spanish church in the distance.

I'm leaving, though, having given notice a couple of days ago. It was a last-minute decision, coming down to the wire and I don't know if it's the right move. I'm up in the air about it, and having a dialectical nature isn't making it any easier. I see things in terms of opposing forces, always with the pros and cons (if not the prose and ex-cons). Moving back to where I used to live is hard to figure out. There are reasons for staying here, but how long do I want to be here? The streets are kind of rough, and I would have half the space of the other apartment.

Early afternoon I walked to the library and didn't find much. There was almost nothing on Kandinsky, but something on Miro by Alain Jouffroy (who I met in Paris in 1976, a friend of one of my professors, the surrealist poet Nanos Valaoritis). I checked out a couple of books, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* and *Volunteer Slavery*.

Went to work (I wouldn't call it slavery).

6:30 p.m. I went to the pool and gym for a workout on the weight machines, followed by a watery mile. Then I walked to Ming's place, having been invited for dinner, bringing one beer and a branch of scented jasmine. There was pasta and a salad – she's getting better in the kitchen.

10 p.m. We were talking about surrealism. I mentioned a method I used sometimes for breaking the habit of logical thought, arriving at random unfamiliar phrases and ideas. It involves making sentences from a word where each letter in it is the first letter of a word in the sentence.

This intrigued her, so we were on the floor with a large pad of sketch paper and ended up covering four or five sheets, taking turns, and couldn't stop. She was edified and amused, surprised at the results, the phrases forming in her mind like a radio picking up signals on a strange frequency. The words we used: SLAVERY. MEMORIES. DISASTER. (She chose the last two, and waffled on "memories," but I liked it.)

It went on for a few hours, coming up with lines across the spectrum, from the dumb and absurd to moments where, as Rimbaud intoned, you're present at the birth of thought. She wasn't bad - whatever the problematic physicality of this woman, she has an active and spontaneous mind, that being where we engage each other the most.

<u>Some of my lines</u>:

Somnolent Loretta is atomic, vacuous, electric, and remotely interesting.

The memories of every man are ordinary, and ruined in electric stores.

A divorcee in South America in suggestive tights is exterminating roaches.
Drive into a stormy atmosphere of slippery tornados and ephemeral
remembrances.
The dog is sick and sis has taken eleven relaxants.
A drum is skin, a song is thought, and everyone is wrong.

Some of her lines:

Songbirds longing after vast eruptions. The roses are yellow.

The motors emit mostly optimum rays that are incomparable to egg salad.

Doesn't it seem a little strange that ether can relax?
If doves are inclined to sip alcohol sometimes, then Egypt is ruined.
Down inside start ancient scripture threads evolve the righteous.
Dawn inserted a strong and sticky testimony with evocative realism.

At some point in the proceedings, I couldn't help completing one of hers, beginning with "Most evolved mammals opt to retire…." I said, "… into early senility." She then wanted to compose sentences by taking turns, word by word, with her beginning (in caps).

MASTURBATING… eels… MOMENTARILY… are orgasmic.
REVIVING… their internal… EASE… and suction.

WHEN MEN… are evanescent… THEIR MOUTHS… are open.
TO RHETORIC… inhaling… AN ENCHANTING… smoke.

FAINTED… underneath… CORPSES… of kindness.

And so forth. After midnight I asked if it wasn't late, but she said, "No, this is too much fun."

2 a.m. She got up off the floor, half asleep, and said I should sleep over. Sitting on the edge of the bed she struggled into her red long johns with a flap in the back and this is how she did it: took her shorts off, pulled the long johns up over her legs, took her shirt

off with a T-shirt underneath. Removed her bra from underneath, pulled it out, and threw it aside (hitting the wheel of her bike for some outspoken lingerie).

She handed me an old bathrobe and a few minutes later I lay down next to her and went to sleep.

Friday, March 18, 1994

6:30 a.m. The room was full of morning light. Not enough sleep. She was groaning while lying on her stomach and dying for a back rub. I started with her shoulder and ended up sitting on her butt, doing the usual routine from her neck to her feet. She likes to have her bottom massaged. It might appear suggestive with my being semi-erect, but that is not unusual in the morning and we're used to this routine. It gets her going to have a laying on of hands, and the effort brings me to my senses.

She took a shower, then I took one while she used the bathroom mirror. I had a half-hearted hard-on, like it wasn't sure if it was showtime or not. I dried off, put my clothes on, had some coffee and cereal which looked like hamster food, and went out on a nice morning and rode the bus home.

At work in the afternoon, the secretary at the next desk (Maria) was chattering away, talking about emotional distress and men's cologne (I didn't have much work). Men who wear something called Fahrenheit drive her wild. The fellow in the Army who she was swept away with last week is history, and now she thinks he's "stupid."

There was something about having to watch her figure. I expressed some doubts, what with her being an attractive woman. She said, "You haven't seen me in the shower,"

which is true enough. V. gets tired of her flaunting her figure in the office, but this is someone who has known heartbreak and childbirth by eighteen, and has a jaded matter-of-fact air. She is candid about what she went through at sixteen, going out with a man who was twenty-five and putting a lot of effort into it, planning an expensive dinner out, but he lost interest. She was devastated for days or weeks, not eating and moping about. The woman has suffered, but has a big ego. She is not shy about admitting her strategies with one man or another, and will act like this is her law firm since she is useful and the lawyer is her assistant. V. looks askance at all of this, not impressed with her office skills, or her breasts either.

There was an article in the *Chronicle* to the effect that it's women who choose the man, and not so much the other way around. "In evolution men are just there for the picking." "Males are a breeding experiment run by females, a proving ground from which females can cull winning genes." It's still a mystery "… how women decide which male genes survive and which disappear." This has some curious implications, if a lot of men are jerks. It sounds like women bear some responsibility for encouraging those types, like when they fall for a fascist.

As for males having to put on a show to attract a dormant female – that could be the reason for building a civilization. From fireflies which "flash their own natural bioluminescence," to the city lights at night, the females are being summoned.

There was a study of 1100 personal ads, where "female advertisers seek financial resources 11 times as often as male advertisers…. Women value good financial prospects in a mate about twice as highly as men." It sounds like they're objectifying the opposite sex, or that they have ulterior motives, but that can't be since only men do that.

"Marrying for love" is a "relatively new phenomenon." It is "predominantly western," and "in most places" it is "seen as a lack of good sense."

After work I walked home, ready to collapse from lack of sleep. Then I didn't, feeling somewhat revived.

I went to the sound-room flat near the Haight. I was in the living room with the Phantom and his effeminate roommate. He's a nice guy, but has a faux-jaded attitude, or maybe he is stoned a lot. He grew up in front of a TV, so he's not sure what is real and what is a pose. I suppose there are degrees of this, ranging from men who give no sign of being homosexual to those who wear it on their ruffled sleeves and speak with an accent. I have a harder time talking with the latter. It's not so much the orientation as the affected pose. I keep suspecting there is someone more real inside.

Garcia Lorca had a more extreme opinion in "Ode to Walt Whitman" (1930).

> Not for a moment, Walt Whitman, lovely old man,
> have I failed to see your beard full of butterflies,
> nor your corduroy shoulders frayed by the moon,
> nor your thighs pure as Apollo's,
> nor your voice like a column of ash…

He is less complimentary when it comes to those who're "Emerging in bunches from the sewers, / trembling between the legs of chauffeurs, / or spinning on dance floors wet with absinthe, / … crowds of howls and gestures, / like cats or like snakes, / the faggots, Walt Whitman, the faggots, / clouded with tears, flesh for the whip, / … urban faggots, / tumescent flesh and unclean thoughts. / Mothers of mud. Harpies… / Fairies of North America… / … murderers of doves! / Slaves of women. Their bedroom bitches…." I wonder what he would have thought of writers like Allen Ginsberg or William Burroughs in the 1950's. The poem was written when he was visiting New York City. He would

have been fifty-seven when “Howl” was first read, if Catholic assassins hadn’t left him in an unmarked grave full of moon dust.

Star Trek on the tube, alcohol and marijuana on the table. I said something which was mildly amusing, but which the roommate found delightful, and went on laughing longer than it warranted. A few minutes later the television segued into *Robocop*, and he and the Phantom were a little thrown. There was a news broadcast in the movie with commercials. One of the fake commercials went by them, hardly realizing what it was, even as a satire of commercials.

The Phantom and I went downstairs into the motorcycle graveyard with a couple of cars having their engines repaired. I was hooked up to the Les Paul in the sound room. We messed around for a while with him on drums. He may have taken a break or two. He put a blank tape in the 8-track and we took off on a more methodic stretch which went on for five minutes before he lost the beat and decided that was enough to work on. He now wanted to go back and record other tracks over it.

Except he had to leave again, this time disappearing for twenty minutes or more. I got absorbed in the sound effects with some full speed velocities coming out. I get wired the minute I’m hooked up to the equipment, but maybe there’s some anger inside. I finally got tired of waiting and pushed the right buttons and recorded a ten-minute stretch of a meandering solo improv tacked on to the end of our five-minute effort.

Eventually the Phantom returned and I lay down two more tracks on the shorter number, making for three guitar tracks. The first one had more rhythm with him having altered the sound, and he put in a bass line which was fairly fluid. Now we had five tracks and listened to it again. It wouldn’t hurt to have a more structured approach to music, but

we were losing something, the interplay of veering guitar parts. Something ends up being eclipsed or blurred when there are too many tracks. He wanted to add vocals. I refused, so we stuck with what we had. I got a copy before he made any further alterations, like throwing in mechanical bird calls or a choir.

Earlier, taking one break in about three hours, I sat in the garage and leaned on a car while staring blankly at the auto parts and tires, having a cigarette and coffee and my one beer for the evening. I felt exhausted and fine.

Saturday, March 19, 1994

11:30 a.m. I was at Pier 41, ready for a ferry to Vallejo. No boat. There was a long line and no sign as to what was going on. I had to ask someone – turned out the boat broke down last night, but there's a bus. I took the bus to Vallejo, which when you expect a hydrofoil on a warm afternoon is like expecting a glass of champagne and someone hands you day-old coffee.

I met Jon at the terminal, who was in shorts and brought his dog. We drove through the country to Napa, and passed the mental institute. He said a lot of patients were discharged into the community or half-way houses. A minute later we saw a man meandering down the sidewalk with a distracted air. He was in his fifties with long grey hair and a beard, no shirt, and barefoot.

Jon stopped in an old part of town and we went into a thrift shop where he had seen some heavy overcoats from East Germany. I tried one on. It felt like Soviet economics with a clumsy bulky cut. It was totalitarian grey with brass buttons showing the hammer and sickle. I picked up a pink stuffed bunny rabbit and posed. He bought

some black leather boots recently (East German) and gave me the box they came in – yellow with a black thunderbird on it, flexing its deadly wings while clutching an insignia in its claws, not insignificant.

We walked to a store and bought a yellow inflatable canoe for $200 (with paddles), tied it to the top of the car and drove through the country on a back road to St. Helena, passing through a stunning countryside. The vineyards with their gnarly bare limbs and water lines were ready for spring. Now and then we saw a little tree with pink blossoms bursting in an isolated field, or a lone oak in the open.

We hung out at his house for a while, then drove with his roommate, Elmo, to Calistoga, passing through open terrain in a valley surrounded with wooded hills. Napa Valley has volcanic soil from Mt. St. Helena and is very fertile. There were wineries here and there, and old stone buildings. The plan was to try out the canoe on the Napa River. However, it was more like a stream, moving quietly through a dense thicket of trees in a sunken bed with high banks.

We backtracked a few miles and found a metal bridge over the stream. It was idyllic, with echoes of something we would have done as boys. Maybe that's why we didn't put too much thought into it. I assumed he knew what he was doing, and he usually does. There were some problems with the planning, the idea being to float down the stream from there to St. Helena, coming within a mile of his house. Should the stream be impassable, covered with debris and fallen branches, we would have to carry the canoe around it. If we got stuck, we would be miles from the house and any phone.

We didn't think about that, however, as we struggled with the canoe, carrying it down a twenty-foot embankment to the shallow water. It was loaded with a six-pack of

beer (for ballast). I took my shoes off and got in front. We disembarked on a reflecting pool with the sunlight coming through the branches overhead.

A couple of hours later we were cold and wet, scratched up a little, and disillusioned, having gone through a floating obstacle course. There were stretches of open water floating across a mirror, along with narrow passages with overhanging vines and spider webs. Little spiders kept dropping into the canoe. Smooth interludes were interrupted by obstructions, having to push our way through or get out and carry it around a log. Sometimes the canoe scraped along the bottom it was so shallow.

He thought there would be more water and was a little embarrassed, what with his experience in the woods and country. His late father was a photographer for National Geographic, and he's a hunter. Eventually he was pissed off and cursing the situation. I was in a calm or fatalistic mode, like a city boy who is relieved to be out of town. We finally pushed our way around some fallen branches, got a puncture in one side of the canoe, and were losing air. We dragged it to a rocky shore and continued a short distance. It still floated, but we pulled it out of the water and carried it up the embankment.

We emerged in the middle of nowhere, though I didn't mind, it was so beautiful. Late afternoon with the rays of light slanting through the vineyards. We were not sure where we were or how far from home, but figured it was a few miles. He saw a house half a mile away and headed for it, while I walked over to a tree on the edge of the field. It was bursting into little white flowers with the waning light coming through. There was a small tower with a black propeller turning slowly and the pale specter of a half moon.

The sun went down behind a hill, I put a short jacket on, feeling cold, and walked on a dirt road in his direction. I saw him waving in the distance and passed a farm

through the trees with a few cows standing around, including a pretty blonde one. I kept hearing sporadic gun shots, like someone was hunting, and hoped we hadn't stumbled into someone's firing range.

I met up with Jon. He had phoned Elmo at a stranger's house, got the name of a nearby road, and we headed for it, less than a mile away. I never would have seen this area if things hadn't gone wrong on the river. We would have floated by it unseen or driven on the main road, not knowing what existed out here. It was another instance of failure being informative.

We passed a grove of trees with dry Spanish moss hanging down. A graveyard for stumps, with twenty or thirty strewn about, uprooted from a convoluted existence in the ground. Some rundown wooden houses with a Mexican worker emerging from one, a low-rent situation with a million-dollar view. There was a more established road, and a few minutes later Elmo arrived. We drove back, picked up the canoe, lashed it to the top, and drove home as it was getting dark.

Dry clothes in the evening on the porch with a cigarette and a San Miguel. The canoe experience was an effort, but I was in the mood for something, thinking there were two boats that broke down that day, a ferry and canoe. I was bringing a city-accelerated nervous system to the country where things are slower, and the evening went through our fingers like something precious we couldn't hold onto.

Elmo's girlfriend, Rima (she's part Syrian) got back from the coffee shop where she works. Jon and I went out for something to eat – a retro soda fountain with burgers and fries. When we returned, the others had the tube on. It was a night of low caliber stuff, as if in keeping with a small-town atmosphere.

There was a musical interlude, though it didn't amount to much. I was on acoustic guitar with Elmo working out a rhythmic chord progression on a subdued electric guitar. No piano or conga drums.

Rima went to sleep early, and eventually it was Jon and me with a bottle of wine (*vin ordinaire*). Both of us found the night more edifying than the tube, and were sitting on the porch around midnight, listening to a bird across the street. It was something he had heard the last couple of nights and wanted to record. A lone bird in the void with a reverberating tour de force of audio signals. There were variations on an ornithological theme. We tried to decipher it, and see how many changes it could come up with, a mockingbird from the sounds of it. They imitate all sorts of things.[78]

We walked behind the house in full view of the constellations overhead, Orion and the Big Dipper, and sat on the ground with a glass of wine, absorbing a rural dimension with a half-moon sinking near the western horizon and bare branches in the night. When we went back in he turned the sci-fi channel on, a cheap Tokyo production of King Kong meets Godzilla (with the latter symbolizing the atom bomb).

I went to sleep around one in the morning on a pad in the living room. It was next to a piano with the strings exposed, skulls and feathers and bones on the wall, a rifle, hunting knife, stones, a Mexican blanket, delirious artwork, some ceramics, sound recording equipment, a small amplifier in a net, and a digital clock which had been torn apart and attached to a piece of wood.

Sunday, March 20, 1994

---

[78] My father has an outdoor phone and was up on the hill when he heard it ringing. He hurried down, crossing a wide patio, and answered the phone. There was no one there. A mockingbird in a nearby tree had fooled him by imitating a ringing phone.

In the morning we went for a long walk through the bare vineyards, beginning a block or two from his house. A dirt road passed the occasional house half hidden in the trees and we went to the end, about a mile, and sat under an oak tree. I found a small bicycle wheel, no tire, just spokes and rim. We ended up in a coffee shop with an atmosphere of old ladies and morbid gossip. He had begun the morning with a toke off his marijuana pipe.

Back at the house he gave me some photo-sensitive sheets of blue paper. He works at a nearby warehouse which produces it. You lay it in the sunlight with something on it for three minutes, then bring it inside, run water over it, let it dry, and there is a white silhouette of whatever was on it. He made a few exposures of his dog, a wooden guitar, and two hands holding a flower.[79]

Early afternoon there was a curious interlude. He brought out a guitar in a case (it was Elmo's), then got a long-distance call from his mother in North Dakota. It was a bass guitar, and I provided the bass notes while he talked to his mother on the back porch. Afterwards we sat in the garden, feeling grounded. He pulled out some white radishes and I munched on one, which was pretty fresh. His small dog with black hair was running around, and it was warm out. I was thinking how the morning was slow or uneventful, and yet when I am back in town it will seem like a bucolic interlude compared to the Tenderloin.

I forgot to mention that he showed the video footage last night from his trip to the city a month or two ago. Three-fourths of an hour with jump cuts according to whenever

[79] I'm photo-sensitive in another sense, taking lots of pictures, but I never got around to using the sheets of blue paper.

he decided to start shooting. There was a view of the boat approaching the skyline of San Francisco.

Cut to my neighborhood and a sign: GUNSHOW.

Cut to a few Vietnamese girls in costume walking by.

Cut to me opening the door, looking the worse for wear.

Cut to me sitting on an over-stuffed chair and reading selections of 17th century premature ejaculation poetry, and responding to his questions.

Cut to a long interlude where I'm fooling around on the Strat, providing a sound track for the camera as it pans the surroundings and looks out the window at two hookers walking by in low-cut dresses.

Cut to an odd-looking person across the street.

Cut to the interior with the guitar throwing off sound effects while the camera moves around the place with close-ups from every angle.

Cut to the following morning in a car driven by a woman from Brazil and it's raining.

Cut to a conversation in a café.

Cut to us standing under umbrellas out at the cliffs with a view of the ocean.

Cut to when he's leaving on a boat and focused on a freighter.

It is disconcerting when you see yourself on video and talking with someone. It would be constricting if you became self-conscious, whether or not there is a camera in the room. It feels like an out-of-the-body experience. There were airs and attitudes I barely recognized, and more ephemeral facial expressions than I thought I had. I have to work on my deadpan Buster Keaton look, although I wasn't operating under the most

serious conditions. Ming said she would hardly know me if I didn't have a mercurial flux between the cynical or facetious and the analytic. Not surprising since I'm pushing forty-two in the 1990's, and being typecast never appealed to me. It helps to have a fixed persona when it comes to getting ahead, rather than a smoke screen of elusive attitudes. They throw some people off, even an old friend like Ming, who said, "I don't know when to believe you sometimes."

There are times I say things while pursuing a mental tangent. I have a dry sense of humor and speculative moods (if not exploratory attitudes). Literary side-effects may show up in my conversation, exploring if not floating a depressing worldview. At other times I have a cosmic buoyancy that floats up out of nowhere, in spite of myself. I can't blame others for being hesitant if I project a shifting warm and cold front, even as Ming does. She might assume her pessimism is more consistent, and her speculations grounded in reality, however much that leaves her feeling like a flightless dodo bird.

Where was I, leaving St. Helena with Jon. We dropped by the coffee shop where Rima works.[80] There were bottles of rosemary in olive oil. I talked to her for a while, a student at Sonoma State who is learning photography. She was driving in the country when she saw an old car near the side of the road. She pulled over, took her clothes off, and lay in front of the wreck, using the automatic timer on her camera.

We also stopped at a nursery, looking for praying mantises to keep the insect population down in his garden. The male p.m. has two operating modes or urges – head

[80] In a later conversation she told me about her friend, a Korean student with strict parents who don't want her being friends with a white woman. Rima thought that is racist, and her friend has to hide the fact that she hangs out with "ghosts" – which is how her parents refer to white people. They want her to marry a rich Korean man, but she is resisting, and is giving Jon mixed signals as to her sexuality.

and sex organs. When copulating with a female the latter will bite his head off, that being the more expendable end of him.

On the way to Vallejo, he talked about a young woman who works at the nursery, wondering if she would come to his house and look at his roots. He has an awareness of possible women in St. Helena, but there are not many, and he's been going without for a long time. I get involved in my own problems and forget how they're not uncommon. There are men who are ten or twenty years younger, not bad looking, gainfully employed, and they sleep alone. Rumor has it that it's easier for a woman to get laid than a man, and she has the additional advantage of being able to shut it off, becoming dormant or disinterested. But manipulating men from behind a smoke screen of the feminine isn't easy, and they often have a harder time in bed.

