SLOW-BURN JOURNAL – IN THE TENDERLOIN

BOOK VI

April 18 – June 22, 1994

Monday, April 18, 1994

In the morning I went up and down three flights of stairs about ten times, carrying things and working up a sweat. I had an empty feeling in the half-empty rooms, having left a neighborhood I hadn't lived in very long for a neighborhood I know too well. Whatever I did, leaving the Tenderloin or not, I would be haunted by the decision. If I didn't move, I'd never hear the end of it from my friends. There was a phone call in the late morning from Ming who was at work. She wanted to see how I was doing, and was surprised that I am underwhelmed with being here. She thinks it is a beautiful apartment, and it occurred to me that women like it and I don't very much, the opposite of where I used to live.

2:00 p.m. The Phantom finally showed up. I was on the phone with him last night, with him going on about the death of Kurt Cobain. I thought he would be here early, like eight in the morning, helping to move the last few pieces of furniture up several flights. He arrived at two in the afternoon, a bit hungover, and immediately went downstairs and bought a six-pack of beer. We sat around talking, and he was into his fourth beer when I figured we should get to work.

He said he fell asleep last night holding a bloody Mary, and now there is tomato juice all over the bed. It doesn't affect him that much, drinking beer, so we hauled the stuff up: two metal filing cabinets, a black sofa I found in a garage, a large box full of papers and writing, a few odd

objects, and a small wooden desk. We relaxed for a while, handing my wooden guitar back and forth. He said he wants to get serious with our recording sessions, and then left.

I forgot to mention, B. called in the morning, asking how I liked the place. She was a little perturbed when I didn't sound thrilled to be here, like it was insulting because 1) she has half the space in her apartment, 2) she was all for my moving here, and 3) she had helped with the move. Then she went into her usual complaints about her girlfriend. Almost every week there is something going wrong or falling apart between them. I'll hear about some dire straits and then a couple of days later they are over it. The next weekend she is angry and upset again. Her girlfriend is controlling and insulting, and she can't stand it. But she goes on with it, maybe with a short memory. I tell her I've been hearing the same thing for months now, although when she was running it by me, the latest brouhaha, I showed less sympathy for her side and she finally dropped it.

Ilsa wants to see a show on Sunday night with a few others, including a Brazilian woman who is hot for her. She hadn't invited B. because she knew that B. would not be interested. The show involves an ex-prostitute and porn star who talks about her life and times while demonstrating some X-rated methods, showing just how uninhibited a goddess-whore can be.

B. said she heard about it from someone who went on a women-only night. There was an interlude which took her breath away (not heavy breathing), where the woman (Annie Sprinkle, whose original name is Ellen Steinberg) would bring herself to a climax after fifteen minutes. She then had seven women from the audience come up on stage and masturbate in front of everyone, like do-it-yourself volunteers. It sounded odd, and downright mystifying when you try to imagine the male equivalent. But there were classes in the 1970's, when the women's liberation movement was picking up steam, where an expert would come to a class of women

and show them how to masturbate. Not many men would have to take a class in that sort of thing, much less want to be there with other guys.[1]

B. was scornful, getting rather blunt about cervixes and flashlights (for a public cervix announcement). She is more conservative than Ilsa, one of several ways they're out of sync.

I caught the evening news, with Peter Jennings getting older, even in the rarified realm that he inhabits: a million-dollar video formaldehyde with some formality. I held onto a wooden instrument, providing a soundtrack for the "abysmal biopathy" of the news.[2]

9:00 p.m. Phone call from Jon in St. Helena. He also thinks, along with the Phantom, that this place is an improvement. I seem to be the only one who doesn't like it, and I'm the one who lives here. He was worn out from his job – he flies all over the country to trade shows – but sounded upbeat. The last show was in a town not far away. He met a woman in the next booth and they spent the night together. He kept saying she was "wild" and knew everyone there. Her parents are prominent in the world of educational products and well off. What triggered their night together was when they went to a bar and he was joking about sadomasochism. She took it seriously - it hit the right note – and he didn't object. She is a little younger than him, tall and big-breasted with a Norwegian-Russian background (his ancestors are from Norway). She lives in Los Angeles, so Jon assumed it was a one-night stand. He said it has been a long time between women, and he is hit on more often by men.

I went to sleep early, like I was trying to bury myself in something, feeling washed up on the shore of a clean well-lighted place. When I lived in the Tenderloin I was immersed in an

[1] With respect to the women who volunteered to masturbate onstage, you wonder if they were pretending since that is what a stage is all about – acting, taking on a role - and what they wore. It's like a magic act where the hand is quicker than the eye, and they pull an orgasm out of themselves. It might be liberating, doing it in front of other women and moaning in the footlights of a mass approval.
[2] A term from *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) by Wilhelm Reich.

atmosphere of lower income levels (low to nonexistent), where people were closer and out in the open, if not on the street. Also, the apartment fit better – like a sports car instead of a van. I'm adjusting to having more space, while the neighbors are sequestered in their insulated middle-class continuums. I find the air a bit thin here.