Where was I, digressing on the way home. Jon drove me to Vallejo and dropped me off at a boatless dock. I took a bus back to the city where a low-key evening lay in wait.

10 p.m. I was reading *Volunteer Slavery* when the phone rang. It was Ming, returning my call. It was one of the more chilling conversations we have had in a long time, maybe a reality check. Sometimes what she does with other men will jar me out of a warm communion, and I remember who I'm dealing with.

It was underwhelming when she said she hung out with a friend on Saturday night - long hair, early forties, a reformed alcoholic. Not a bad fellow, but it's hard to imagine her spending time with him. And yet I get along with people who she wouldn't have much to say to. More to the point, the two of them had an evening with the same

coordinates as one of ours, as if those are the main thing and the men are interchangeable – TV, art, guitar, she fades out early and sleeps over.

What turned me off was the subject of an old boyfriend. He called her out of the blue from four or five years ago. It was one of her horrendous breakups, but the way she described the relationship and how it fell apart made me wonder. She admitted that with "two Scorpios" there were power struggles. She told me about it a long time ago, but I hadn't realized how intense her second year of college was.

There were jealous intrigues with two men, and she opted for the second one. It lasted for a year or more. His father was a priest who left the church because he was a homosexual, and his mother was a lesbian. He was drunk at a party one night and committed the intolerable act of kissing a girl. I think that was it and he was sorry afterwards, but she was devastated, feeling betrayed. She put herself through a horrendous month or two of anger and depression, and this is where it gets really odd. They were negotiating the possibility of being friends. She was emerging from that phase of anger and depression, and one evening, during which they had been drinking and slow dancing with each other, she told him, in his arms, moving slowly to the music, "I'm over you… aren't you happy for me?"

She was surprised when he excused himself a few minutes later with tears in his eyes. She really knew it was over when later they were in bed and - as she put it - during the act of sex he was in tears again.

The Phantom has been carrying the torch for her for a long time, with her having used him for sex a few times, which messed him up. There are times a woman wants to get laid with no emotional involvement. He was willing to be more or less subservient,

like a sex dog, but admitted that he tried to make her pregnant. They have had arguments and long estrangements over the last year, but lately there were tenuous attempts to talk.

What got me is when I asked her what is worse, a man trying to get a woman pregnant without her knowing, or kissing a girl at a party? I would think the former, but the latter incident tore apart a love affair and the former didn't do anything – she shrugged it off as the behavior of a pothead whose dogged devotion is useful at times. I suppose she held a boyfriend to a higher standard, but he would also deserve more understanding, rather than less.

There was some talk about what if she had gotten pregnant. She wouldn't have told him. "It's my body." She wants to have kids someday, but her relations with men are problematic. She said she could get one of her men friends to contribute some sperm, maybe sign a contract, and have the kid alone. It's a situation where three people are involved – man, woman, and child – but the woman is the deciding factor. The child might like to have a father, and the biological father might want to be involved. The court might look differently at a contract dissolving a man's involvement. I'm not sure it's worth the paper it's written on – the court considers the interests of the child, and a woman could change her mind and demand child support (as would the court).

I'm starting to think that she's not kidding when she says there is a cold bitch inside her, and I should be relieved for not being put through the grinder of a love affair. She doesn't like who she becomes in a relationship. Her finer side comes out when there is some detachment.

Monday, March 21, 1994

Spring arrived with the sound of banging metal, buzz-saws, and a garbage truck with a cascade of breaking glass. There was a cold chill from talking with Ming the night before, and outside a girder was being raised from the dead by a forklift. The constant reconstruction of the present on a planet of obituaries in orbit.

Went to work in the afternoon. The Attorney was in court out of town, and there was not much work. I read the paper.

Los Angeles was shaken by some after-shocks (5.3), giving the trauma-weary post-traumatic stress.

There is something "pulling at the Milky Way."

There was an outbreak of "false memory syndrome," involving an accusation of "emotional incest."

Ethnic clashes in Burundi, forty dead. "Tens of thousands of people have been killed in tribal slaughter… since a failed coup last October." And that's only in Burundi. Someone should inform them that black people are more humane and understanding than any race on earth. On the other hand, being slaughtered is okay as long as it is done by people of your own race. Consider it Afrocentric, one of the local customs, and nothing to get excited about, compared to how black Americans are threatened by billboards for beer.

I walked home.

On the phone with Ming in the early evening. I was at a low ebb, talking to her from the standpoint of having stepped out of this consensual rapport. She finally asked if something was wrong, but I didn't go into it.

Reading *Volunteer Slavery*, the title of which is pretty offensive, as if being a journalist with her own apartment and the freedom to move around is no better than working in the fields with no civil rights. It seems a black person can be a middle-class hypocrite like anyone else. Her perspective was not uninteresting, working for *The Washington Post*, and if she is an overbearing egomaniac it shows itself with other blacks as well. It often happens that the worst insults about a group of people are from a member of that group.

Typing in the evening for a few hours. A wooden guitar for an instrumental break. I might have been a minor virtuoso of the moody instrumental with the music unpredictable as thought, if only I didn't write so much. I have a loose connection in my head, like a downed power line lashing about and throwing off sparks.

NOTES

> A book review in the paper, *Crossing the Border: An Erotic Journey* (I wrote Crossing the Body), a memoir by Kim Chernin. There was some mention of "society's double standard with its implicit fear and condemnation of sexually active women." How much of that condemnation comes from other women, especially when their men are being lured away, intentionally or not (I wrote intelligently or not)?
>
> And what century is the reviewer talking about? A magazine like *Playboy* has been around since 1953, and its recognition of sexually active women was not exactly condemned, having mainstream advertising and a wide circulation.
>
> I don't think "fear" is the right word, especially for a man. It sounds like wishful thinking on the part of women who want to think their bodies strike fear in the hearts of men. I came across something similar in *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer, where men are threatened or put off by a woman's cunt (her word). I wouldn't say it doesn't happen, but I'm not sure how prevalent it is. It's like threatening a man with a tropical oasis, one of the more pleasant things he knows. You might as well say that he's afraid of a warm dessert. If a man recoils, it might have something to do with bad memories involving the woman herself.

The woman reviewer gives the writer of this memoir the benefit of the doubt for exploring her sexuality, but ends up with the underwhelming conclusion that she is writing things "of little interest or meaning to anyone else." It sounds like she cut a turbulent path through society – the Holy Land in fact - with her body. She was thirty-one, left her "male partner and 8-year-old daughter" to break free of the "strictures of Freud and family." She has a "string of jolting, ultimately disastrous love affairs…drops a young American… for an even younger Israeli soldier." She leaves him in turn for an ill-concealed affair with… a woman married to a fellow kibbutznik." This ends in a violent attack which "she suppressed the memory of… for 20 years." Nothing like situation ethics combined with a selective memory to come up with a self-deluding neo-slut who left a trail of messed up men and women, having abandoned her daughter so she could fuck her brains out. There was some mention of her being "calculated and disingenuous."

The review was originally in the *Los Angeles Times*, and the responses couldn't have been worse if the reviewer was an undead white European male, instead of Lillian Faderman, who wrote a history of lesbianism in 20th Century America, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*. Chernin wrote a letter to the editor, claiming her actions didn't constitute "desertion," and compared it to "A soldier sent off to fight a war, when he leaves his child behind…," or "A husband and children leaving the mother behind in a particular city, while they moved across the country because of his work…." Keep in mind this was a woman who left her husband and child to have sex with other people, so her examples are a bit off. Nevertheless, she decries the "judgmental, moralistic tone" of the review which "seriously misrepresents the story…" The reviewer forgot to mention that she rescued Palestinian infants from the line of fire, and only had sex with a soldier or someone's wife as a way of bringing peace in the Middle East (I'm kidding).

Another letter: "I was appalled by the tone of the vitriolic attack in Lillian Faderman's review… she seems to make an attack on the writer's life." That sounds life threatening, like something a terrorist would do. "'Crossing the Border' is a meditation…"

Next letter: "Lillian Faderman, highly respected for her academic work, made her name with writings that argue for the absence of sexuality in women's relationships before the 20th Century." "Her outright hostility toward Chernin's 'erotic journey' raises more questions about the reviewer than about the book."

Next letter: "Your review… is offensive to me and shouldn't pass without comment…. to parade that cranky, idiosyncratic response as an analytical review in a major newspaper is just plain offensive. A reviewer ought to exercise more self-awareness and not take her own unanalyzed antipathy out on the author."

Next letter: "Lillian Faderman, a representative of the sex police, wants to protect L.A. Times readers…."

> The reviewer's response: "I was more than a little perturbed to see the orchestrated series of letters by Times 'readers' from areas such as Oakland, San Francisco, and Berkeley about my review of Bay Area writer Kim Chernin's book…." "Did they read the review – or did they read only Chernin's request to them to come to her 'defense'?" "In my opinion, 'Crossing the Border' failed not because it is an 'immoral' book, as I am falsely accused of having written, but because it is often tedious – a much graver sin for a book than immorality."

Tuesday, March 22, 1994

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office with both of us looking more formal, which is to say she was lovely. We walked to Old St. Mary's Church, which was crowded, and sat in the back row for Bach's Cantata #106 with soprano, mezzo soprano, tenor and baritone. Recorders, viola da gambas, violincello, organ. *"Gottes Zeit ist die Allerbeste Zeit."* It was some sort of theological apprehension of the fourth dimension. "God's time is the best time."

She didn't know who Bach was, "Is he still alive?" and looked a little bored at first. Then pulled out her prayer book, sitting next to me with straight hair to her shoulders, holding the prayer book open with her small hands on her knees with her feet up on the footrest. A white blouse, black skirt. The sight of a woman who worries about her soul or even thinks in those terms, and tries to act accordingly, leaves me almost helpless with respect.

By the time we left she had come to like the music, especially the sopranos with their gentle and refined modulations. We found a not-so-gentle granite ledge outside the world headquarters of a monolithic money-lending institution and ate our Bach tacos. We were talking when a young white guy, tall and thin, walked up and interrupted us, wanting change (or maybe a loan). I ignored him and went on talking to her, vaguely

sensing he was still standing there. He finally walked away and said something to his companion, a black guy. I was sitting there and minding my own business, but I'm the rude one.

In the office there was not much work. I was in the front getting my messages and talking with Ami. She didn't know the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan, and furthermore doesn't care. We were talking about rugs from India and Iran. I told her I had a rug from Afghanistan with the woven images of helicopters, hand grenades, and a machine gun. She wasn't sure what to think of that.

There was a phone call from an old client in prison. We talked for a few minutes, then I had the call transferred to my desk. He had a lot to talk about. He's been in prison for a year and a half on a second-degree murder conviction – looking at ten years. This is the one who killed his girlfriend in a drunken argument. She had his baby two weeks before and said it wasn't his, which caused him to pick up a knife. I had met her in the office (a nice woman who worked as a legal secretary). It was eerie knowing all of this, but having to continue with the ordinary facts of life – finalizing the divorce from the woman he was with before the woman he killed (I suppose that would make her his ex-girlfriend).

He got married a few weeks ago to a woman who knows his background, not to mention his foreground of iron bars (another woman said she must be desperate). There was a problem though, the prison authorities are putting off the conjugal visits. He thinks his attorney made a half-hearted effort with him ending up with second degree (we didn't handle his murder case). He said the gangs in prison are not that much to worry about (he's in Vacaville). No one messed with him. He has a six by ten-foot cell with a TV

which he shares with one other guy. Most of the day he isn't there, working on landscaping (he used to drive a cement truck for a living). There is a small prison law library for 5000 inmates. Maybe fifteen can use it at any given time. He has been lifting weights and getting by from day to day, a mild-mannered Latino (except when he's drunk).

I got off the phone and a few minutes later Ming called. She wants to go to the library after work.

5 p.m. I walked V. to the station. The other day she was talking about her fiancé, saying she feels sorry for him sometimes because she is such a "nagger." She gets all keyed up about something and won't let it go or would have insomnia, so it's "nag, nag, nag," making a sound like a bird. She was half-amused about it, looking up with those big brown eyes. I'm struck by the paradoxes in someone with the looks and poise of an orchid, and the inner mechanism of a bookkeeper. Not that there aren't other sides to her – she brings me samples of her cooking.

I picked up Ming outside the granite of her building, by which time I was over the moody recoil of the last couple of days. There were some lingering traces in an unromantic repartee, but she relishes that sort of thing. We took a bus and rode past the Strand Theater with *Café Flesh* and *Tokyo Decadence*, and got out near the library.

We left an hour later with an LSAT book (Law School Admission Test), art books, and something with Navajo and African tribal patterns - maybe she could incorporate those into her therapeutic watercolors. She looks for books like someone in an aisle in a store, just moving along with no idea of anything in particular. All I found was *Six Degrees of Separation* by John Guare.

She was supposed to rendezvous with a woman friend, but they've been flaking on each other for months and this was no exception. I thought she had something else to do in an hour, but we ended up spending the evening together. I picked up some Russian food, stuffed pepper and beet salad (with nuts and raisins). She got some Chinese food, imagine that, and we went to my place, relaxing with one beer each.

She called her sister-in-law who is having marital problems. They were commiserating, what with her own recent breakup or breakdown, running through the usual "men are jerks" routine while I sat on the bed having a nice workout on the guitar. I provided a musical background to their condemnation of the male gender.

Earlier she was standing by the radiator and rubbing against it, saying, "I'm bloated."

Then we sat around the wooden table looking at her LSAT book. She read aloud the test questions involving logic, reading comprehension, and sentence completion (sounds like how to be a writer) with split-hair multiple-choice responses. We tried a few (I want to turn it into a play with multiple-voice responses). It wasn't easy, but it doesn't hurt to push your mind in a different direction. Well, it hurts a little, in this case like having a logical vise on your brain. She was taken aback by the difficulties of the paragraph completion, the slightly varied choices of a sentence which is inconsistent with a foregoing paragraph, and there was a time limit. Then she gave me a haircut.

10:30 p.m. We walked to her place ten blocks away. I half-expected to walk back, but she said, "Want to come in?"

It turned into a pleasant evening sitting on the floor in grey cords, white shirt, dark blue sport coat, while she struggled out of her clothes into sweats and flopped on the

bed, getting comfortable and girlish with her period coming on. I looked at a collage of torn-out pictures she is working on. There was a comment as to how her mind works, compared to mine, and if it is more female than male. Her images had a warm chaotic profusion with humanistic overtones – a lot of people. She said I should rearrange them, and I came up with something different. There was less chaos, more direct juxtapositions, and less people. We wondered if she is so close to people that she loses perspective. I have more distance, but it's lonelier.

I said I could send her telepathic messages at work, like the mental projection of a cosmic light would brighten up her day. She is not opposed to the idea. I said that we have been accumulating interludes of calm between us, like a reservoir that she can call upon whenever her life is getting "hectic" (one of her most-used words).

We went back and forth on this, but she was getting sleepy and asked if I would give her a shoulder rub. I took off my shoes and coat and climbed on her back and in no time she was moaning, directing my hands to the soreness and tension in her neck and shoulder blades. There was a tape of women's voices in the background (mostly K.D. Laing). When I got down to her tailbone it had the usual effect of putting her to sleep.

I climbed off her carefully and was going to leave when she turned her head and opened her eyes. She can slip in and out of sleep as easily as trying on a blouse. We resumed some of the back rub, until I was getting sleepy and she said I might as well sleep over.

12:30 a.m. I lay next to her in a bathrobe and blew out the candle. She likes to have a warm body in her bed, and we fell asleep lying back-to-back with our butts touching.[81]

Wednesday, March 23, 1994

7:15 a.m. Coming to on an overcast morning with her getting out of bed and heading for the shower.

[Walking to her place last night, we went by Larkin and Post where the surgical implant men stroll around, blowing kisses to the internal combustion machines. On the corner was a black man with well-rounded cleavage in a low-cut shirt. Further on we were confronted with an apparition – a tall white man standing under a street light in a white blouse cut to the waist, with the most artificial tits I've seen in a long time, pale as plastic and about as interesting.

We kept walking, and a minute later she had some comments on their fake buoyancy, compared to the graceful gravity of the real thing. More to the point, she felt sorry for the men who go through this. I'm not sure if they want anyone to feel sorry for them. If they didn't like what they were doing there were other options, although some of them have to work on the streets to pay for the operation. If women have it so hard in this country, why do many men want to try it? Conversely, if the eternal feminine is such a wonderful thing, why do many women want to be like men?]

[81] I don't think she has ulterior motives with this sort of domestic routine. A woman doesn't necessarily mean anything by having a close familiarity with a man. She could be rehearsing for someone else in the future, or simply communing in the human condition.

I got up, made coffee, took a shower when she got out, and ended up making breakfast – throwing some broccoli, green onions, mushrooms, and eggs into a wok. She played the tape of women singers, which was given to her by a woman friend. Both of them support the American Indian Movement, so I mentioned Buffy St. Marie, but she never heard of her.

8:30 a.m. We left. I'm not used to this early morning routine, and having changed a couple of times she had a nice outfit on, cowboy boots, tights under a long black skirt, and an olive sweater, one of her more layered looks. She almost never wears anything revealing.

I got off the bus on Hyde and walked home while she went to work. I was typing for a few hours in a room overlooking the workmen, with the spark of a welder's torch and girders hanging in midair. The mystery and suspense of a construction site – I don't know how they do it, pulling all that structural precision from the primordial ooze. I was so tired and distracted I went into the bathroom and peed on my foot. Talk about an aimless morning, feeling misdirected.

I went to work in the afternoon, paying $1 for a floating seat on Geary Boulevard which carried me away like an altered state. Things were a little intense in the office. A Middle Eastern man showed up for an appointment with his neck in a brace (a new client). The Attorney wasn't there and he left after half an hour.

The long trial ended, something he has been handling with another attorney and they lost. Our client had a fight with two men he owed money to, bashing them with the butt of his (unloaded) rifle, and is now looking at over $100,000 in punitive damages. The other attorney arrived in a nervous mood with the whole case collapsing. They

inherited it from someone else with a large pile of documents. The client wants to sue them for malpractice because he lost. We had to throw together a last-minute Memo of Points and Authorities saying the amount of punitive damages has to be proportionate to the defendant's net worth (ten percent). The other lawyer dictated the P and A, citing cases.

Meanwhile, V. liked the fact I had a haircut. Now all I have to do, according to her, is get rid of the grey streaks and I'll be a new man.

6 p.m. Went home.

Early evening, I walked to the Strand Theater on a whim. It is six blocks away and cost $2. I read some good reviews about *Tokyo Decadence*, which has something to do with sado-masochistic moral vacuums in a powerful corporate state. There were individual psychodramas that a paying client could indulge in, fetishizing the subjective in a context of impersonal restraint.

A small old theater with some art deco and not many people. I sat through the last part of *Café Flesh*, which is an odd genre of its own, like some out-of-work actors got together to make a film that was a send-up of X-rated situations. It was followed by a strange intermission. There were men scattered here and there in the seats, staring at a hypnotic screen with a hot pink glow, bluish around the edges, while the most artificial kitsch music played in the background. It was like a conceptual event. Some of them would have gone to a theater in the Haight for this sort of film, and a few may have thought they were getting sex films, being disappointed as the minutes passed without any sex. There was simulated S and M, but not much else. I think a few guys were there to get off the street (it only cost 99 cents until 2 p.m.).

Then I was in Tokyo with its futuristic steel and glass. A young woman was in the throes of future shock, being sent to hotel rooms where the men had their own notion of a rubber-lined approach-avoidance.

10:30 p.m. How scintillating the night is when compared to the silver screen. I walked past City Hall, glowing in the dark from the friction of its legal confrontations.

There were three messages at home. One from the Phantom of the sound room, one hung up, and one from Ming which went on at length. How is it she can talk to a phone machine as well as talking to a human being? Maybe better, since it can't respond.

I made coffee, opened a Spaten beer, and called her back. In no time we were discussing whether the spirit survives the body. She is inclined to think it does, though not sure in what form. She likes the idea of reincarnation as a metaphor, if not a genetic coincidence of recycled character types - according to the limitations of our species. I don't think a spirit can survive after death, retaining (wrote retraining) one's identity and memories.

We talked about women internalizing stress and tension in certain areas of the body – her back and shoulders for example. I have so little sense of that. It's not that I don't have emotional tensions, but I tend to take them out on something – like a typewriter or guitar. A couple of hours on one or the other, along with pacing and maybe breaking something. I usually have a handle on it, having externalized the tension.

"Where were you tonight?" she asked. "Tokyo," I said, and told her about the movie. I thought she was going out or I would have invited her. The women were presented in humanistic terms, but she doesn't care about Japanese fetishes. She was

home all evening, cleaning her apartment. There were dirty dishes in the kitchen and clothes on the floor - when she takes them off, she drops them where she stands.

There was some mention of men and what she wants from them. She is fairly open with strangers, but the walls go up the closer someone gets to her (I'm practically the opposite). Ming has found that having casual sex with someone is more trouble than it's worth, especially if the guy has any feelings, but being in a relationship has a turbulence of its own. She can be sincere about "claiming celibacy," and be in bed with someone the following weekend. Whether that comes from multiple personalities (one celibate, another not), or being moody and subjective (with a shifting perspective), she is known for being ambiguous. It drives her nuts sometimes. When I ask if she wants to go somewhere, she will nod her head up and down, then back and forth sideways, then up and down again.

There was the usual litany of feeling lazy and bloated, and how hard her days are. "Isn't life odd?" "Yours is." Not to mention how good it felt, the massage last night. She was lying in bed with the lights off, squirming around and trying to get comfortable. She said I don't toss and turn when I sleep with her.

12:15 a.m. We got off the phone and I was on the typewriter for a while.

Thursday, March 24, 1994

11 a.m. I went to work early with the Attorney having some last-minute preparations for the trial (second phase). The client lost and the co-counsel on the case threw together a haphazard Memo of Points of Authorities which was refuted rather nicely by the other side. "Plaintiffs' opposition to defendant's memorandum regarding

financial status relevant to punitive damage award." It noted that his claim of punitive damages being limited to 10 percent of net worth was wrong. What is considered is "financial condition… not solely a formalistic inquiry into 'net worth'," and other cases were quoted.

> The determination of whether an award is excessive is admittedly more art than science. "The channeling of the correct quantum of bile to reach the correct level of punitive damages is, to put it mildly, an unscientific process…."

Community property is not exempt, "neither the code nor the cases purport to exempt the non-tortfeasor's half of community property from satisfaction." So the assets of the client's wife can be tapped into. Well, we also handle divorce cases.

V. suggested we have lunch, so we went to the Hunan place. Rock cod, rice, and tea. She told me about Holy Week in the Philippines when she was a girl. She held a candle in a long procession and flirted with boys. The other day we were talking about religion, and I said something to the effect of being a sinner. She said, "I'm a sinner too," looking up with those beguiling eyes. I was struck with how one of the more conscientious women I know would think she is a sinner. Her sins don't amount to very much, I don't think, while other people wallow in the 7 sins and then some, but without much guilt.

Walking back, I held her umbrella over us in a light rain. It was a long afternoon in the office, though it went by quickly with the Attorney gone.

After work I went for a swim, beginning with a workout on the weight machines, and then a mile in the pool.

8 p.m. I was relaxing at home when Ming called and wanted me to come over. I said, "How come?" She said, "Because… and bring some rum." An hour later I walked to

her place in a light drizzle and showed up with honey, rum, scissors, and a pleading from the office. I felt becalmed from the workout.

She was in purple long johns with a big sweater which she wore backwards because it was low cut and there was nothing underneath. As a large-breasted woman she knows how easily they make their presence felt. She said she cleaned the place last night, but it was on its way to being trashed again. She likes to scatter her stuff on the floor, having a wall-to-wall persona which from time-to-time is bouncing off the wall.

It took her a while to settle down. One reason she likes to sit around with a sketch pad, working on a composition, is it gets her mind off her problems. We ended up sketching a Turkish rug. It took some concentration, using black felt tips, with each one working on half of it. My interest was fading, but we were feeling the rapport. It was deepened when she made a couple of hot rums with lemon and honey. In the background was an old tape of the Velvet Underground with "All Tomorrow's Parties."

She was talking about her being-in-the-world and how she is still healing from the breakup. Some women have a magnified view of their emotional wounds, while inflicting those on men without a second thought. They get downright precious about needing time for healing, like they feel things twice as much as men. The men are dense, so it doesn't matter if you jerk them around. It matters if it's done to women since they are more human.

Fortunately, we didn't go into it. Sometime after midnight she slipped into her tired state, sounding like the computer in *2001* when it's running down, throwing off absurd comments and regressing back to when she was a girl, and laughing at herself. At

some point she did her impression of Chinese opera, riffing off a color she was using in our sketch, singing, "Brown… BROWN… BROOOOWWWWNNNN," in a high meandering voice.

The conversation had been bouncing around with facetious references and personal observations. She wondered how well I know her, and admitted she is difficult as a girlfriend. There is some question as to how marriageable she is, but she may not care at this point. I said "Incorrigible," but she seemed to think it had something to do with "cordial."

We talked about everything from her encroaching period to the psychotic reverb of ancient rugs, not to mention semi-automatic pistols. I told her one of our clients (the defendant) was in felony possession of an UZI and there was an operating manual in the file. 1100 ft/sec muzzle velocity. She said, "That isn't fair." The mechanical features include "blowback firing from closed bolt with floating firing pin." Ammunition: "9 mm parabellum"[82] in the cerebellum. I don't like guns.

It was after one in the morning when we went to sleep.

Friday, March 25, 1994

6:30 a.m. Woke up… went back to sleep.

7:15 a.m. She got up and took a shower while I was half asleep under the covers. Later we were in the kitchen and she threw some stuff into a wok – potatoes, onions, garlic. She has a tendency for making random provisional meals, using whatever is at hand. I had some dried pineapple trail mix and black coffee.

---

[82] "*Para bellum* is Latin for 'prepare for war' and is often used within the context of the phrase, *Si vis pacem, para bellum*, meaning 'If you want peace, prepare for war'." (Wikipedia)

8:15 a.m. We went out, with her in a distracted rush of going to work in a red sweater, men's slacks, men's shoes, and a black leather jacket. In the early morning we operate as a moody diversion for each other, though affectionate and not without sardonic little sparks. There was some comment as to what it would have been like if she was my sister, or the similarities between her and Lucy, the crabby dark-haired girl who likes to make a sucker out of Charlie Brown.

We took the bus and I got out on Hyde and walked home. I was a little tired, but there was no work today with the Attorney in court.

I finished reading *Volunteer Slavery*. I had to read it fast since I was barely staying ahead of losing interest in a cranky personal memoir. I had to take her word for it when it came to her objectivity as a journalist, but coming from the subjective angle of a memoir. There was so much adolescent petulance it makes you wonder. Her narcissism is a little out of sync with the world.

I read *Six Degrees of Separation* in one sitting, which was not very hard. In the introduction the author said he wanted it to move like the wind. I found it airy and surprisingly lightweight. There is a chain-link of acquaintances which stretches around the world. Not everyone has a telephone, however, or a number they are willing to divulge, or any interest in connecting with a person in another country, so the network breaks down pretty quickly.

Reading the script, I was reminded of when I tried to write one. I had a tendency to over-write, not realizing the lines are less than half of what is going on. The actors bring their own dimension to a script (and so does the audience), which is more evocative

with something left unspoken. Less is more, along the lines of Pinter or Beckett (I'm not sure where that leaves Shakespeare).

There was some resonance in a phrase like, "emotional and intellectual paralysis." I was sitting at the typewriter with a mental block and felt immobilized. What if the earth is spinning in a timeless void? Would that account for the feeling that you're not going anywhere? All the more so when people are frozen in their lives like someone in a mine field, having had too many situations blow up in their face.

A further paralytic state is brought to you by television, with the viewer like a deer in the headlights of a modern civilization.

On the typewriter for a while, followed by a work out on a wooden instrument.

I read the newspaper from yesterday – the main presidential candidate in Mexico was shot and killed in Tijuana.

PASSENGERS ACCUSE GREYHOUND OF DISCRIMINATION. Five Latina women filed a complaint against a bus driver who was taking them from Lake Tahoe to San Francisco. He allegedly "ordered them to stop speaking Spanish." He may have yelled at them. "The women refused and continued their conversation in Spanish." It would seem the driver was out of line, maybe having a bad day. Were the women all talking loud and right behind his seat? In which case, the language they were speaking is beside the point, he just wanted them to be quiet. Nevertheless, he didn't handle it very well, and you might suppose the bus company would give the women a free roundtrip ticket to Lake Tahoe, while apologizing for the rudeness of the driver. But no, they want

$1,000,000 (each). For that much you would think they were kicked off the bus in the desert and left there for days after he tried to run them over.

There was an accusation of "discrimination," the definition of which is getting so diluted you can see right through it. You would think that being discriminated against means you were not allowed to ride on the bus, or were forced to sit in the back. It is hardly the policy of the bus company, which I don't think discriminates against Spanish-speaking people by refusing to let them on its buses. It would lose a lot of business in California if that was the case.

There are two more women filing suit – also for $1,000,000 each – contending that the driver "approached them in a threatening manner," when they tried to come to the aid of the other women. This is priceless. It is further evidence of people having no sense of proportion, and such overblown reactionary notions of their own self-worth that anyone so much as daring to "approach" them in a manner which is deemed "threatening" (a bus driver, no less) can be sued for a million bucks. It's worth the equivalent of what the average person earns in a lifetime, as if to say, "The driver was rude, so I don't have to work for the rest of my life."

Given the amounts being demanded, compared to what actually happened, it would seem they are exploiting the concept of discrimination for their own personal gain ($500 each would be more than enough, with a temporary suspension of the driver). The hypocrisy is nearly as bad if they say it's not about the money. It reminds me of a newscaster, Diane Sawyer, negotiating with her lawyer for a new contract of $7,000,000 a year. She said, "It's not about the money," so I imagine she will give it to a worthy cause and not see a dime.

Late afternoon, I lay down and passed out for an hour or two.

6 pm. Woke up with the phone ringing. B. was calling from a pay phone and talking fast, although I was slow to respond and she had to repeat it. A dinner party… a Japanese journalist… 7 p.m…. better hurry… Leavenworth and California… bring a bottle of wine.

A few minutes later, sitting in a daze, the phone rang. It was Ming, still in the office. She was changing her plans for the evening. Instead of a panel discussion on the American Indian Movement at San Francisco State, she will go home, take a bath, and relax. I told her what I'm doing and she said I should call her later.

Took a shower, shaved, put on a dark suit with an open shirt and went out. I walked six or eight blocks on a clear night with the moon nearly full. It felt like I was in an altered state - it happens on those rare occasions when I fall asleep for an hour and wake up and it's still the same night, but I'm on a different wavelength and headed for an unfamiliar situation. It was good to break out of my usual routine. I could have gone in four different directions that night – home, the sound room, Ming, but opted for the unknown.

I met B. at the building and went in. I didn't know anyone. We sat in a room, just four of us (eventually six), with white wine, no music, and me thinking this could be a deadly bore.

It turned out otherwise. The writer was a woman from Japan (Marie Oeda), around fifty, a photo-journalist who branched out into interviews. For the last few years, she was working on a book about the fall of the Berlin wall, having compiled interviews

in Germany in 1989, before the wall came down, and then went back for more when the wall was gone. She talked to a cross-section of German society, from the ex-prime minister, Willy Brandt, and various writers and professors, to some anarcho-punks and neo-Nazis. She had two and a half large manuscripts which constituted the book, and there was a photo of each person she interviewed (between fifty and a hundred). I flipped through it, reading some of them, and was impressed.

She has a refreshing candor in her interviews, like someone from Japan who found the Judeo-Christian world to be strange or mystifying (which it is). She said to a rabbi, "If the Jews have been waiting for the messiah for 2000 years, maybe it will be another 2000 years before he shows up." The rabbi replied that when the messiah comes it could be in the form of a Japanese woman, he wouldn't mind. When she interviewed a young neo-Nazi (a spokesman for an unspeakable cause), she didn't cut him much slack and they got into an argument.

Her journalistic caliber was coming out with people talking in her living room. She was outspoken with a sense of the absurd, and then silent for long periods, letting conversations and debates develop - a good listener, in other words. B. was thrown a little. She is used to some formality when it comes to dinner parties, but Marie wore shorts and a T-shirt, with the hair-cut of a man. Her social manners are tomboy-blunt, which conceal a serious and well-educated woman who is used to operating on her own.

I liked how she managed to arrange the interviews with high-powered figures. She didn't seem to have much money, living in a crowded flat, and it seemed to be her life's work to refute the notion that women should be silent and passive. She mentioned some similarities between Germany and Japan when it comes to authoritarian tendencies,

a certain conformity, and a fascist past. As a student she spoke up in class, asking questions, and other students would shun her as a proverbial nail that is supposed to keep its head down.

Another woman arrived who taught at Sonoma State (including a holocaust course), a German in her late forties who has been in this country since the 1960's. Her father was a doctor, not a Nazi, but was forced into military service (I think) in 1944, and she never saw him again. Her grandmother was the mayor of Hamburg (not sure if I heard that right).[83] Oddly enough, she lives up the street from the sound-room flat.

There was a discussion on professors and what they're up against, not only with dull-witted students, but those who feel compelled to resist a teacher as an authoritarian figure. It's the knee-jerk impulse of a half-baked radical who won't be quiet, disrupting a class and being provocative, but not knowing what they're talking about and not raising the caliber of the discourse. That's what amazed the German professor. She said a woman nearly ruined her class last semester on that basis, and went on in this vein, being tactful, but something has to be said. She is stunned at the ignorance in this country, with students on a conveyor belt of mere attendance who can't be failed. They have an attitude of "the customer is always right," and resent the implication that someone (like a professor) might know more than they do. It's an affront to their self-esteem (however artificially contrived) (and without which they would go insane). Some of them know they were misled in going through an adulterated school system, and it makes them angry. Even worse is when it isn't the fault of the schools, but the students themselves, which confirms an old saying: "You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

---

[83] You can tell a bad reporter if he's drinking too much and not taking notes.

She mentioned how hard the German students work in school,[84] who might study in the ninth grade what Americans study in the twelfth (assuming they can read). Imagine having a solid education and a government which offers support to the people. There is a solidity of fact, compared to a swamp gas of subjective fictions. It functions as an anchor – psychologically as well as socially. You would think some people came to the United States to escape from factuality. She said there is a kind of "hollow dignity" in this country (choosing her words carefully), with the education often a placebo. The government is known for empty promises, and people feel abandoned.

There was a younger man from Berkeley, maybe thirty, involved in computer library information. He helped the German woman proofread the manuscript. There was also an outspoken heavyset woman around fifty who I hit it off with for some reason. She seemed to relish any one liners or comments which didn't agree with her opinions as long as they were interesting. I got some protests when I wondered if the women's vote is overrated when it comes to giving us enlightened politicians. I mentioned the Reagan landslide as an example. The man was amused, and in some agreement, explaining what I said in a more palatable form. B. didn't know what I was talking about.

The conversation covered a lot of ground, and continued when we were in a small dining room sitting around a table with a hot plate in the middle. It was a Japanese meal, putting thin fish cakes, mushrooms, leeks, and noodles into the hot liquid, then pulling

---

[84] She said the current generation of Germans do not feel much guilt for what went on with the Third Reich. The attitude is founded on the logical assumption that they weren't involved or even alive at the time. The fallacy of being guilty because of one's race is, by definition, racist, not to mention an obtuse generality that doesn't hold water. The same goes for assuming credit based on one's race. There is more verisimilitude when you focus on the individual. I said if it was up to me, I couldn't have invented anything, so a vicarious racial pride would not be worth much. The German woman laughed, saying something similar with respect to clockwork Germans, and her own propensity for being late.

them out a few minutes later. White wine, champagne, and hot Saki, followed by some red wine which I brought, and a Japanese green tea which I thought was awful.

There was an Armenian woman who was not dogmatic, having no sympathy for Lorena Bobbitt and not much for Hillary Clinton. She wondered why Israel gets over $3 billion a year in foreign aid, and Armenians get so little.[85] It was curious how blunt and straightforward the women were with each other. She said to the journalist, "How competitive you Japanese are!" and they laughed. I often hear women say things to each other which you wouldn't hear men say unless they're ready to fight.[86] They seem to be imbued with diplomatic immunity and the holiness of bodies, so things can be said without violating someone else's space with a thrown punch or a bullet.

Some points or questions I touched on: If boredom is a leading cause of war… what is the distinction of *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft*… a woman constitutes the country that one lives in – a line that went over well that night.

It was nearly midnight when things were breaking up and we left. B. nearly put her foot in it a few times with one or two of the women. She has a curiosity and enthusiasm in conversations, but is not well read, and will sometimes charge into a sentence or a thought without knowing where it's headed. She took my arm as we walked on California, wanting to find a quiet bar with a fireplace. We walked into one but it was all men and too subdued. We ended up at the Barleycorn, sitting on a wooden bench by the fire and having a coffee and whiskey.

---

[85] A foreign power exercises undue influence on our elections, making sure no politicians are elected who would slow the flow of money from the taxpayers to Tel Aviv. The fact that AIPAC doesn't have to register as a foreign lobby would suggest that we're a part of Greater Israel.
[86] They have a bluntness with each other which they picked up as sharp-tongued sisters or schoolmates. It is so habitual they use it on men sometimes, many of whom aren't used to being mocked and insulted in that manner, and don't know how to react.

She said her girlfriend has been giving her the silent treatment for a week or so. Things were horrendous a while back, so maybe that's an improvement. They're going to the Anita Berber show at Bimbos tomorrow night. They have regular breakdowns, and a week later things are back to normal, except they're supposed to see a couples counselor (which she is dreading).

She doesn't know much about Anita Berber, whose "addictions and professions" included morphine, heroin, coke, prostitution, sex with men and women, and naked dancing (Berlin in the 1920's). B. thought it was more about Nina Hagen, who she likes. I walked her home, and then continued to my place at two in the morning.

Saturday, March 26, 1994

Typing for a few hours. Tore the living daylights out of the guitar for an hour. Read the paper. The guy who assassinated the presidential candidate in Mexico said he did it to call attention to his pacifist principles.

Late afternoon – it's warm out, but I'm not going anywhere.

Early evening, getting restless and I'm not sure why.

8 p.m. A full moon rising in the window with the opera on. There was some energy in the air, and having a studious evening with the books and writing wouldn't be enough.

9:30 p.m. I left, making my way to North Beach. It was a last-minute decision, although I had known about the event for months. It was put on by the Goethe-Institut, a production called "THE 7 ADDICTIONS AND 5 PROFESSIONS OF ANITA BERBER." What swung the evening in that direction was sensing I had to get out, and

having heard that B. was going. I was still compelled to smoke a joint, a couple of hits, before the line in front of Bimbos started moving, having the feeling it was not uncalled for.

It floated a good part of the evening. I walked into a club that felt like the 1920's (art deco, built in 1931), with the tables filling up in front of the stage. I managed to secure two or three chairs at a table already occupied - by a German, oddly enough. He was soon joined by three others in their late twenties who seemed to be on woman-to-woman and man-to-man terms. Someone's normal-looking German parents were at a nearby table.

I was in black slacks, a burgundy silk shirt, and a light blue sport coat which I left on the back of the chair while I went to the bar. I was getting a half carafe of red wine when B. walked in with Ilsa. There was something a little off between them. Ilsa went to the lady's room and B. muttered what an awful mood she was in. However, her ability to shift gears, and B.'s own natural exuberance, carried the evening for us.

Having a table helped, though it was crowded. B. sat between us, almost in my lap. Ilsa is a small German woman with straight blonde hair. She took her coat off, showing her little tits in a see-through blouse of black lace.

When the show was over, an hour and a half later, I had had a good deal of wine, plus an Irish coffee. I was okay with the production, but puzzled by how it was presented – less serious and less wild than the woman it was about. For one thing, they couldn't reproduce her naked dance numbers, which were too much for this venue.

It was a vaudeville format with musical numbers and skits on the theme of her life, with a few dance numbers using her own choreography, such as it was. She was portrayed by a stripper from one of the better strip clubs in town, who kept her G-string on and didn't have much presence. The persona of Anita Berber was deflected off in several directions, using another dancer and a woman who recited her so-so poetry on the side, writhing slowly in a leather corset which left her breasts exposed. "Illusion… the stars scratch my eyes…."

Then there was the overpowering presence of Nina Hagen, who provided a loud and growling musical interlude, wearing a tight low-cut outfit with a lot of dark hair. She nearly stole the show.

The MC tried to steal the show, having most of the lines. He was a tour de force of the decadent leering fey bald-headed alcoholic in a devil-may-care condition (Dead Marilyn in another life). He maintained an ongoing narrative of her life and times at regular intervals, though it left me with the impression of hearing about her life, rather than seeing it unfold. I had expected pale figures against a black backdrop in a German expressionist tableau, but they kept it in a lighter vein.

B. leaned over when the bare-breasted woman was reciting less than twenty feet away from our table and said the poetry is underwhelming and mine is better (which wasn't saying much). A woman at the next table said it was boring.

Anita Berber died at twenty-nine, missing out on the 1930's, World War II, her own aging process, and what else?

It was after one when we left and were in a good mood. The two of them had been holding hands at the table, and the repartee at some point concerned B.'s naivete or

feigned innocence, which Ilsa does not have much patience with. At one point I was talking with Ilsa while leaning over B., who was getting wide-eyed when she heard us communing in a common interest in women and whether they should shave their pubic hair or not. The shaved look does not do much for either one of us. It was not the deepest subject for conversation, but we were in a nightclub, and the subject came up when the woman onstage was doing silent movements with nothing on, except for a fur-piece on her crotch. B. said she hadn't noticed. She has a tendency to not notice things, being caught up in the distracted swirl of her nervous presence in the world.

We rode in Ilsa's car through North Beach and got out in a bar-enhanced neighborhood. It was nearly closing time, but we managed to get a glass of wine. Then they drove me home. (The next day there was a message from B. as to their having gotten into yet another "row" and she was miserable. It was not exactly "peaches and cream.")

I went to sleep a little after three in the morning.

Sunday, March 27, 1994

8 a.m. The phone rang, pulling me out of a nice dream. It was Ming. She wanted to know if I was ready to help her move. I had said I would, though I didn't realize it would be so early.

I walked over there around nine at a low ebb, passing a line of people waiting for tickets, some with blankets on the sidewalk. I was looking askance and asked the last guy in line what it was for. He said, "Barbra Streisand" (who was appearing in another town). I walked by a gender-bender bar. The surgically-altered men were there on a Sunday morning with their liquid prayers.

Ming's place was half torn apart. I wasn't feeling very energetic, and wondered why she hadn't picked up her brother's pickup yesterday. Instead, she rode on the back of a motorcycle to Santa Cruz. We left around ten, took a bus all the way to Army and Bayshore, and walked through the warehouse district with railroad tracks on a warm morning. I had an existential hangover, where everything is glittering and solid, being approximately brain-dead at the moment. Not that we weren't getting along, with her ability to adjust to whatever level I'm coming from.

Her brother has a roofing company in a warehouse. We unloaded the black tarpaper from his truck, and she tried to figure out the roll-down door. "I'm such a twit sometimes…." We drove back to her place where I was suddenly on. We crammed the elevator several times with her things – mattress, dresser, boxes, plants, small trees, loads of clothing, small tables, lamps, and somehow got it all in the truck.

Her room is a few blocks from the opera house. It is also a few blocks from the projects, and she isn't sure about the security in that part of town. On the other hand, there were kids all over the street – some black and some Latino, with Mexican music coming from a window. The place is a tour de force, a long flat that kept unfolding towards the back and which she will share with one other person – the woman from New York who has an artistic slant. It is not just her paintings, but how she arranges things, with old furniture, a lot of wood, some crystal, and fresh flowers everywhere.

Both of us were sweating, having to drag or carry things up two flights of stairs. I hauled up one mattress and then the box springs by myself. Her room has curving windows and a southern exposure, a lot of light, and a wood floor painted white.

By mid-afternoon we were finished. There was some mention of driving out to the beach, but I think she was leading me on as she didn't have time, having a few more things to pick up, and didn't have her driver's license (muttering "stupid bitch" to herself). Also, someone might run off with a ladder which was tied to the truck. We drove to the sound-room flat where she used to live and picked up a few things. I had a desk there which the Phantom was using in his room. She wanted to take it for her own room, although he wasn't there. It didn't occur to her that he or I might want it.

The flaming roommate was there and when the two of them were talking I could hardly stand it. It was like two women speaking in superficial terms, but with one of them more fey. Half an hour later when we had gotten her things together, he emerged from the shower with a towel around his waist and walked by. There were scratches or whip marks on his lower back. From what I've heard he's on medication (manic-depressive), has few friends, and is stoned a lot.

We dropped off the load at her new place, then drove to the farmers market at the Civic Center. I just wanted to get it over with. I sat in the truck next to some guys with loud Mexican music coming from a radio while she picked up some vegetables. We drove to the warehouse, dropped off the truck, and walked to the bus stop in the late afternoon. I was in a friendly daze, which is good for riding a bus. We walked the last half mile to her old place and sat on the floor for a couple of hours, having a sandwich, beer, and cigarettes.

She tried to straighten up, but the sun was going down and we were so tired it was getting absurd. I'm not sure what is more addicting about her, the responsive mental presence, having a mind full of question marks and exclamation points, or those moments

when she slips into an edifying repose. The woman is inhabiting her life to the last bitter drop. It is a life of solidities and clean black hair and tense emotional states which she inflicts on others, including me, but when she finds a quiet moment there is an open gaze. It's like we stumble on a primordial hum, which is generated when we get together.

Which is to say it took us a while to get out of there and go to my place, with some further deliberation if she was going to sleep over, and that required clothes for work tomorrow, the proper hair conditioner, some things for dinner, feminine hygiene products, etc.

We walked to my place around eight and threw together a meal. I got a second wind, and the mood drifted into a serious discussion for a while, having read an essay in the Sunday paper by a woman, "Rape of the Self." I had some questions about it, and Ming immediately took the opposite position on the subtleties of "acquaintance rape." She read the essay aloud, until she had to admit it was losing her.

There was a point in the discussion when she asked if I'd known any women who had been raped, and I had to think for a minute. Only one, as far as I knew, a woman I was with when I was twenty-one. We met at the Café Trieste in North Beach and were together for a year or more, a gentle soul, soft-spoken, and something of a flower child from Colorado. She was hitchhiking there a few years before (which would have been the late 1960's), and got picked up by a man who drove her into the country and had his way with her. There were still faint traces of the stretch marks from the ensuing pregnancy (the child was given up for adoption).

I wasn't sure what Ming was getting at, having a disturbed look on her face. I said it's not the sort of question one can ask most women. I wondered later if she wanted me to ask her.

She talked about the psychological after-effects of breaking up. I said some women adapt themselves to a man, not only to be close to him, but to know how he functions and how to push his buttons. That might explain her feeling so at odds with herself, having internalized the contours of a man who was no longer there. According to this fading adaptation to another person, she is still geared to expect his presence and an image of herself that he had been projecting, but isn't anymore.

Ming was torn up by the paradoxes, hating someone she was compelled to think about, and calling him a weakling because he walked out. I thought it was the strongest thing he had done. It was weak when he waited while she ran around with other men. She tests a man by seeing if she can bend him to her will, having more respect if there is some resistance.

We took a break, and I called my father who turned sixty-six yesterday. My mother answered the phone and said he was in Tijuana, working with the poor who don't have much in the way of housing.

I was on the guitar for a while, and it wouldn't quit. It often happens when I'm tired, the music picks up with a life of its own, a manic virtuosity coming out, if not irrational currents which can change direction in a second. Ming lay on a Mexican blanket reading the paper, sometimes commenting or asking questions about inane things. Maybe that is part of the holistic approach, having to bottom out in the mundane, like an anchor or a touchstone (I nearly wrote tombstone). Later we were lounging on the bed

with the tube on, watching an interview with a Russian politician while sipping rum and hot water.

It was nearly one in the morning before she was sleepy. She took off her pants, put on some men's boxer shorts, took her bra off from underneath her T-shirt, and got under the covers. I put on a bathrobe and we lay on a black sheet with a tall window overhead. A full moon hovered in the void with vapors floating by. She thought it was stunning and fell asleep.

Monday, March 28, 1994

7:15 a.m. Woke up. She took a shower while I made coffee. I was standing in the kitchen in a torn robe when she emerged from the bathroom in a bra and lacy see-through briefs, drying her hair. She stood in front of the mirror in the hall and put on a chemise, a white blouse, and a wrap-around beige skirt, completed with a brown leather belt and shoes, looking downright womanly. It's a side of her which she lets out now and then since she works in an office. It is a side of her I find a little too endearing for my own good.

She has something about white cotton. I wore a white cotton shirt yesterday and we were getting along so well I thought that might have something to do with it. I put on a black shirt and pants, having coffee and a carrot cake muffin which we shared. It was split open by a ray of sunlight coming through the window, while next door a metal crane unloaded a coil of black wire.

How do you know a woman has been in your apartment overnight? You feel enhanced and displaced. Her presence is a drug, an absorbing current. You end up

ignoring your usual routine, and the bathroom floor is wet. I walked her to the bus stop, with her saying if it's a good day at work it feels short. Not so good if it's long. I said, "I thought you said long is better."

There was an hour or two of sleep, which was interrupted by a phone call from B. Later I was on the typewriter.

3 p.m. I went to the office where there was a lot of work. It accumulated while the Attorney was in trial last week, including a Motion to Deny Sanctions against him for missing a hearing in another case (with a weak excuse). The Attorney was in the conference room (following an arbitration involving one oblivious woman running over another - backing out of a driveway and hitting a pedestrian). He was with a man and woman (and two screaming little girls), this being the young white woman who had a child with a Malaysian man a few years ago. Things didn't work out in terms of what he thought a wife should do (he is Islamic). They broke up and his mother kidnapped the one-year-old son and took him back to Malaysia. The woman hasn't seen him since.

Ming called from work and said she left a long message on my phone machine at home. She wanted to work out together in the evening, but now said she is broke and not in the mood. We have an ongoing debate as to whether her mood shifts mean she is multi-faceted or has multiple personalities. There was some discussion as to whose place to have dinner which went nowhere since I wasn't interested in going to her place and sitting on the floor, besides which sometimes she just likes to have me around as a diversion or to fill up space.

7 p.m. Walked home, where I was feeling tired and lay down. A few minutes later the evening got a shot in the arm with the Fifth Symphony by Beethoven on the radio. I

turned it up, with a full moon rising in the window and some screaming firetrucks. I was on the typewriter and a wooden instrument for hours, probably repeating myself, even when it's warm-ups and rehearsals, like you have to practice just to hold your ground (the musical equivalent of treading water).

Last night we talked about an expanding universe. She was not sure how it worked, but referred to an expanding mind where you imagine the dimensions that are possible (and some that are impossible). They come into existence when they're striven for, like a thought-projected life.

She likes that sort of thing, but will admit to being impatient, having a short attention span when it comes to intellection or reading. I think, for better or worse, she gets her main signals from experience. She read ten women's books over the last six months, and only got something out of one or two of them, as far as feeling enriched as a woman. I said there are a few books by men which a woman might find useful and informative, and she said, "That's true." We arrived at this discussion when she noticed I was reading books by black writers, as if I wanted to criticize those books and maybe I should find some black writers I respect. I have – and mentioned Greg Tate as a recent example - but I can't say much about Jill Nelson, the reporter for *The Washington Post*. I still learned a few things from her book, in spite of her crotchety attitude.

That's a good word for Ming: crotchety (and she's a Scorpio), who let me know that however grumpy she appears, I haven't seen her at her worst by a long shot. When she's with a man on intimate terms it stirs up the hostility in her nervous system.

Walking to my place last night around eight, the last block or two, I was distracted by the architecture and wrought iron doors, while she pointed out a man in a

tow truck across the street. It was parked and he was sitting in the driver's seat with soft music coming from the radio. She wondered what he was doing there, this being a neighborhood inhabited by whores, and speculated, "Maybe he's getting a blow job."

She also offered to read my journal in case I could use another opinion. I think she wants to see what I'm writing about her. I said it would be useful, and her short attention span would let me know when it is boring or redundant, though the latter shows it is in touch with the eternal repetition which informs the cosmos. She is used to hearing that sort of thing and takes it with a grain of salt, if not a brain of saltwater.

It would be good to get her opinion on the diatribes I have regarding gender politics and racial controversies. There is not much in the journal that I haven't floated by her at one point or another, but she would let me know if I was letting disillusion cloud my vision. She made a good point last night about women who are "socialized" to be passive and uncomplaining, where socialized is an amorphous term. It is so amorphous that it's hard to place the blame – is it Western civilization, or the fact that someone comes from awful parents and a backward culture? I said I haven't known any women who don't know how to complain or speak their minds. If they were indoctrinated, it didn't work. People are told a lot of things about how they should behave, that doesn't mean they change their behavior. It would be a sign of intelligence if one is not a true believer in the propaganda floating around and she agreed. You can't blame the system for having warped your thinking with billboards and commercials, and presume to have an IQ above room temperature.

Tuesday, March 29, 1994

Typing in the morning.

Phone call from the Professor in Los Angeles. He sounded different. It turned out he was on codeine. When one of the recent tremors hit Los Angeles (5.3 on the scale), he was in the living room and reading the paper. He figured he would ride it out, with things shaking for nearly half a minute. However, the arch nemesis he lives with, a woman whose hysteria is right beneath the surface, started screaming at him to run or something. He jumped up, slipped on a slick ad in the *LA Times*, fell on a chair and cracked a rib.

His ribs are wrapped and he can't even cough or it feels like he will puncture a lung. He lost a week or two at school. Meanwhile: life with her is awful. I've been hearing that for years. She is the bane of his existence, the hair shirt, the screaming monkey on his back, a source of much of his stress. He is an insulin-dependent man with adult-onset diabetes and needs to avoid stress. Unfortunately, she has her claws into his life and property, and a separation would be complicated and horrendous, not to mention leaving him alone in his late fifties. But the thought of living alone is like a sylvan glade compared to the emotional slums he lives in.

Sad to say, he's being worn down by her nagging (she is twenty years younger), and her insistence that she be the authority in all matters. Never mind that he has a PhD in history. After years of this, he has found (like countless married men, including my father's father) that he ends up agreeing with whatever she says while saying less and less himself, in order to avoid the constant friction. I have seen older couples where the woman does all the talking and the man looks drained. Her confidence is connected like a vampire to the man's declining presence.

He got himself into this years ago, and there is a sick poetic justice going on, that he would end up with someone who embodies his worst nightmare of a woman - especially for a man with leftwing sympathies, and her a frigid conservative whose main concern is to be around people who are "rich and white," as he put it. All of this is undermining the presumptions of the women's movement as he saw it. She complains he hasn't done enough to help her find a career, though he helped her when she went back to school last year. I imagine if she found a career she would drop him cold and then pretend that she had done it on her own, another strong woman who doesn't need men. Her sense of accomplishment includes exploiting a man for all he's worth. She had the insight to use his resources, while putting him down for being a professor with an average income. Her conversation is a form of domestic abuse.

Once again, I'm hearing the worst about a significant other. I don't know if I'm getting a skewed view of things or just a more honest one, combined with a behind-the-scenes perspective in the office where our clients are having a hard time, from crashes to divorce. To make it worse, I am addicted to reading the newspaper. I might as well be reading police reports (actually I do at work).

We touched on other things,[87] like my moving out of the Tenderloin (he thought it was a good idea). Also: there are more and more Latinos in Los Angeles… the administrators of the California school system should be fired… many high school teachers are weak and sentimental. I asked him about the accusation that girls are ignored

[87] He mentioned Roman Polanski's latest film, *Bitter Moon*, which involves an American, a "failed writer," living in Parisian exile. He is around fifty, jaded and corrupt. There were some chilling connotations, as if there are forces in my life which could lead to my moving to Europe – I have spent a lot of time in Paris and have some friends there – but which might correspond to a stereotype: the writer in exile, a drunken American in a foreign country. I wouldn't want to use Paris to compensate for a lack of talent.

in class, with a teacher deferring to the boys. He said it would hardly be deliberate on the part of the teacher, who would know how to involve students who are quiet, whether female or male. When I was in school it was more likely the girls who brought apples to the teacher, so to speak, and made their presence felt.

As for his daughters: the oldest is thirty-two and educated, but aimless or bored he thought. She is learning how to teach English as a second language. He can't understand her passivity. She has some musical aptitude, but there were the usual difficulties, not finding outlets or venues for her music. I had a vague suspicion that she doesn't want to be like her parents, who had so much storm and stress in their lives, professional and otherwise, and it tore apart their marriage. The wife went on to host a radio show, living in the Hollywood hills, and later edited a national magazine, but the daughter knew what it was like behind the scenes and opted for a quiet life.

Another daughter is twenty-nine and lives in San Francisco, working as a nurse with a one-year-old son (the father is black and disappeared).

I called Simone (who is now fifty). She had wanted me to help her move to a border town, where she would be a Blythe spirit, but said it was off. Being head librarian in a state prison in the desert sounded good to her, but it was a drastic move and they were being ambiguous, not sending a job offer in writing. She applied to work in the law library at Solano State Prison where a client of ours is residing, doing ten to fifteen years. He calls me now and then.

Her son Wolfgang is thirty and in law school in New York. For years he was something of an idle druggie in the Mission district, becoming preoccupied with chess

when the writing didn't pan out. He is trying to turn his life around in a legal manner and become an attorney (criminal law). His father is a radiologist in Los Angeles, and is funding this transition.

I went to work in the afternoon with the Attorney in court and not much work. I put a file together, an arbitration he handled yesterday. A woman stepped off the curb in the middle of the block to cross the street and hesitated. Another woman in a parked car backed up and knocked her over. Who is at fault? The woman who stepped off the curb was out of place, but a driver is supposed to check the rearview mirror. He thought the woman in the car was mainly at fault. She is being sued by the woman who was knocked down for $60,000. He put it at $34,000 – the medical costs being maybe a third of that. Given the compromised position of the plaintiff, who shouldn't have been standing where she was, I thought $15,000 would have been sufficient – especially as there were questions as to how injured she was. The fender hit her in the leg between the knee and hip, but she admitted there was no mark. She landed on her hands and knees, and yet for some reason there were no cuts or bruises on her hands. She didn't even tear her jeans. She hurt her knee, but didn't go to the doctor until five days later (for lower back pain).

Flipping through the *USF Law Review*:

THE ACONTEXTUAL ILLUSION OF A COLOR-BLIND CONSTITUTION

SENTENCING DRUG OFFENDERS IN FEDERAL COURTS: DISPARITY AND DISHARMONY

THE INCARCERATION OF THE AMERICAN FAMILY
[What to do with the kids when the parents are in prison.]

5 p.m. I walked home, and was eventually reading *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. Tired, with some ambiguities involving Ming. I want to take a few days off.

Then she called, having taken a long bath, and was sitting around her empty apartment (the one she's leaving) in a tank top and boxer shorts and feeling miserable. She had the worst day at work, and was compelled to tell me how strange and awful things were. She got off work yesterday and was on the bus, going past Union Square while listening to a Bob Marley tape, when suddenly she was in tears and couldn't stop. When she got home there was more, it was emotionally wrenching, the bouts of crying and tears, and there was more this evening. She said she could cry right now in fact, and that wasn't all. Her father and mother now reside in southern China. They are in their late sixties with the father in and out of the hospital with a heart condition. She thinks he will die soon.[88]

Whatever I was feeling about her, like I wanted to back off for a while, evaporated under the circumstances and we had a long talk, with her trying to come to terms with the pathos. She said she is good at blocking out feelings, but also sensed that sooner or later it will catch up with her, the sadness from an affair that fell apart, along with turbulent relations with several other men. She doesn't want anything to do with men for a long time, and that alone is making her sad. The future is looking bleak and sexless, not to say up-in-the-air career-wise.

I forgot to mention something that Simone was talking about, apropos of what I don't recall, that in the Chinese character for disaster are the signs for crisis and opportunity.

The Phantom called recently, who she had a fling with a year ago (which was disastrous for him). It took him this long to get over it or find a tenuous detachment. He

[88] He didn't.

went over to her place last week for a few drinks in the evening. She wants to stay friends, but he is suspicious, thinking she finds him useful or even worse, still wants to toy with him. He asked me, amazed, why she would bring up such a touchy subject of their having slept together, especially when she insists it only happened twice – to me she says once – when he said it was a regular thing every Monday night for a month and a half. It was something he couldn't figure out, until he realized the other roommate (his old buddy Jon, who was burned by her and it left him hurt and resentful) occupied the next room and was there on Monday nights. I don't know if that was her intention, to "tear his nerves up" as the Phantom put it, but he thought so.

They sat around talking, having vodka tonics, and he was surprised when she got ready for bed, putting on pajamas, like she wouldn't maintain some formality under the circumstances. When he put on his coat to leave, she asked him what he was doing, as if to say, "Leaving so early?" He thought she wanted to get him going just to cut him off, having the double pleasure of getting a rise from a man and then refusing him.

This puts her in a bad light, and isn't necessarily how she operates. It's just how the Phantom sees it. But I remember him saying when they were getting friendlier as roommates she let him sleep in her room (while telling him, "No touching.") She would sleep without a shirt on, which she hardly ever does, knowing it would drive him crazy.

Meanwhile, things are getting so amorphous she could turn into a lesbian Eskimo. I said as much and she didn't object. More to the point, she needs a great "charge" in her life, feeling listless. It sounds like being energized by a man, but who knows? We talked about other things, from personal injury to push-up bras, and she suggested I come over there. I wasn't in the mood, but said she could come over here. Maybe it would get her

mind off her problems if she rode here on her mountain bike and spent the night. She thought about it, said she was lethargic, but a minute later thought it was a good idea.

10 p.m. I straightened up the place and she arrived with her bike and things for tomorrow. She was soon walking around in shorts over purple thermals and a sleeveless T-shirt with nothing underneath, her bosom swaying until she put a sweater on. It was a little cold, lying by the window on the bed, and she didn't want to be provocative.

We had dinner, having all of one Spaten beer, and watched a police show on the tube. Near midnight she was curled up on the bed, getting comfortable and relaxed, and said it was a good thing coming over. She felt much better, describing herself as a cranky girl who I was "baby-sitting." She is disillusioned with her own intelligence, and can't believe she would have walked "blind" into a situation which would fall apart and leave her feeling bad. I said it can happen to anyone. She is in her twenties and feels old.

We went to sleep on a single bed with black sheets and heavy covers. There was not much room, but we managed, lying close together in a state of suspended animation for six or seven hours, her long hair strewn across the pillow and my detachment wearing thinner than my bathrobe.

Wednesday, March 30, 1994

Woke up before seven with the morning light flooding the room. She had slept well, to her relief. Her shoulders were stiff, so I ended up giving her a back rub, sitting on her butt and squeezing her shoulders. I don't wear anything under my bathrobe, which was open, and my cock was flirting with her arm, becoming semi-hard.

She felt revived and eventually got up, made coffee, and took a shower, which was followed by a red sweater, black slacks, and black men's shoes. She thinks muesli is weird and prefers cold pizza in the morning. I walked her to the bus (at her request), with her expressing some concern about her hair and weight and period (which was late), all of which have been affected by her stress. However, my appearance in the morning was a source of some amusement.

When I got home I read the paper. A partly mutilated body was found in a dumpster a few blocks from here.

Went to work in the afternoon, another two-hour day.

5 p.m. Walked to the pool and sat in the lobby for a while (the pool was crowded), having a cigarette and reading the paper. Ming wanted to work out, but cancelled at the last minute, a woman friend was having emotional problems. Then B. walked in, looking harried and distracted. Turns out she left a message, suggesting we meet here.

She then proceeded to unburden herself of her emotional problems, which were considerable, if not redundant. Several women are giving her the runaround in different ways, the worst one being her girlfriend, with whom the highs are never far removed from the lows. Ilsa is a busy woman who sometimes doesn't have time for B., who then gets depressed as someone who relies on others. She is one of the more externally focused women I know, and it leaves her feeling frazzled.

She said I owed her a glass of wine. I didn't argue, and she was tugging at my leg. I returned with a glass of white wine and water. Though not in the mood, I listened to her account of trivial complications and misunderstandings with a friend (something to do with keys). She also wanted to know what I thought of the woman she is with, and what

to do about her feeling jerked around. Whatever I said didn't take hold, as she insisted I repeat it or say what she wanted to hear, but I'm not sure what that was.

We finally headed for the gym and had a workout. It was followed by the pool, with her in a one-piece suit, but she wasn't there very long. I had a one-mile swim and walked home.

8:30 p.m. Phone call from Ming, who was doing some last-minute packing (she will give up her apartment tomorrow). I told her there was a play on Channel 9 about Georgia O'Keefe (who she likes) and Alfred Stieglitz (who she never heard of). She wanted me to come over and bring the portable television with me. I put up some resistance, but it didn't work.

10 p.m. Having phoned for a cab, I got a call when he arrived downstairs. I went out carrying the portable and there was no cab. A guy on the street said the cab just took off. I walked a couple of blocks to Geary, got another cab and rode to her place.

It was another scintillating evening in the vicinity of her. The place was empty except for a bed folded down from the closet. I put the black and white TV on a chair with a few white candles burning on the floor and the skyline in the windows. We lounged on the springy bed, each one with a beer and a cigarette, and got absorbed in the interaction of Stieglitz and O'Keefe in New York City in the 1930's. He was not an easy man, but had the stature of a photographer who was twenty years older and well-established.

There was a curious episode when she returned from a trip to New Mexico and was less concerned that he screwed a female assistant than his having photographed the woman in the same poses he used with O'Keefe. He didn't understand her reaction,

saying it was merely a comparison, but maybe he should have used other models. Not her at any rate, with the connotation of her being interchangeable with other women. He might have said he had no trouble telling the two of them apart, and was in love with her own characteristics, but her sense of herself was tenuous. It required moving to New Mexico where she stood out among the skulls in a barren terrain (homing in on the androgyny of a dry bone). She was shaken up by seeing her poses replicated by another woman, but had nothing to worry about as far as her figure was concerned – a statuesque woman with a confident bush.

When it was over, after midnight, Ming was in one of her serious-coy moods. She can use her questions and a semi-hypnotic presence to get a man to bare his soul. The Phantom said he couldn't keep anything from her, and would find himself "confessing" all the time. I think she does it out of curiosity, and I don't mind. We have some interesting dialogues.

Sometimes she will confront me with a mundane version of herself. She is utilitarian with an androgynous air, leaving the bathroom door open and talking while she pees (urination is subservient to conversation). Very matter-of-fact about her skin products, and will walk out of the bathroom brushing her teeth while staring at me, as if to say, "Well here it is, the goddess at home. Love it or leave it."

A few minutes later she walked out with a mask of white lotion on her face which slowly hardened as it dried. She sat cross-legged in front of me like a stare-down with a statue or a mime who couldn't move her facial muscles and wanted me to tell her a story.

I said, "Give me the circumstances," and she said, "A necrophiliac picks up a male hitchhiker." I changed it to a narcoleptic and started talking. A narcoleptic driver

picked up a male hitchhiker and drove a while. He saw a woman hitchhiking, kicked out the male, and picked her up [which was closer to the story I had in mind]. [Ming thought narcoleptic meant a narc.] They drove for a while in the desert at night with a full moon, but he started getting sleepy. She needed him to keep driving to get where she wanted to go. He said in order to stay conscious she should put this white lotion on her face which would reflect the moonlight and keep him awake. She smeared it on her face and he drove for a while. Then he was getting sleepy again. He said he needed more reflected moonlight to stay awake, could she take her shirt off and put lotion on her body? So she did, smearing it all over her chest and stomach. That worked for about a hundred miles, but he started getting sleepy again. He asked if she would cover the rest of herself with the white lotion which slowly dries and hardens, so she did – an accommodating woman with a destination. There was an aura of eroticism here which helped to keep him from passing out.

Finally, she was getting stiff in the drying lotion and he pulled over to the side of the road in the middle of nowhere. He carried her out of the car and placed her on the ground. She looked like a marble statue in the moonlight. He was mesmerized by the sight of her, so calming and complete, and leaning against a tree he fell asleep. When the sun came up a few hours later it melted the dried lotion on her, which was dripping down her legs. She could move freely now, and went through some morning exercises. He was still asleep, so she got into the car and drove away, leaving him there.

He either died of thirst or was picked up by a passing truck driver. Ming wanted to know what happened to the woman. I wasn't sure. She asked if I wanted to touch the dried lotion on her skin.

1 a.m. We lay on the bed. She told me her latest idea of what she wants to be: a fireman, or fire person. I said, "That's how you drive through town, like going to a fire and everyone has to get out of the way." There was some mention of her being a water sign and putting out a man's fire. She figured there are hiring quotas where she would have an advantage. There are not many Chinese women on those firetrucks. I said it fits in with her modus operandi – she likes to lay around for hours and then go out suddenly – and sliding down a pole is right up her alley.

Thursday, March 31, 1994

6:30 a.m. I woke up floating over the city (on the seventh floor) with not enough sleep. We lay there for a while, close together. There are times when it feels like we're having a love affair, but without the physical affection.

Ming took a shower and walked out in her lingerie. In a few minutes she had a whole other look, and a demeanor to go with it. A serious white blouse with a wrap-around skirt past her knees, and her hair tied back. She prefers a conservative look for work. She doesn't like to flaunt it, being a man-magnet, but has some different looks and even voices. I can shift into her mood as fast as she can.

We have an ongoing debate as to whether or not she inhabits an alternate universe. She seems to think she doesn't, although she might agree to the proposition that we both do. I mentioned something we have touched on before - how insidious is the repetition on a revolving planet. You don't want to be caught doing something boring or inauthentic because it might become a habit and replicate itself for months or even years. She found that disconcerting, given her current situation.

8:30 a.m. We left, with me carrying the portable TV to the bus. I rode about six blocks and got off.

I went to work in the afternoon. There was not much to do, so I read about Henry James and tiger penis soup. The former was "rehearsing the discrimination of his senses in Rome" (which I do in San Francisco). The latter is for Asian men with "flagging libidos." Maybe they need better music, and more respect for women (not to mention tigers).[89]

Talking with the receptionist, who usually has a lawbook on her desk. Now there was a form for mail-order hosiery. She had some comments on a few clients who are rude on the phone, and repeated what an angry woman said. "Fucking motherfucker!" She looks delicate, but is made of stronger stuff, which is fortunate, considering the people she has to deal with**.** One of our clients, the Japanese divorcee, is pretty impatient. Her own concerns have the magnitude of an earthquake and everyone should stop and take notice. She called while the Attorney was in arbitration in the conference room behind closed doors. No matter, she wanted to interrupt him, and if the receptionist wouldn't do it she should ask another attorney to knock on the door. Ami had some scorn for our client.

5 p.m. I walked home, picking up a few things on the way, including guitar strings for the Les Paul and two blank tapes. I went into a backroom at the music store and plugged an electric-acoustic guitar (for $1200) into a small amp with a little reverb. The quality of sound was like a missing chord, it resonated with my *raison d'etre.*

[89] The Asian tiger is disappearing. Someday it will only exist on paper.

I was supposed to go to the sound room that night, but ended up staying home and editing the journal from a few years ago.

Friday, April 1, 1994

In the morning I regained consciousness with an echoing loud noise. The workmen were securing the bolts on the girders next door. They form an airy structure anchored in iron-boned concrete. The construction site across the street has a different approach. The entire lot is covered at the one-story level with a wood floor and laced with a gridlock of iron supporting rods and wires. It is complicated as a computer circuit and will be cemented like they meant it. The subtleties of intricate construction.

11 a.m. I was at the train station with the rails disappearing in the distance, into which I was headed a few minutes later, sitting by a window and floating above the ground. I was ridden out of town on a rail, and read the paper for an hour. A black woman in the next seat read about "New miracles of the holy shroud" in a tabloid. (On the bus to the station the black woman driver was yelling at other drivers, and then at her transmission.)

In the paper: "Judas was innocent,"[90] and Madonna isn't. She asked an interviewer, "Why are you so obsessed with my sex life?" A classic hypocritical dodge, like she didn't make it a public issue with her fuck-me song and dance.

A doctor is under investigation for falsifying reports. He said his critics are "taking the same attitude toward me as the states had against Somalia and Vietnam." I

[90] More interesting to consider is the probability that he never existed. Many theologians who are not afraid of Biblical research have come to doubt the "historicity" of Judas. It wasn't like the Romans needed someone to betray a man who gathered large crowds in a small town. He wasn't hard to find, however much he walked on water and left no footprints.

think I could become a connoisseur of inflated not to say meaningless rhetoric, there is so much of it around. I think he means his critics drop flaming petroleum jelly on him, and his reputation has been defoliated.

Two Japanese students were shot in the head by Latinos who stole their car in San Pedro (where I used to live) and went for a joy ride. The fathers of the dead students came to Los Angeles and there was a picture of them bowing to reporters – a formality which a rotten country like the U.S. doesn't deserve. At any rate, they don't express their emotions in public. This is a country where "a savage servility slides by on grease,"[91] and it's armed. "Last year, there were 44 murders connected to pistols in that country of 120 million people." Last year there were over 18,000 gun-related homicides in the U.S. Compared to Japan, there should have been around 90 shooting deaths. Such a well-regulated militia we have.

Latinos protest an anti-immigration bill. *"Justicia sin fronteras."* Justice without borders. It sounds better than "Borders without justice," but neither one is realistic. There was some mention that anyone arriving in this country, illegally or not, should have the same civil rights as a citizen, which includes not being subject to immigration laws. It renders the integrity of borders ineffective. That is something which few if any countries in the world would tolerate, including Mexico. It's not an issue of Latino immigration or no Latino immigration, given how many Latinos are here. You can't even speak in terms of making immigration more proportionate for other groups without hearing cries of injustice.[92]

---

[91] Robert Lowell, "For the Union Dead," (1964)

[92] I've seen full-page ads in a progressive magazine like *Harpers* for limiting immigration to 200,000 a year. There are valid leftwing reasons for that, including concerns about over-population and stagnant wages. Many blacks are wary of unlimited immigration.

The train pulled into the Mountain View station. I got out and a little kid came running into my arms - my five-year-old nephew, who was there with my brother and sister. He can dominate an afternoon and requires a lot of attention. I don't mind when it comes to playing ball in a small backyard. He knocked it over the fence three times. My brother and I took turns climbing over the fence, but the last time we left it for the neighbors to throw back – they're used to it. He is ten years younger, and has more muscles, but had a hard time getting over the fence. He's more solid and grounded than I am, but I'm more limber when it comes to trespassing on other people's property.

Later I was in the backyard, having a cigarette, when the five-year-old stuck his head out the door and said, "You're going to die."

My brother is thirty-one and from the sounds of it he's looking for a woman.[93] My other brother has a wife from Mexico and is the only one of us who is married (they have two kids). Only one other sibling has propagated (producing the five-year-old) and she's divorced (from a lawyer). From past experience, and my brother's situation, it would seem that being with a Latina is worth considering if you want continual love.

The physical therapist was married a few years ago but it only lasted two years. She was narcoleptic, for one thing. It didn't work out and he moved back to California,

[93] I called him in San Diego, the only one in the family with a black belt and he's taking classes in skin diving. He might be looking for a mermaid, someone in a deeper context. (I thought of men and women wearing masks while breathing oxygen through a tube connected to the compressed histories on their backs, and rubber suits for safe sex.) He went diving off Santa Barbara Island – it took four hours on a boat from San Pedro, leaving at two in the morning. He descended to a depth (wrote death) of 72 feet, and saw a lot of seaweed, nudibranchs, lobsters, crabs, a small shark, and curious sea lions swimming within two feet of him.

which he greatly missed (they were on the East Coast). Now he's on the West Coast, but you can't make love to the ocean. Meanwhile, she remarried.

The sister who picked me up at the station is thirty-eight, unmarried (divorced from a lawyer), and is a strident feminist to the point of being anti-male, and yet she has a boyfriend. He works in computational fluid dynamics (for NASA), something to do with aeronautic air flow.

We drove to her place in Portola Valley. The homes are half-hidden in the trees, being in the $700,000 range and up. She rents a couple of rooms in the one-story house of a man who retired early (an auditor from Stanford). I was impressed with the site-specific layout. The trees were planted (not to say planned) for an airy refinement, and the placement of the windows was original. The house reminded me of musical compositions from the early 1900's by Debussy or Ravel, having that sort of light-hearted structure and unexpected transparencies. I had a feeling Frank Lloyd Wright was here.

There was dry wine along with rugs and Tibetan artifacts. Everything was clean and neat - he has a housekeeper - and my sister said she hasn't changed her sheets in a year (it's done for her). She sees deer from her window, while I see someone getting arrested.

We drove half a mile to some courts on a hill overlooking a broad expanse (wrote expense) of verdant terrain with cows and horses in the distance. We had a long workout, working up a sweat with my sister and brother alternating on the other side of the net. He said he was getting tired of losing.

Afterwards we took turns watching the five-year-old, and my patience was on the wane. He can be endearing and annoying, often within a minute. My sister said an only

child of divorced parents can end up being spoiled when both sides want to compensate him for the separation. He has a quick intelligence and a temper, and is slightly dirty-mouthed. If he can work “stupid butthead” into the conversation, he will. He has absorbed a message of immediate gratification (maybe from the television), but I’m putting up some resistance**.**

On the other hand, he considers himself an artist, and presented me with a booklet of his drawings. He is an adherent of the school of fluid abstract expressionism. When I first arrived in the kitchen he was sitting at his little table and tossing off a few more at the rate of two or three a minute and handing them to me. Like many modern artists, he leaves it up to others to interpret the meaning or significance of his work. He would hand me a page which only contained a thin red line or a swirling scribble, or what he characterized as a butt (so esoteric that mere buttness was left behind). I didn’t see a butt, but like many men I have perceptual limitations.

Some of his compositions utilized recent breakthroughs in color field theory and action painting, not to mention the refusal to delve into anything so mundane as the representational. There was a spontaneity of the subjective in conjunction with the Freudian ego, truly an artist for our times, and at five years old he is younger, not to say fresher, than those jaded poseurs in their twenties. I think he needs an agent, and could sell his drawings. I know his mother has a lot of his original works, and has thrown away more than he realizes.

Late afternoon, we drove to the hills near Stanford in the waning light, and walked a mile or two, emerging from the woods into open rolling hills with an enormous radar dish on the horizon. I was mentally relaxed – there is nothing more placid than

approaching a radar installation with a few cows near the trail. I was staring at its filigreed concavity and wondering how a radar works when I stepped in cow shit.

The dish was forty feet tall or more, and surrounded by a fence. We walked back over the hill as it was getting dark and the constellations were coming out. An airliner floated in slow motion overhead. There were a couple of horses, and a dried-out tree of tortuous organic forces. I was lagging on the trail, reluctant to leave the area, but eventually I caught up. The five-year-old was talking with my brother about the phenomenon of foreshortening, how I was smaller in the distance and then larger up close. I asked him about the origins of life and he said, "I don't know about that."

We drove back to my sister's place for a rendezvous with my other sister (the mother of the five-year-old). We were 20 or 30 minutes late, but the driver kept apologizing, like it was a big deal. They are something of an odd couple. The older one (by one year) is imbued with practicality and order, a business woman who could care less about feminist theory. The younger one is a sociologist with a disorderly approach, and they can't live together.

Dinner in a well-appointed dining room. Mercifully, my nephew passed out in the other room with a book about birds lying next to him. Earlier I was hiking on the trail with a beer and a cigarette, but had no further alcohol that night. My brother gave me two bottles of Pinot Noir since I'm turning forty-two next week and will need it. Also, a shirt and socks from my sisters. Their acceptance of the family as a territory they inhabit, if not the horizon, is something to consider. My own approach is more like an approach-avoidance, for better or worse, and I have nicer relatives than I deserve.

10 p.m. Several left, leaving behind the sociologist and me. The owner of the place had a well-stocked liquor cabinet, but I didn't touch it. I felt like I was half-drunk on fatigue and sleepiness, my legs having gotten a workout that afternoon, and I was yawning like there's no tomorrow. When I left the city I was practically falling asleep, being cut loose from the tension. This area reminds me of an "unbearable lightness of being,"[94] where your life is secondary to the trees. The city is full of compromising fractious magnitudes, but here the quiet pulls the rug of motivation out from under you. That might explain the big sleep of the suburbs, as opposed to the pressurized awareness of the city, where a hard edge substitutes for property.

I went to sleep in the room of the owner like I owned the place – on a well-made bed according to a maid with an impressive sleight of hand. It was a change of pace, diverging from my usual routine, with the writings of the Dalai Lama on the nightstand.

Saturday, April 2, 1994

Morning in the windows with a tree invited in for tea, or was it a symbolic invitation from the architect? I had a leftover strawberry torte and coffee. We drove to my other sister's place in Mountain View for a couple of hours and watched a video on the history of the family, put together by my brother who studied film.

12:17 p.m. The train pulled up with the momentum of its own foreshortening, though it looked like it was going backwards. An hour-long silver bullet to the city.

Back in the Tenderloin. It's been "a year of living dangerously" according to some people, but I wouldn't call it that. I've gotten so used to it that other parts of town

[94] Milan Kundera (1984)

seem sterile or vacant. Things are out in the open here, you walk outside the door and washed-up versions of the human condition are passing on the sidewalk, passed out in a doorway, or passed away last night.

There were five messages on the phone machine. I went out for a typewriter ribbon and coffee.

Early evening, on the phone with a few people, including B., who was going to a bar with friends. I declined the invitation, not in the mood for an arbitrary diversion. It's something she lives for, and then wonders why she can't get things done. She likes to be diverted by other people and their problems, and then complains about being jerked around by women - the missed connections, faulty communications, and ulterior motives. She keeps a few men on the side who might be seen as eunuch escorts for a woman in a dysfunctional lesbian relationship.

8 p.m. Reading with a Wagnerian opera on.

10 p.m. Lay down for a minute and three hours went by.

1 a.m. I got up, which was probably a mistake. I should have let the evening go. This die-hard obsession with the writing makes the next day all the harder. The coffee had me going until four in the morning, and then I couldn't sleep. Maybe one more hour. I was hounded by some lame ideas, a long night of the soul miasma where you lay there tired and defenseless with your mind attacking while you're down.

One theme had to do with Ming. It was a relief to get away from her for a few days. When I'm with her it feels like a seductive impasse. I have to resolve it sooner or later, this detachment is getting to me.[95] When I spend a lot of time with a woman on a

[95] The following month I met the woman from Baton Rouge. She was thirty-eight, a writer, and self-medicating with Prozac, wine, and pot.

more or less platonic basis, it leaves other relations with women on hold or not pursued. We have touched on this before, how the connection between us undermines the possibility of meeting others (if only because we're spending time with each other and not some actual romantic prospects).

Sunday, April 3, 1994

Early morning light, a dawn I hadn't planned on seeing, a reluctant witness of a holiday commemorating when a man in a desert country was executed by an occupying army. His body was put in a cave, and on the third day he came back to life, not only walking through walls (having walked on water when he was alive), but levitating through the clouds into heaven (the existence of which has never been proven). It was approximately 2000 years ago, but what the hell, one can't be "absolutely modern" all the time (sorry Rimbaud).

The divine significance of the occasion was lost on me, being nearly brain-dead from a lack of sleep. On the street was a dirty grey Bel Air.

1 p.m. Jon arrived from St. Helena and we drove to the Haight, picking up some raw meat on the way. We ended up in someone's backyard with sunlight coming through the trees, throwing meat on a grill. A man used an old hair drier to fan the coals. He lives with the Brazilian woman who is married to Jon for immigration purposes. I'm not sure what Jon is getting out of it, but she seems to think her situation is as much his concern as hers. It requires some effort and risk on his part, and there will be an interview with immigration authorities next week, so they have to get their stories straight.

She is from Brazilia and has been here for ten years. It was a slow and placid afternoon with a few other people from Brazil. They have a *joie de vivre*, and though I don't know if they're like that all the time, it's like a state of innocence compared to the neurotic sexual politics of this country. They gravitate to the accepting rather than an everlasting victimology. The economy is lousy in their country, but they manage to have relationships.

I'm not sure how I was there so long, except that it was pleasant lying on the grass with the shadow of a tree on the fence. I thought I should lighten up, and moving back to my old place near the water might encourage that. I have written myself into a critical corner, concentrating on the bitter dimensions of love and alienation. It's no wonder I live alone.

Early evening, we were inside. I had a few sips from a glass of champagne, along with pineapple juice and coffee. Miles Davis in the background. We talked about scandals and inflation in Brazil. One fellow said the women are unpolitical and easy-going. Imagine a life where every little thing is not politicized. Unfortunately, the government doesn't care about the diminishing rain forest. This country is no better, having written the book on clearing forests and defoliation. You would think that Agent Orange goes back to colonial times.

I was sitting on a love seat when a woman sat down next to me. I think it was more about the seat than love. She had arrived with a man who spoke Portuguese, although he is Swedish. Socorro's boyfriend from Brazil is of Polish extraction. There was some mention of mixed races, and the number of Germans in Brazil and Argentina. For that matter, I was sitting on the front steps having a cigarette when a few people

walked by speaking Russian. A few minutes later, a Chinese couple. Then a young black guy with a baseball cap askew and baggy pants with a boombox.

I got home around nine (passing an overweight hooker who was singing out loud on the corner). The phone rang a few minutes later. It was B. and she sounded miserable, distraught, her voice cracking. Things are falling apart with the other woman. I was not in the mood for this, but she sounded disturbed and in need of running the whole thing by me, having no one else to talk to.

She admitted she blew it a couple of nights ago when she met a woman in a bar with Ilsa, who was transmitting angry signals with her eyes. The next night, B. rendezvoused with the woman, saying she needed someone to talk to about her affair with Ilsa. She would pick a stranger off the street and talk about her personal problems, like she needs another person as a mirror to bring her life into focus.

Things went from bad to worse with some missed connections, and they went for a drive this afternoon to Marin, walking on the trail to Black Sands Beach. It was warm, but things were chilly between them. B. said she can't stand it when Ilsa analyzes every aspect of "the relationship," with B. feeling X-rayed and manipulated, like the other woman has to know her mind in order to feel secure on what to expect. It makes B. feel like a machine which her girlfriend knows how to operate and what buttons to push, if not caress. I said, "Welcome to the wonderful world of moody and controlling women."

B. was characterizing Ilsa in those terms - one minute she was saying the worst things to B., and the next minute was coy and romantic, having brought some champagne for their Easter outing. (They should have gone to church instead, if only because you can't talk during the service.) B. was at a disadvantage since she doesn't like to fight or

argue, while the other one does. They are an odd couple, where Ilsa is small and quick-tempered, and B. is tall and friendly and slow to anger. She is tired of being a punching bag, however, and won't respond when Ilsa gives her a tongue lashing.

I said that could be a problem right there. It seems to be a theme between them. What does Ilsa have to do to get a response from B., whether in an argument or in bed? B. is out to sea about a lot of this, and I can imagine Ilsa getting impatient if her girlfriend acts like a stereotypical woman who is dizzy, absent-minded, and not sure where she put her sex-drive.

When they left the beach, B. decided she couldn't ride in the same car with Ilsa, and started walking along the road, a mile or two from the bridge. It was a bad move. What had been a cold shoulder treatment shifted to the next level with Ilsa throwing a fit, yelling and screaming at B. from the car to get in. She came back three times, but B. refused – again this phenomenon of not responding to her girlfriend, who finally drove away and B. walked most of the way home, crossing that bridge when she came to it.

She was exhausted and depressed. We were on the phone for an hour or so and she finally apologized for subjecting me to her love life.

10:30 p.m. Phone call from Ming. She just got home, having spent the weekend a few hours up the coast with her brothers, diving for abalone. We talked for a while, until she was sleepy and suggested we meet for breakfast tomorrow.

Monday, April 4, 1994

7:30 a.m. I woke up and went out. We met on a sidewalk near here and went to a greasy spoon café with red vinyl booths. I gave her a worm sucker (a present from my nephew) – a transparent substance with a worm embedded in it. She was underwhelmed.

I walked her to the bus and went home to the typing and a wooden instrument.

In the office in the afternoon - there was a lot of work with the Attorney there.

5:30 p.m. Ming dropped by, having changed her plans for the evening a few times. She wanted to work out, then remembered an X-ray appointment. Then it was cancelled, so she came over in one of her blue Monday moods. Her life is getting to her.

We went to my place, picking up some Cajun catfish and a couple of beers. I did most of the cooking while she lay around, reading the paper and trying to relax. She took off her long skirt, with white tights to mid-calf which make her legs look firm and muscular, but she denies it. A constant refrain with her these days: "I'm fat." Also, bored with her job, uncertain about the future, stressed out, broke, unmarriageable, and getting old (at twenty-four).

Ming is not uncoordinated, but has a tendency for bumping into or breaking things. I wondered if she is graceful or not. She doesn't think so. I said, "The proof is in the pudding," which didn't make much sense. We had dinner at the round wooden table with the tube on. It showed a helicopter strafing a truck full of kids. I'm not sure why we left it on.

I had some watercolor paper and a few brushes, so we ended up doing a picture. It's one way of getting her to relax. She is more spontaneous than I am, but I'm better with a realistic depiction (factual to a fault). It was an underwater scene, with both of us eventually losing interest. I had a long and phallic-looking form, maybe a shark,

venturing into her side of the picture. She had a hectic-looking purple octopus all tangled up in itself, along with some graceful weeds in which a black snake was coiled. There was something which defied description, and neither one of us knew what it was. She said she liked my side of the picture, conveying an underwater scene. I like her wacko graphics.

When painting the watercolor some phrases floated up in my mind. I said, "Rocks in the ocean, rocks in your head… probably even rocks in your bed," and smiled. She intimated that it wasn't the greatest poem she ever heard.

11 p.m. We went out. A Latina male-to-female prostitute was sitting on the hood of a car and lifting her skirt for someone. We walked another block and a male-to-female whore was dropped off in front of us by a Mercedes. She walked on, adjusting her miniskirt and wearing boots to mid-thigh, with big hair, artificial tits, and perfume. There were remnants of a man's muscular carriage, a little awkward in high heels. Ming wasn't sure what to think.

I walked her home, carrying the vegetables, and was invited in to see her room. It was not very feminine (according to her). I said time and space are bending around her (there were curving windows), but she said, "No." I said maybe it's in her nature to be this way – having the gravitational pull of a self-centered person - but she took issue with that as well.

She had a wry comment about my being able to amuse myself, while all she could do was be depressed. She wanted to know the secret - is it something I could put in a bottle? Where do I come by this mental buoyancy? I think some of it comes from being

with her. It isn't hard to come by when I have some outlets (writing and guitar), and don't work too much (three hours a day).

She likes her white room with its plants, but we had to talk quietly. She lives with an older woman whose room is next door and was already asleep. It's a long flat, but comes with a slightly compromised atmosphere. Ming suggested I spend the night as I was too relaxed to walk home – although I left the radio and TV on, along with a few lights.

We were in the bathroom and she said I could use her toothbrush, since she uses mine, but I declined. I liked the mirrors on opposing walls, where you raise your arm and many arms go up, receding into infinity.

Tuesday, April 5, 1994

7 a.m. I woke up slowly in an open shirt and a pair of violet thermals. We lay there for a while until she got up and disappeared, taking a shower.

When she walked back in, she was wearing a long night shirt. There was a discreet procedure of putting on some cotton briefs, then a bra was strapped on underneath the night shirt, which she took off and sat on the end of bed. She put on a white slip and a white blouse, then stood in the closet, looking for a skirt. I was thinking this platonic close connection would be easier if she didn't have a firm and slender behind.

8 a.m. We left on a nice morning and walked to a coffee shop, having apple strudel, coffee, and reading the paper. She read my horoscope:

"The lull in your love life will end soon."
"Are you leaving?"

"Jerk."

Then she read hers. "Great things are possible today!" [Dental X-rays after work.] "You feel something special in the atmosphere." [Paranoia in the headlines and a toothache.] "Do not ride roughshod over someone's feelings." She said she was sorry for calling me a jerk.

We walked to the bus which pulled up and I declined the offer of a ride and walked home. I passed the fountain of civil rights in front of City Hall, or is it a dirty wading pool? We're up to our knees in civil liberties.

Typing for a couple of hours, and not enough sleep. Focused by fatigue.

Through the window I could see a Latino with a welding torch standing on an iron-red girder. He was ten feet above the cement with a network of girders bolted and welded into place. This will be a playground for kids, and he wore a T-shirt: NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK.

I walked to work in the afternoon, passing a few theaters and a sign for PHANTOM PARKING (a local problem – no parking). There was a play directed by Benny Ambush.

I passed a newsstand with something about pedophilia, and an article about a young woman taking aim with a semi-automatic rifle through a cyclone fence. She shot a pregnant woman sitting in a car. The woman barely survived, who is married to a sub-human who the shooter was having an affair with. They took out a life insurance policy on the wife ($500,000). It sounds malevolent, but you wonder if they were so dumb they couldn't comprehend what they were doing, or how readily they would be suspected and caught.

There was a lot of work in the office, including a change of plea to the District Attorney (wrote Distracted) which I thought was weak. A black man, nineteen, was found in possession of an Uzi submachine gun, possession of which is a felony. Maybe he's an honest citizen who is trying to make a life for himself, and maybe not. He has a job and some references. On the other hand, how to explain the bag in his house with "ski mask, tape, and rope"? His excuse about the gun: he was holding it for his stepfather. It belonged to a woman friend who didn't want it near her twelve-year old daughter. However, mere possession of such a gun, not ownership, violates Penal Code Section 12280(b).

We have to get a police report from the CHP in Visalia about an accident which occurred on Highway 99. When I was a kid we lived there for several years, and there were pile-ups all the time on 99 because of the tule fog. It reduces visibility to a few feet. I remember my father driving slowly while holding his door open so he could see the yellow line and know where the road was.

V. walked by the desk, looking glamorous and smiling. She gave me what was left of her coffee mocha.

I went out for a cigarette. I have to use the balcony on the next floor up since a Jewish legal assistant said the smoke from the balcony (behind a closed door) comes under the door into the hall by the elevators, then drifts along the floor and passes through the wall of his office (like the ghost of a prophet). I was out there with a cigarette and a black woman walked out to have a smoke. We had a friendly conversation, commiserating on how smokers are exiled, and talking about someone who jumped from

the 12th floor of the immigration building a block away. I said, "Maybe the lines were too long."

When she left, saying I could come up there anytime, it left me thinking how I get entangled in racial issues, and yet I get along with most of the black people I meet. Maybe that should occupy the foreground of what is significant, and leave the constant static of racial politics in the background.

7 p.m. Went home tired and read *Mona Lisa Overdrive*.

Fell asleep early.

Wednesday, April 6, 1994

The early morning light was streaming through the windows while I was on a typewriter facing east. There was the sound of metal cutting through metal. A man stood on the girders with a buzzsaw which was throwing off a shower of sparks about ten feet long. It reminded me of a show I saw at the Fillmore with the Beatnigs (who opened for the Butthole Surfers).[96] They used a similar technique with an amplified buzzsaw. The friction and the sparks are generated as the world turns.

10 a.m. A phone call from B. I heard about the psychological torque of two women while listening to the sounds of workmen building a building.

After a while I was losing patience with her credulous questions. Love makes you dumb? She was supposed to call the other woman at work, but wasn't sure if she would get her head chewed off, or hear that it's over. She doesn't want to end it over the phone, and was asking some futile questions like - can one expect a paramour to act as a

[96] 1987

"responsible person"? I had to tell her again that she is in a love affair. The other person, man or woman, is under no obligation to be "reasonable" or ethical or honest or anything. There are no laws to protect your feelings and keep the loved one from tearing your heart out and walking away and not returning calls.

B. sounded like a mournful girl. She can't understand how Ilsa would throw it away, considering the nice times they have had together. I don't know if she is in denial or has a memory span of twenty-four hours. I had to remind her she's been calling me on a regular basis for months and complaining about the latest miscommunication. She is not sure why people fight about little things. I almost said it goes along with having small minds. The moments of friction trigger an argument which is "blown out of proportion." It is symptomatic of a deeper condition of their being out of sync. She said, "How can someone tell you they love you one minute and be so critical the next?" I said, "They might be lying, or they have a shallow view of love."

With respect to the constant arguments, she said she hates to fight. "We're not a couple of three-year-olds." I said, "I think three-year-olds get along better." She said something about making a last-ditch effort to go to "couples therapy" (originally the other woman's idea), and furthermore, before Ilsa calls it off, she wants to mail her a tape by a woman on the subject of couples and their problems. I thought it was a little late for that, but she could try. I'm still not sure what I'm supposed to say, like maybe I should call up Ilsa and remind her that modern people should be reasonable.

I was typing for a while, and then Ming called from work. She wants to meet at the farmers' market around one. I walked to the rendezvous. There were loud banging and sawing noises from the construction site across the street (the new library).[97]

I'm not sure if this is a recent development, but she will touch my arm in greeting. We have drifted into more involvement in each other's lives, and she is nearly as involved in my leaving the Tenderloin as I am. She suggested the other day I buy a larger bed for the place I'm moving to, and then was on the phone with furniture stores. I wondered why she was interested in the size of my bed. I've been wrong about her close attentions before. She might be practicing her empathy, or keeping the reflex of affection in working order and the gears well-oiled for when she meets a man she really likes, there being some limitations to this rapport.

We walked around with her picking up vegetables, then took a bus downtown.

In the office I spoke with Ami who was doing a summary of deposition which was boring her to no end. We got on the subject of her impending marriage. She told me how it works, according to the tradition she was brought up in. As a Patel, she can only marry other Patels, but they're not closely related. The branches have to go back five or six generations. There are matchmaking networks. A girl will be introduced to a boy, the meeting arranged by the parents, and she will have a few days to decide if this is someone she should marry and spend the rest of her life with (having children along the way). She said that things are more relaxed for her generation, and a girl could refuse. She knew her

[97] When it was finished, the old library was taken over by the Chinese and it was a shame how much was lost. It was built in 1917 "with the principles of beaux-arts architecture," including high ceiling reading rooms and Depression-era murals. The building was partly gutted, with the reading rooms subdivided, for an Asian museum. Included in the loss were a number of books which the new library didn't have room for (with the architect unclear on the concept).

fiancé and they got along, so it wasn't like she was being given to a stranger. She is twenty, he is twenty-three.

I asked if she has been to India. She said, "A couple of times," but it left her with some bad impressions, being a fastidious woman when it comes to cleanliness and smells. She said how dirty it was, her village a day's drive from Bombay, and no, they didn't take the train. They don't trust it (thinking they might be robbed). She said that people would "take a dump" on the street or sidewalk. I am generally in awe of India and would like to go there, but that is how she described it.[98]

Meanwhile, she was muttering how a summary of deposition was "boring my ass off." According to her horoscope, she is a "cute little bundle of extreme emotions." We were talking when there was a phone call from one of our clients and she held the phone away from her ear, he was yelling and swearing so much. I took the call at my desk.

6:30 p.m. in the lobby of the old hotel with the pool. Ming walked in wearing jeans, a black T-shirt, and heavy shoes. We were in the weight room, making the mechanical rounds of a few machines. I left her there and went to the pool, swam a mile, and returned to the weight room where she was sweating profusely.

We walked to my place around 8 p.m. She made rice and stir fry for herself, and I had a burrito. I have had one beer in four days. She was in a kitchen-domestic mood this evening. Later she was sitting on the bed with the 10 o'clock news on and characterizing

---

[98] I never went. The pull of the Roman Empire was too strong, with its ghostly ruins which surround the Mediterranean and go as far as England in the north. I made it to Greece and Rome, along with Egypt and Morocco, the Islamic empire overlapping on the Roman. I went to the Moorish palace known as the Alhambra in the south of Spain. On the other hand, there are people of India coming to California, and I've known a few of them, like Daljeet (a computer programmer and recording engineer who I recorded an album with); Simran (his daughter, who studied environmental science and moonlights as a techno-DJ); Rajshree (a teacher from the poetry community); Jayinee (a young psychiatrist); and Nidhi (a wandering woman who I correspond with since she went back to India).

what she has to look forward to: “Getting fat and wearing glasses.” The conversation had its usual magnetic continuity.

11:30 p.m. She was getting sleepy and wrestled her mountain bike onto the elevator and out the front door where she rode off past a prostitute.

Thursday, April 7, 1994

In the morning the four cement trucks of the apocalypse were right outside my window. The entire lot across the street is covered with a wooden structure, one story high, with iron supporting rods in a complicated grid. The cement is poured on top of that from a white tube that hinges to a big right angle thirty or forty feet in the air. The end of it is guided by a single man. The other end is connected to a truck with support legs which unfold from the sides, and which is fed by a cement truck.

Sparks were flying under the window, the noise of a blade cutting through metal, while I was on the phone with Ming.

12:30 p.m. I met V. in the office and we walked to the Hunan place which was full of Hunan beings. She looked special for some reason, her hair tied back with a delicate ribbon, wearing a black and white outfit with red lipstick. She told me about a woman whose marriage broke up because she was so lazy. She had to know everything about her husband’s finances, but wouldn’t let him know about hers. In other words: what’s mine is mine, and half of yours is mine.

I walked home after work and had a workout on a wooden instrument while the Secretary of State was on the tube. He does not inspire confidence.[99]

[99] Warren Christopher

7 p.m. I took a bus to the sound-room flat, and walked into an alternate reality. There was an atmosphere of slacker fatalism diverted from itself by being stoned in front of a TV. It makes you wonder if slumming is a response to the lightness of being. The two male roommates were sitting around. The manic-depressive homosexual is medicated, and the Phantom was so stoned he could barely focus on the conversation (it was his day off). Nearly thirty and his life is not going anywhere, but it could be worse. It could be going down the toilet.

He had found some old video tapes in his room (which is a mess), and switched the TV from commercial-interruptions-of-the-irrelevant-and-corrupt to a tape of him on stage. It was a few years ago at the Omni in the East Bay. He was on electric guitar (the white Strat), and pushing pedals on a foot organ while his old buddy Jon (now estranged in St. Helena) was on drums. They sounded awful. The recording was not very good, his vocals droning on with some echo, and the guitar was not coming through very well. Now and then there was a glimmer of sound effects that might have sounded good as they generated a diversion for a small crowd. Even though it isn't much, you miss it when it's over, like it had some energy, and the human voice is better than nothing. They got some applause (a private party), but the people may have been applauding the fact that it was over.

The next tape was from the early 1980's, when he was about nineteen. There was a band on stage, I think in North Dakota, with him on rhythm and/or lead guitar, and looking more professional. They did cover tunes (the Rolling Stones, the Cars, and Stray Cats). He had short hair, a suit and tie, and played rather well as far as cover tunes go. He was reviewing the ghost of his former self from ten years ago, and wondering where it all

went wrong and how things would have been if the band had stayed together (they were touring around the Midwest). There are people who were cut adrift and never fully recovered after being in a working band which broke up.[100]

The before-and-after footage of the Phantom was a revelation. How much drugs and alcohol did it take to turn a competent guitarist in the early days into a droning stoner, surviving without a band and not much structure to his music. Another loose end on the West Coast, where I was born - a loose end from the get go. There was footage of his band backstage at a civic auditorium, fooling around, conducting mock interviews with each other, and his dry sense of humor. He kept messing with the remote, however, turning the tape into a flickering fast forward, playing with the past.

9 p.m. We went downstairs into the garage as a beat-up high-powered sedan went by. Two cars were being repaired, but the motorcycles had been reassembled, and the same pin-up was on the wall over a tool bench, a pretty woman sitting there and smiling with no clothes on. In the sound room we sometimes go our separate ways, with him as a drunk technician, and me as someone who is there to play.

I sat on a stool with a microphone and a classical guitar, using a pick. He wanted to record some acoustic guitar. It sounded nice coming through the amplifiers, so he set it in motion, going out of the room for a cigarette while I lay down a track of rhythmic chord progressions with some flourishes, six or seven minutes. We listened to it and he was stoked. We did a practice run of laying down another track over the first one as a counterpoint, then taped it, which turned out alright. When I was done, he fooled around

[100] The singer suffered from depression and dropped out of the music business, or maybe it dropped him. I met him in his rural hideout. He said he works at night in a hospital, taking blood from patients when they are unconscious. It sounded vaguely vampirical.

with the recording equipment and couldn't find what we recorded. There is often a momentary confusion with him.

Then he found it and adjusted the balance, with two guitars overlapping, the swells of sound in an ebb and tide. We went outside and sat on the steps. He wore black gloves and talked about musicians with tendonitis. He said, "You also get it from typing."

I went home.

Friday, April 8, 1994

NOTES

Yesterday was the birthday of Billie Holiday.

The recent deaths of Derek Jarman (I've seen *The Last Days of England*), and Charles Bukowski (the last days and drastic lays of an alcoholic poet). They were fifty-two and seventy-three years old, respectively, if not respectfully.

In 1973 I was a junior at San Francisco State, where I met some leftwing organizers on campus. They talked me into going to one of their meetings. It turned out to be a small gathering of Trotskyists and was kind of pathetic, the speaker haranguing the small audience for contributions. He was in his twenties and wore a trench coat to show how serious he was. I had an older friend in Los Angeles at the time, a Vietnam vet who was a Maoist, and he didn't think much of the Trots.

I left the meeting and went to a packed poetry reading in North Beach. That's where "the people" were, along with Charles Bukowski. He had a small refrigerator full of beer onstage. If Wordsworth was one of the Lake poets, Bukowski is one of the Beer poets. He has a poem called "6 Inches," which is not an intimation of immortality. I lived in Los Angeles for years, including San Pedro where he ended up, and used to see his column in an underground paper, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man." His short stories are not subtle, like the one about a man who is driven to despair by a woman when it comes to getting through to her, or letting her know what she is doing to him. He goes into the bathroom and cuts off his testicles and crawls to her bleeding and hands them to her.

Another story, which seems more realistic now, is set in the old West. A slender poet is in a showdown with another man. They're about to shoot it out over a woman, who knows them both. The woman isn't taking any chances, however,

knowing how her butt is buttered and her bed is bettered, thinking she can get a good fuck out of the meat-head, so she shoots the poet in the back with a shotgun.

One of his everyday poems in a lesser Los Angeles. He is going on with his life, and making observations, but one day

> "…you look around & no longer
> see any
> old men."

Him with his cheap radio opera, booze, and struggles with himself and women. Through a beer glass darkly, peering through the smog and smoke with a hungover nervous system. It didn't obscure his knowledge of what's what. If anything, it obscured the superficial and romantic illusions of the time he lived in.

Another writer with a mundane job in order to pay the rent, although in his later years a movie was made about him (*Barfly*), and he floated the rest of the way. He didn't like the film – saying they got it wrong, too macho or something. He wrote about cruising in a black BMW, which was a change of pace. It corresponded to a premature hearse, or maybe a rehearsal for his accoladed death, being ushered out of existence on expensive wine-soaked shock absorbers.

Yesterday morning I went out for some milk. There was a guy standing on a fire hydrant and staring into the distance with a few others staring in the same direction. Four police cars were up the street with their lights flashing and people standing around. Whatever it was I missed it. It often happens that I'm walking on the sidewalk and I turn the corner and sense something in the air, like an animal-pedestrian awareness of an arrest, if not a casualty.

Last night on the bus, it went a block and stopped. There was another arrest in progress. A man with long hair was being handcuffed and put into the backseat of a police car while an officer had a briefcase open on the trunk of a car. He was talking to a woman who was also handcuffed, like they were in possession of stolen goods or drugs, if not illegal passports.

We are lone survivors in a culture of discontinuity. There is a sense of having outlived some phases and relationships. The products have a built-in obsolescence (and society has a built-in adolescence). Your relations with people are like fading illusions. It is like those countries where the buildings are made of weak cement, and when there is a tremor they collapse.

There is too much information - all the more so if you made the reckless move of expanding your awareness, not realizing that it would include a greater awareness of the darker things. It sits in your head and after a while you need an extra-strength brain reliever. You're accumulating information at an accelerated rate of technical machines that never existed before.

Imagine a country full of people who have been accelerated out of their basic human bonds, leaving them on medication staring at commercials for the rest of their lives.

Epistemological concerns among the block heads.

The terraced levels of diminishing consciousness when one is falling asleep. Going… going….

Some men are misled when the eroticism of a woman is diffused in her life (one reason her sexual response may take a while to bring into focus). It is worse if there is vinegar in her blood and static between her legs.

What is the female equivalent of being phallocentric, and why don't we hear more about it? Gynocentric? It is like the elephant in the room, given how much tender loving care their nether regions get.

A smug ad on the radio (KUSF) for "the Women's Building" which "like us, transcends gender" (men are allowed). If it transcends gender, why don't they call it something else, like the Humans' Building? Was it built by women?

Women with deep internal instincts which are balanced by contrived normality adjustments.

If you go without a woman long enough you feel as hollow and reverberant as the sound box of an acoustic guitar, one that resounds to the slightest touch.

A lot of poetry is the equivalent of linguistic breath mints.

Those who look at the mind as the equivalent of peripheral vision.

Failure Analysis Associates – a good name for a ban**d**. Or The Aviation Authority.

Smoke is pouring out of your face.

Girders are defying the absurd.

The tree outside my window is illuminated by a riot light.

A black whore in a white corset with bicycle shorts and nylons.

A woman with duplicities up the butt.

The immaculate conception of persona.

Fine tune the mind. Toughen up its finitude, a fight tune.

The etherealization of what it means to be oppressed.

Typing in the morning. Went to work in the afternoon.

5 p.m. On the way to Ming's office I was feeling upbeat when I passed a newsstand and a headline punched me in the stomach. The singer in Nirvana shot himself at twenty-seven. When Ming walked out I was distracted by the loss of Kurt Cobain. It had an impact. She was underwhelmed, and found it irresponsible for someone who had it all and left behind a wife and child. She considers suicide a weakness.

I wondered if he shot himself because he was on top and got there in such a powerful accelerated manner that the next step was to break on through to the other side and leave this world behind. He went from obscurity in a grunge band to fame and fortune coast-to-coast, so the precedent for a major leap was there. The next one took him out of this life.

Sometimes we don't know why a person kills himself. The friction and the contradictions which had generated the songs he made up didn't go away because he sold a lot of records. We're so used to manic sound effects in music that we don't know if a singer means it when he's screaming in pain. What you're hearing is the chaos inside him, but so many others scream and shout in front of microphones it's hard to take it seriously. When acting depressed or crying wolf on stage is normal, those who're actually self-destructive fit right in.

I have the feeling something was eroded in him by his various altered states, along with an identity crisis when he was well known, feeling pushed out of his own existence by his public image. The audience wasn't a hundred people, it was spread to the horizon. I thought he had a handle on it, having a sense of humor and posing in a woman's blouse for a magazine. But the windy and disorienting magnitudes of fame will separate the vulnerable from the grounded, and you lose a sense of proportion when you stand in front of 50,000 people while they're going out of their minds. You hold onto your guitar, but it is not the most relaxing sound.

If one is disillusioned with success in the music business (knowing it is fleeting and ephemeral), it is even more depressing when you know that others want it and you have it, but you're miserable. You still are mortal with an awful girlfriend and the usual aches and pains. He tried to numb the pain with heroin, along with amplifiers, but the surest method of becoming painless is to drop out of existence. Some would say it's self-indulgent, but so is being a rock star.

I walked with Ming in a light rain, holding an umbrella over both of us. There was an opening at the Vorpal Gallery near her place, but she was in one of her inflexible moods. Her thoughts and plans can change in a minute, so she has to put her foot down, knowing how shiftless things can be in her world. Which is how we ended up in the basement of Woolworth's, looking for bubble bath and toilet paper. She didn't find what she wanted, and I was getting claustrophobic. We finally left and took a bus to her place in the pouring rain.

No plans for the evening, but it hardly mattered. We are capable of generating something. I was introduced to the woman she lives with, a painter who sells her work, which is mostly flower arrangements. There was a floral theme informing the flat, which was built in the late 1800's. Fresh bouquets in every room, along with books on the subject (like the subject of flowers was pressed between the pages). She seems to have a realistic view of things, including what constitutes a bad neighborhood. This one is marginal according to some, but she likes it. A sweet-tempered woman who smokes cigarettes and has a couple of grown children.

Italian food was delivered and we sat in the kitchen with a floor of black and white squares and a bouquet on a wooden table. I could see why Ming moved here, occupying a home that was furnished like a soft landing for the near future.

We had the living room to ourselves, the woman retiring early for the night on the other end of the flat. Wood-lined with an old mirror and a tile fireplace from the 19th century. Some of the flowers smelled like incense. There were hot toddies with hot water, rum, lemon and honey while we lounged on the sofa. We went through a lot of rum that night, and in the window was a stream of tiny headlights in the distance. I brought the boombox in and played the tape I recorded with the Phantom last night, with an acoustic guitar on overlapping tracks. It was seven minutes long, and she said she could have listened to more.

We got absorbed in a mental-intensive telepathic session on the sofa and some moments bordered on the eerie. She wanted to do some writing. I mentioned a surrealist exercise where one person begins a sentence with "If…" or "When…" The other person completes the sentence without seeing the first part. Then you look at the two halves

together and find an odd thought. We were surprised by an occasional common wavelength moving through us.

Me:	Her:
When you hit the nail on the head…	nostalgia hits.
If women are goddesses…	art is.
When lilacs in the doorway bloom…	spring has sprung.
If men are the source of life…	the veins in my wrist are going to burst.
Her:	**Me:**
When voices cease in a room…	the end is near.
When love equals happiness…	women are spontaneously giving birth.

This went on, moving back and forth with results which were too strange for words, or hitting on unlikely philosophical concepts.

Later in the evening, after midnight, we got into a discussion which she instigated. More and more I find her talking about the connection between us, and if it's undermining our relations with others. I think she sees it as a *fait accompli*, rather than leading to something else, and wants to protect it by not coming too close, which in her experience tends to screw things up with a man.

Our being sexual would guard the relationship in one sense, as without it I will drift into the arms of another woman who may wonder about a friend I spend entire evenings with. It seems like I have fluctuating close rapports with different women, finding out how many variations of a love affair there are. I'm not sure why I'm open to that sort of thing, as if I want to see how many kinds of love – and women – there are. I've had affairs that lasted nine years, or nine months, or nine days, and women friends with whom I ventured into sensual understandings.

There are connections and rapports where you don't have any expectations, letting it unfold along whatever lines it can. I find myself in unfamiliar scintillating territories which I wouldn't have if the main intent was getting laid. You go through phases where there isn't any sex, but it's erotic as hell. The sexuality is sublimated. Like energy, you don't get rid of sexuality, it just takes on a different form, like clouds instead of rain. It's in the air and it informs the norms, but now and then you want to go swimming.

Earlier today she gave me a handmade card, for which I had to kiss her. I was surprised at how complimentary it was, not to say well done. She xeroxed on heavy paper a medieval picture of a man seen from behind. He was sitting with a bare back and long hair, while staring down an architectural tunnel with a light at the end – which she heightened with a highlighter.

> To the man who has more complexities than we all know what to do with… and who has an odd yet unique sense of humor… with the patience of a saint, the smarts of a mastermind… the fingers of a classical artist… In essence, the costs of being your buddy are far outweighed by the benefits… hope you have a wildly hectic birthday weekend, we're gonna have fun!!!.... love…

There was some discussion as to who has more complexities, and if the patience was required for dealing with someone like her. If I had a mastermind I might have finished college. As for "the costs of being your buddy," that is an allusion to how it undermines affairs with other men. Before she gets romantic she considers the cost-benefit ratio. I consider a lost radio.

2 a.m. We were fading out, after writing on each other's stomach with a felt tip pen.

Saturday, April 9, 1994

8:30 a.m. Woke up in her bedroom with the windows curving out and the morning light coming in. I was a little stiff from her bed, and for once the person getting a massage was me. She would outdo herself today, applying herself to the occasion of my turning forty-two, and having everything to do with it being a pleasant experience. The day wouldn't quit, as we were to find out. It is an annual habit and it comes with psychosomatic overtones, but there were some illuminated moments.

She drew a bath for me, complete with bubbles. Something I never do is have a bath in the morning, much less with scented bubbles and her sitting on the floor beside the tub and handing me pieces of chocolate.

After the bath I sat on her bed in a towel which didn't stay on very long. I was lounging naked in the sunlight and she didn't mind, we're used to it, while she made some effort to straighten up the room and tend to the plants. She cut off a spiked leaf from an aloe vera plant and put it dripping on my chest, saying I should rub it on my skin, so I did. It was a slow morning with some notion of going out to the cliffs.

1 or 2 p.m. We walked to my place and got too comfortable (four messages on the phone). A package from my parents – black sheets and pillow cases for a full mattress which I don't have yet, and a black bathrobe which I needed. She had given me a narrow vase of brass and copper which looked like a plant with spear-shaped leaves for incense, along with sticks of Egyptian musk, her current scent.

We lay around for a while, and then I was on a wooden instrument. She wanted to hear a song. I ran through some tunes, including "Fly Me to the Moon" (I changed the words and made it a break-up song). The subjects were a little depressing, from loneliness to war, but they were balanced by the positivity of singing.

4 p.m. We took a bus to 32nd Street and walked to the cliffs where a trail winds around to Land's End and the Cliff House a mile or so away. We found a breathtaking afternoon in progress with high winds and so much clarity it almost hurt and the entire ocean stirred up by the forces running through it. I wore some torn-up jeans, while lugging a shoulder bag full of liquids.

We took a trail to Land's End, and then a smaller trail which meandered down to the beach and sat on the sand, leaning on a rock and looking at a huge boulder not far from shore. It's about thirty feet high and I climbed it a while back. The waves were coming in like waves and when they hit a rock it released a tension in the water which exploded high into the air.

For the next hour or so we wandered around the rocks and tidepools, and she poked at the anemones with her finger. They remind her of cervixes. Further on the beach is more rugged with fallen rocks and chunks of old cement. There was a blowhole where a rolling swell would crash into a narrow crevice and shoot straight up and land on us.

Eventually we climbed up a steep hill to a trail and followed it to an overlook with soft grass and ice plant with purple flowers. We lay on the ground and had a beer with the sun near the horizon. She was thinking about this evening, though, and getting restless. We walked to the ruins of the Sutro baths and on to the Cliff House. Coffee and whiskey by a window looking at an ocean sideswiped by infinity.

An hour later we were back at her place. I rested on the bed while she got ready for the evening, standing in front of her closet with her back to me. She took off her shirt, removed her bra, bent over, found another one and strapped it on. That was followed by a black blouse, some black slacks, low heels, and a dark women's coat she just bought and

really liked. There was lipstick and dangling earrings which she never wears. The transformation was something else.

We walked to my place through the Civic Center. We had some time, however, as the band wasn't on until 11:30 - Strictly Roots at the Kennel Club. We went through half a bottle of Pinot Noir, and she made a sandwich by candlelight. There was a scent of Egyptian musk in the air while I changed into some dark wool slacks and a burgundy silk shirt which got her approval.

11 p.m. We took a cab to the club. We walk so much that when we take a cab it feels like ripping through town on a power glide. Half an hour later the band came on. I saw them years ago. Three white guys, three black guys, and one woman. It was her idea, as I find their music a little subdued, if not monotonous at times. They played for a couple of hours, and it had its moments. There were images unfolding on a screen like a Rorschach test, and blue points of light were flying through the crowd doing a two-chord zombie shuffle.

The Czech woman had shown up with a woman friend. B. was supposed to, but didn't make it. (It turned out she had arranged for one of her flunky escorts to go with her. Things were not going well with the other woman, but at the last minute they reconciled, so she left the guy hanging. He went to her place and then to the club on his motorcycle and never found her. He later said he almost got shot.)

The women were buying me drinks. Ming said, "Kamikaze," but I asked for a Screwdriver. It was followed by a beer or two. Not sure if it was her influence, the evening, or what, but there was a prolonged momentum of drinking like I hardly ever do

anymore, and too much energy for some reason. It was not the best music for dancing, but we made an effort, knocking bodies on the floor next to guys with dreadlocks.

2 a.m. We took a cab to her place, and were in the kitchen having some Middle Eastern food and yet another beer. The conversation took on an unfortunate torque, mainly on her end. Maybe the alcohol was bringing out the worst in her, or the reggae stirred up something – like memories of when she had a boyfriend. It was odd, considering the warmhearted atmosphere in the club.

It was anything but that as we moved into the living room and lounged on the sofa. I mentioned B. and how she had been leading on a guy for two years. He was on the verge of taking her home to his parents and discussing marriage plans, but she finally had to tell him she had no intention of marrying him and they should not see each other anymore. B. had a mounting guilt about this, and was telling me for weeks how she couldn't bring herself to end it. He had functioned as an escort and that was it, maybe a little kissing. She had secured his attentions by letting his romantic feelings grow (hence the marriage plans). Some women see it as a useful energy, a man in love, but it's like using someone's heartstrings to tie your shoes.

Ming had no sympathy for him, saying it was his fault for being so gullible and sentimental as to fall in love. It led to a diatribe against love affairs between men and women, which in her opinion are bound to get ugly with people being deceived and torn apart. We reviewed some of her recent history, with a few men who fell for her. She repeated her old routine, saying, "Don't words mean anything? You just can't believe men when you tell them, 'We'll sleep together and have sex, but it doesn't mean

anything, don't fall in love with me, okay?'" And they agree, whatever it takes to get her into bed.

We were soon shooting from the hip - her at romantic love and me at some of her contradictions, which she agreed might seem like lies. I mentioned things I heard from one man or another (which is never a good idea), that she had a more active role in leading them on. She usually says, "It just happened," or "It was his idea." She didn't disagree with that assessment, but it only made things worse as to her views of romantic love. At some point she was lashing out in all directions and caught me with a few remarks – "… AND THIS BETTER NOT HAPPEN TO US!" - referring to when she's friends with a man, but then he falls in love and it screws things up.

At some point she admitted she has slept with most of her male friends over the last couple of years, but it wasn't news to me.

It was after four in the morning and we were exhausted. She suddenly changed her tune, aware of having been a little indiscriminate in her angry comments, like she might have clawed the daylights out of someone sitting nearby, or maybe just depressed him, who was suddenly quiet and leaving the room with her saying, "If I said something that hurt you or disturbed you, would you tell me?" "Not necessarily…." I walked the long corridor to her room and stood next to the bed. She wanted to talk about it. I said, "It's 4:30 in the morning, we could do this until the sun comes up." She said she didn't mind and that she was used to it.

We got under the covers and I was turned away from her. She said once again, quietly, that she says things when she's angry which she might not mean. I said, "It's okay," and went to sleep.

Sunday, April 10, 1994

7:30 a.m. I woke up after three hours sleep and thought about it for a minute. I probably couldn't go back to sleep and didn't want to be in the same room with her. I was feeling some repulsion with her looking on romantic love as turbulent and ugly, a recurring theme with her. It makes me wonder what there is inside her which might correspond with that. Last night she said she might be sadistic with men, and yet she is more conscientious than most women I know. Oblivious when it comes to her effect on men, but patient when it comes to the negotiations, though it sounds like someone who will kick a man in the balls and then administer first aid.

I got up quietly, took my clothes into another room, got dressed (leaving the violet thermals on a table) and walked out. I hit the sidewalk in the slanting shadows of the early morning and walked home. I was powered by a motivation I had fallen asleep with, and I woke up like a spring inside was being released and pulling me out of there.

I got home, made some breakfast, sat around for a while, then went to bed. I was in dire need of sleep and went under for a few hours.

In the afternoon I wasn't good for much, watching a sunlit tree in the window moving slightly. I slowly came around with some coffee. Having walked out on her didn't feel so bad. I don't know how it affected her, but it's the worst thing for some women. When a man walks out it calls into question their control of him. They may be feeding off his energy and presence, and then turning it against him.

It was warm outside, but I was not in the mood for going out. Around 4 p.m. I plugged in the Strat and tore it up for an hour. Later I reviewed an old journal from 1989 about the earthquake. There was a passing mention of her.

In the evening I had the tube on while playing guitar. I was lying on a Mexican blanket and feeling grounded on a hollow Sunday. There were several phone calls which left a message. I didn't feel like calling her, and wanted to give it a rest. On *60 Minutes* a woman was accused of child molesting, and the President's wife had some involvement with suspicious cattle futures.

I watched a documentary on the albatross, which was poetic under the circumstances. It has a wide wingspan and soars over the waves, migrating more than 9,000 miles. It averages 150 miles a day or more. I don't have an albatross around my neck, and the lyricism of the scientific was a relief, compared to an emotional morass. Wind gradient – slower near the water, and faster at a height of twenty or thirty feet. It utilizes this for flying long distances. There was a bird-crowded beach with two or three miles of nesting albatross pairs, each of them with a mud nest. It was too crowded for their take-offs, so they had a runway on the side and would walk to it when they wanted to fly away. It was on a slant, maybe with a sense of wind direction. They get a wobbly running start and take to the air.

This was followed by a movie about World War II bombers getting shot up, but it didn't hold my attention.

Monday, April 11, 1994

Rested and comparatively well-adjusted. The mental paralysis of yesterday was a nice place to visit. Everything was put on hold, with nothing moving but a few branches in the wind.

Typing for hours. I left a message on her phone machine (after some thought), and said I was sorry about Sunday morning.

Went to work in the afternoon.

5 p.m. I took a bus to the Haight where the Brazilian woman lives, and met up with her and Jon. They were planning for their immigration interview tomorrow, a marriage of convenience. We walked down Haight Street, looking for a cheap ring. Then she went home, while Jon and I went to an Egyptian restaurant (Kan Zaman), where you sit on the floor with cushions and smoke a hookah which is four feet high. The conversation wandered all over the place, from a nightclub in Oakland to the chemical content of Venus.

We returned to her place and hung out for a while. I left around 11 p.m. with a cool fog rolling down the street. No bus. On a whim I got a cab which turned into the oddest ride. The driver was in his early thirties, wearing a T-shirt, and looking for some music on the radio. He started making comments about classical music. He doesn't like the moody impressionistic stuff, and mentioned a few composers. I said, "Mahler" to make sure where he stood. He didn't like him either. (I'm partial to his 4th symphony, which has a soprano singing *"Das himmlische Leben"* (The Heavenly Life).) The driver had a lot to say about "melodic integrity," and considers baroque to be it, especially Bach.

When we got to the Tenderloin, he pulled over a block from my building and I said, “This is fine.” He had been making a point about why he thought Gershwin was good, and then asked if I wanted to hear something. There was a flute on the front seat next to him. He adjusted the radio until he found some music which appealed to him (“Chapel of Love,” an R&B tune) and played along on the flute. Not very well, I thought, but it was so spontaneous I liked it, being parked in the Tenderloin with a driver blowing on a flute like I was being transported.

When the song was over he thanked me, saying it was good for him to get used to having an audience, and I left.

Tuesday, April 12, 1994

Typing for hours.

I called Ming at work. We acted like nothing happened, while knowing full well something had. Whether or not it was a negative sea-change remained to be seen. I’m not used to being estranged from her.

In the afternoon I rendezvoused with Jon and Socorro at the office. They were interviewed in the immigration building a block away. The marriage is holding up as far as the authorities are concerned, although the “husband” isn’t getting any. We had lunch near a geometric tumble-down fountain with the Ferry Building in the background (it was clocking us). The two of them have a curious polarity. He is on the nervous side, while she is calm, with a nonpolitical fortitude which has become synonymous with “foreign” to me.

I went home after work, changed clothes, and walked to Ming's place. She had an air of indifference while talking on the phone. I sat on the floor and a dog came over and drank out of my water glass.

We walked to a place a couple of blocks away and sat at a small round table. Fish fillet with potatoes, salad, and beer. There were some young musicians with a piano nearby. It was a nice atmosphere, clean and neutral, for what turned out to be a dramatic conversation. We talked about this and that. There was a pause, a long silence, and she finally asked about Sunday. I went into it, which required some reference to the half-drunk conversation the night before and how she sounded angry and bitter and things got personal. I had called her on a few points and she didn't like it, feeling put on the spot. I shouldn't have mentioned what other men had told me, and said as much, staring into her dark eyes and saying, "I'm sorry for that."

She said she hadn't meant to start talking about the two of us, since I hadn't brought it up, but assumed she had thrown out something which led to my disappearance the following morning. And yet her Sunday was fine. She went with a woman friend to the cliffs where they were sunbathing in a cove with a few homosexuals and fell asleep.

I've gotten glimpses of an iron wall when she is talking, and the conversation on Saturday night was showing more of that. She appears benevolent on the surface, but she can be hard. All the more so with the recent misery of a long affair that fell apart, the man walking out on her, and having to steel herself.

We knocked it around for a while, looking at the situation from different angles. There were subtle changes in her expression, from faintly amused to matter-of-fact or downright touched, and responding as I thought she would. I just had to hear her say it,

that she is fine with things as they are, saying it is the “purest” relationship she ever had, and noting how long it has gone on. She is mixed up or depressed about romantic stuff, and it leaves her feeling turned off.

There were further admissions along the lines of her libido. She considers the cost-benefit ratio of being with someone, but when it comes to a sexual current she goes by a feeling, whether or not there is a rapport with the man. She is tired of that, but there it is, thinking with her cunt I suppose (as the Czech woman would say).

I remembered that on Sunday afternoon there was a country song on the radio: “Why can’t I free your doubtful mind / and melt your cold, cold heart.”

There were pauses when I stared out the window, though not having much of a reaction, just a little sad. We were there for a good two hours, and I wondered how much of the conversation had been overheard by others, having coffee and cigarettes and baring our souls. We ended in a vibrating stalemate.

We walked back to her place where I felt relieved, like when you get something off your chest and find out where you stand. She was quiet, as if I lightened my burden by giving it to her. Earlier she had a defiant air about how “closed” she is to romantic feelings, but now appeared to be thinking about it. There was a French novelist, Stendhal, who wrote about the fleeting enigmatic expressions on a person’s face, and how they can be misconstrued. I can’t assume that she was thinking about the two of us.

I left early and walked home, feeling fatalistic and resigned. I was thinking of something being aborted. Things were playing themselves out like she had warned me about, having a difficult air when getting on this wavelength, and I should get off it.

At home I picked up a wooden instrument and had a long workout, over an hour, which was all I had left to say about it.

Wednesday, April 13, 1994

Woke up in the morning feeling fine, if doing four loads of laundry means anything. I had weathered a reality check with respect to Ming, along with my drifting imagination. The ambiguities can drive you to distraction, and I'm relieved of that for a while.

12:30 p.m. I met with V. in the office and walked to the restaurant with her in a loose men's shirt and pants. Prawns and broccoli, rice, and tea. We talked about her immediate realities and some of mine. Income level, love, and sex. She was surprised that I would spend the night with a woman and not go further than we did. Actually, we went pretty far, mentally and psychologically. During the conversation the Chinese waitress was a little blunt, reaching over for something and asking if we were married.

In the office with a lot of work, the Attorney catching up with other cases. I had to go with him, driving around town and dropping off papers with opposing counsel and the arbitrator. Bound for glory in a binding arbitration. He is fighting an attempt to dismiss for failure to prosecute (exceeding the statute of limitations). Given his backed-up caseload, the clients could die before he gets around to a settlement, but then he also handles probate.

5 p.m. I picked up Ming at work. She came out looking distracted, saying she had a fever and body aches, and there were weird dreams last night. She thinks she may have

woken up, cried, and gone back to sleep. Something about a baby, the iron maiden with maternal instincts. We went to her place, picking up a few things for a dinner party.

It was one of the nicer evenings I have had in a while. The woman who lives there, her daughter, and two old friends of said daughter (going back to when they were in high school, now in their early thirties) who had just returned from England, and an attorney who handles divorce and child custody cases, an easy-going homosexual who doesn't hide it.

We were all in the kitchen, sitting around an old wooden table with flowers and wine. Everyone smoked, which was a miracle. They were originally from the West Coast, but had lived in New York City. We were getting along, and the woman who lives here was more courageous than I thought. She brought out the salmon, looked at it, and said maybe I would like to do the honors. Ming looked skeptical, if not worried, like I might ruin everything. I said she is skeptical by nature and would figure out something.

I didn't mention that I had cooked salmon maybe once in my life, and was cooking very little when living in the Tenderloin. There was a long conversation around the table with hummus and pita bread as we were getting acquainted. The daughter had a character trait where everything is a problem. I'm not sure if she got that from New York City or would have been like that in a small town. If anyone could get stuck in a public toilet in Paris, or swallow a bone, it was her. However, when she heard her father was ill it made her teary and concerned, with her mother getting almost stern with her.

Meanwhile, I cut the salmon into six pieces which were marinated in whatever I could find – lemon juice, white wine, and pepper. I put them in two frying pans with olive oil and butter, praying to the god of cooking to bless this effort and it did, beyond

my expectations and way beyond those of Ming. It turned out rather well, going by the comments. They were a discriminating bunch, being tuned in to the senses with a certain refinement. We had the salmon with a salad Ming had thrown together, followed with strawberries and some champagne-soaked truffles the lawyer brought.

They were gone by 9:30. I cleaned up with Ming, and we retired to the sofa with her having to admit that I can cook and she can't. Furthermore, she was taken aback that I would get along with strangers. I'm not sure why she found that surprising, maybe she thought I was shy. It's like we're still getting to know each other.

We were back on an even keel, or as even as it gets, having a little more wine, with her generating a sarcastic heat wave of ambiguous affection. We knocked around a few topics, like why she sees so many things in terms of power struggles. And why are men supposed to be a known quantity and women aren't? Like the high school girl who taunted a male classmate, saying, "I can touch you, but you can't touch me." It may have something to do with a woman's protection, but nevertheless it exists. Ming said it isn't like that between us.

She left the room and returned in men's pajamas, feeling more comfortable. However, when she sat on the sofa she heard something rip and got up and stood there, peering between her legs.

There was still a faint fever. Her throat hurt, and she coughed a little in my direction just to get the point across. I suggested cough drops. "I don't like them." There was some discussion as to who is more stubborn.

It was nearly midnight when I got up to leave. She accompanied me to the door and said, "Walk home safely." I said, "I'll walk home dangerously." I went by City Hall,

passing a Sisyphean phosphorescent fountain, where the water is more futile than utilitarian (it rises up and falls back).

Thursday, April 14, 1994

Nothing to report.

NOTES

You made your bed or head, and now you have to sleep in it. I ran that by Ming and she was a little disturbed by the thought.

The other night at my place she was complaining about her wisdom tooth coming out or getting loose and directed my finger into her mouth to feel it. I have to say I'm more mental than dental. For that matter, she has no compunction about using each other's chewing gum.

There are lesser versions of ourselves to contend with, like a facet which we're not impressed with, but which makes its presence felt now and then. In her case it is the oblivious tease. In my case, the misanthropic critic.

I brought up the notion of "character is fate." It's a touchy subject, especially as regards her love life (and it is politically incorrect – if anything goes wrong it is the fault of the system).

In lieu of romance she has taken to sitting in a tiled bathtub, soaking in the scented water by candlelight with a glass of wine, soft music, and writing in her journal.

We're like a tuning fork, with parallel lines which go on forever, but never converge (except as an optical illusion). I have known her for about five years. She was the bosom buddy of my girlfriend at the time (now the ex). That set a limitation for someone who is close but remains at arm's length (close enough for a massage). For the first two years I was with the ex and Ming was often without a man, or in and out of brief affairs. I was with a woman for most of one year, overlapping on her two-year involvement with the ex-boyfriend, and so it went. We got into the habit of staying out of each other's hair (sexually speaking). It was a clearing for her, given the occasional turbulence of her love affairs.

I write about her often, like I'm sketching her portrait from different angles and with varying degrees of darkness or light. It is similar to an artist with a model he likes to work with, using her in compositions which are tuning in a muse. In the process there is much that has been generated or engendered (wrote angered)

between us, including topics from the autonomy of women to illusions and confusions of race. The woman is androgynous and Chinese and knows about colliding cultures. If opposing forces make the world go round, you could say that we're well-rounded. She is more utilitarian than romantic, which is not how I function. I remember how she characterized the situation on New Year's Eve when she left the party after midnight, and later said, "While you were kissing that woman, I was hugging the toilet."

We were talking about what generated this connection, and I said, "A spark gap… I'm the spark and you're the gap." (Ha ha) I found a more accurate explanation of our rapport in the following definition:

"A space between two high-potential terminals through which pass discharges of electricity." (Merriam-Webster dictionary)

" The action of ionizing the gas is violent and disruptive, often leading to sound, light and heat… Spark gaps were used historically in… radio transmitters and X-ray machines. Their most widespread use today is in spark plugs to ignite the fuel in internal combustion engines, but they are also used in lightning arresters…."[101]

Men are known for being detached from their emotions, which is not a bad thing, considering how the latter can gum up the works of many occupations (like a doctor weeping during an operation, or an angry airline pilot). They're also known for channeling emotional undercurrents through a medium of expression. I may appear calm and stoic, but I just tore up the guitar for an hour, or was on the typewriter for two hours straight. That has a calming effect. I know women who will gravitate to unemotional outlets like a hardware store to balance what they have inside them – soggy mood swings, or they go out looking for a bargain on nail polish remover.

Friday, April 15, 1994

Typing in the morning.

High noon: I had a showdown with the imminent fact of relocation, having left it to the last minute (moving tomorrow). I was reluctant, not to mention self-deluded as to how much work would be involved. I finally applied myself, and it took five or six hours to strike the set. What made it more plausible was that I was still in the Tenderloin. I

[101] Encyclopedia.pub

hadn't left yet, so it hadn't hit me. I was tearing everything off the walls and clearing the desk, which took a while – I am reluctant to throw away old notes, filling boxes full of papers, writing, and books. Several armfuls of newspapers managed to get thrown out. I was amazed how much stuff had accumulated in a studio apartment.

6 p.m. Ming stopped by after work and found me in a daze, tired and a little in shock. She thinks this is a good idea. I don't, and yet I'm doing it. I couldn't figure it out anymore, and was going by a remote intuition like an overview which could see the wider picture. Remaining in this neighborhood for a long time isn't a good idea, living in a crowded room where I am somewhat isolated. There is a renovated apartment which is twice as large for the same rent, and in a part of town my friends prefer (most of them). Light and airy doesn't do it for me anymore, but there it is.

We went out and returned with fish and chips and beer. B. dropped by in a black leather outfit with a helmet, her motorcycle companion downstairs. She brought me a single empty box.

9 p.m. Ming left in a cab, not feeling well.

Saturday, April 16, 1994

10 a.m. I walked over to her place and we took a bus to the warehouse district and borrowed her brother's pickup truck with iron bars in back, good for moving stuff. Then it was back to my apartment with four women converging to help out. It was a curious situation, since two or three of my male friends had to work. The women were all more or less acquainted with each other. Forty, thirty-three, thirty-one, and twenty-four years old. The Actress, B., the Czech woman, and Ming, respectively.

It was a massive effort which took the entire afternoon, with two and a half truckloads of stuff being carried down, loaded on the truck, and transported to the bottom of Russian Hill about two miles away. It was unloaded and carried up three flights of stairs and I was doing most of the heavy lifting until my arms were bruised and cut and I was sweating.

There was an ongoing repartee amongst the women as to how some of my furniture wouldn't look so good in a renovated place with polished wood floors. I said I wouldn't look so good either.

The Czech woman saw Ming lifting and carrying things and said, "You're no pussy." Ming said, "Excuse me, what?" She doesn't like the term and said it wasn't exactly feminist. The Czech woman replied that feminism means saying whatever you want to say.

B. left after a couple of hours, and the three remaining women had some comments about men, with all of them having had miserable affairs. The general attitude was that men are hard to figure out, like they're illogical or something. I stayed out of it for the most part, being impressed with how hard they were working. They wanted to get me out of the Tenderloin, and were going to drag me by my feet if I didn't cooperate.

When they saw the place and walked into the modern kitchen (I missed the old one), they loudly expressed their approval. The Actress exclaimed, "MY OWN MOTHER DOESN'T HAVE A KITCHEN LIKE THIS!" (her mother is well off.) There were other comments about the apartment being clean and neat, but it wouldn't last long. Someone said I need a girlfriend now to keep it clean. I had picked up a mattress and box

springs that someone was throwing out (a friend of B.), but the Actress said that none of them would sleep on it. Ming didn't say anything.

There were a couple of trips with her, crowded in the front seat of the pickup with the Actress sitting on my lap, which was not unpleasant.

6:30 p.m. She had to leave and we were more or less finished. We drove the Czech woman back to her illegal basement apartment in the Haight, then dropped off the truck, and left the warehouse with Ming on a skateboard (which was left there by her ex-boyfriend). She wanted me to pull her, so I held her by the hand and started running through the warehouse district.

We took a bus across town to the new place with the sun going down. It was getting dark and there was no electricity. The two of us sat by the window with candles in a cut-glass candelabra having wine and pizza.

An in-depth conversation ensued, during which she mentioned that we often talk about her, and wondered if I think she might be narcissistic. Replying to that required some tact, so I changed the subject. A few minutes later I said I sometimes feel like a listener monk. That struck her, and she had a curious expression on her face, saying it would be the finest thing if someone liked her for her mind and her capacity for listening, rather than wanting her for other reasons. She also noted that however I characterized the fact that I am sleeping alone, there were four women helping out this afternoon, and that impressed her to no end. There was a further observation that at least two of them would go to bed with me.

Sitting in an empty room except for candlelight and boxes can affect the conversation. There was a corresponding resonance when I picked up the guitar, an emptiness with strings attached.

That reminds me, I was talking with Jon the other day about how the building looked after the fire. It burned the stairs and hallways, leaving a blackened mess, while there was nothing left of an apartment down the hall but a jagged view of the sky. If he had his video camera we could have taped it, walking up the charred stairs and following the burn to my door (where the fire stopped). Then he could have shot it in its current state and reversed the sequence, making a short movie where someone walks into the building, up the stairs, and into my apartment with everything looking normal, and smokes a joint. A little while later he walks out (now using the footage of blackened walls), and wonders how strong the marijuana was.

Nearly midnight, we took a cab to her place. Both of us were sore and tired from the moving. She offered to draw me a bath, and I ended up sitting in hot water with some bubbles while she washed her face. She was going to leave me there and go to bed, but lingered for a while. It was luxurious, considering the afternoon we had.

She sat on the side of the tub in a night shirt down to her knees with her feet in the tub. I gave her a foot rub, and she got absorbed in cleaning my nails with an implement, which was practically an act of love (in my opinion). Conversely, if she sleeps with men it doesn't mean she loves them. Anyhow, she wants nothing to do with men, that being her constant refrain these days. I wouldn't be surprised if she connects with a woman at some point, but she said she is more likely to have sex with an alien.[102]

[102] She has slept with a woman before, but said she could take it or leave it.

1:30 a.m. I got into bed beside a sleeping woman while wearing her pajamas.

Sunday, April 17, 1994

9 a.m. Coming to, with her having woken us up in the middle of the night with a coughing fit. She is fighting off something, feeling tense, and had a headache. I said, "Roll over," and she asked, "You're going to give me a massage?" like it was a present.

Shoulders, neck, back, down to her sore behind, until there was a ringing in our ears. Unfortunately, it was the phone. An old friend, long distance, and going on at length. I got so bored I nearly walked out, and then reconsidered. I was not in a good mood, which she noted, saying I'm more difficult than her in the morning. We went to a cafe on Hayes Street which is run by black people, but she didn't like it very much.

I left around noon and walked to the studio in the Tenderloin, now empty, but had to clean it. I swept the floor while the street outside was blocked off. There were booths, and an 18-piece Navy band under my windows. They were very polished, doing Glen Miller tunes with a couple of singers – "In the Mood" and "Just a Gigolo" – which went well with the neighborhood. It was a big send-off for my leaving the Tenderloin, and included some contrast: the derelicts looking the worse for wear and terrible habits, and the syncopated men in black uniforms. I won't be getting much of this where I am moving to, and was a little depressed. I still don't know if this is what I should be doing, in spite of what everyone says.

4 p.m. I went to the new place. It struck me yesterday when we were driving back and forth how dirty and rundown the Tenderloin is, and also how intense. Things are raw and uncensored, not a mannequin version of the human condition. Where I'm going is

more middle class, and I'm like something hauled up from the depths, blinking in the light, and feeling out of place. But I was out of place in the Tenderloin as well. I may have been surrounded by the rancid and dilapidated, but I didn't know them or do drugs with them. And it hindered my relations with women, since not many wanted to go there. As someone pointed out, they are known for judging a man according to external signifiers, like where he lives. That is not to mention the negativity on the streets, and to what extent it went to my head.

I moved things around in the new place, hauling more boxes up the stairs which had been left in the lobby. There was a sense of dislocation, having been torn away from the desk and windows and surroundings which had soaked into my conscious or unconscious mind while on the typewriter.

There was a phone call from the Actress, asking how I was doing. I tried not to sound negative, having made some comments yesterday while moving and the Czech woman said maybe they should move me back. The Actress put her daughter on the phone who gave me some advice on how to get situated. Start with the bed first, then take care of the kitchen.

Eventually some order was emerging from the chaos. A bed with black sheets, a Mexican blanket, a few things on a table. I was thinking of the possibilities, and had to reinvent a setting I could live with. I was shifting gears I didn't know I had, though feeling not all there, like I was moving far away instead of to the other side of Russian Hill.

I picked up the guitar and was surprised at how it sounded and what was coming out. There was a ringing echo in the empty rooms. To find out how I feel about a

situation I have a consultation with a wooden instrument. It was reaching for a finer level, like it didn't mind being here.

I went out with the sun going down, and walked through the eucalyptus trees overlooking the bay a few blocks away, a disheveled and unshaven person who had been transported to an airy realm. I couldn't believe how gentle it was. For a year I was surrounded by hard edges, ruined people, and mean sidewalks, but there was a current of words and music. It continues no matter where you are.