Tuesday, April 19, 1994

A lot of sleep, then I made coffee and was about to try out the new arrangement with the desk and typewriter, using the same props as before, when the phone rang. It was the Professor in Los Angeles, so there was an hour delay.

He thinks the move is a good thing. We went off on a tangent involving the decline of civilization, American-style, including the breakdown of society into separate groups (by way of identity politics). He said it's over-rated, and damaging to the Left which needs to be more unified. There is hubris and historical misinformation, like the notion that one group of people is original while another group is stealing their ideas. It's a two-way street for most of us.

I told him about a famous movie director (Spielberg) coming to a high school in Oakland and talking to the students who were mostly black. They got this oddly sympathetic attention because they went to see a film about the Holocaust (*Schindler's List*), and many were laughing. The excuse one hears when black people yell at Jews about the Nazis[3] is that they don't know what they're saying, they just know it bothers the Jews. If that's true, you can't say they have been overly burdened with a Eurocentric education, or much of an education at all.

[3] In Crown Heights, for example.

Finally, after some hesitation, I had the typewriter going. It was another adjustment, having been a well-worn routine with the writing desk in the old place, and I was not sure how it would work here. It was okay as it turned out – and further evidence I'm holding onto major currents running through my life – music, language, and women. I guess they can withstand a change in location. It is all the more reason to keep a close grip on those, like a psychic rope tow which can pull you through all kinds of situations, unless you lose your grip.

That reminds me, I was listening to "A Love Supreme" on the radio, which was preceded by a quote from Coltrane. "Music is an instrument…to create the initial thought-patterns that can change the thinking of the people." If some of his solos were transformed into thought-patterns it would drive a person mad – like a rapid and kaleidoscopic hallucination of unfolding patterns. A lot of things can change the thinking of the people, but it's not necessarily for the better. You could also say that thought creates the music that changes people. Or that people are instrumental when it comes to changing the music. Consider how much thought goes on in silence, and how some music is distracting, if not mindless – one reason it is readily coopted. It's the background atmosphere for almost anything, and even Mussolini listened to jazz.

2 p.m. I went out, and was standing on the corner about to cross the street when I heard someone talking loudly. I turned around and saw an overweight black woman at the bus stop. She sounded angry, but there was no one around except for a Chinese woman who was waiting for the bus. She was going on about how there's "No crackers in my town," and that "Minorities are better and you ain't shit." I looked around, assuming this was for my benefit, and ignored her, crossing the street. I wondered if I should have responded. It's ironic when you consider the neighborhood I just moved out of. A few minutes later a young black guy walked up and then moved away from her, not interested in her sociological insights.

I read the paper on the bus, like I need to immerse in something disturbing on a vacant bus ride on the northern edge of town. I think I need a change of environment, and not the same old neighborhood. I noticed where the Liberty ship used to dock. It left the day I moved in, bound for the English Channel in honor of D-Day, which was half a century ago.

An article in the paper: “City to pay rape victim $800,000 settlement.” A woman went on a date with a man, a consensual arrangement, but he attacked her. She ran away and got on a bus, but the driver said she had to get off, having no fare. There is not much sympathy for him, although he probably sees all kinds of fights and arguments. The woman ended up being assaulted and raped, and the man was later caught. You might think he was responsible, or at least 80 percent responsible, with the driver (and hence the city) only 20 percent responsible, but it was the reverse. The “convicted rapist… was found 20 percent at fault for her injuries.” The city was stuck with an $800,000 payment, which was bargained down from $1,300,000. You might suppose the woman never has to work again in her life - the interest collecting on that award amounts to $20,000 a year for the next forty years.

In the office it hit me hard. I no longer live in the Tenderloin, but had built up some tension to withstand a threatening neighborhood. Now the pressure was diminished, and the tension was turning into anger, though I’m not sure at what. There was also a lot of work which had accumulated after two days off. The Attorney doesn’t hire someone else to do it when I’m gone. He was hitting me with stuff the minute I walked in, and is a few days late on my check.

The receptionist from India was on the phone. Could I take a call from an attorney who was getting on her nerves? She said she didn’t like anybody today, “Except you, of course.” Earlier we were talking, with her saying she got into it with the Japanese divorcee on the phone yesterday. Our client is pushy and demanding, and she can’t stand her.

The dissolution of a twenty-year marriage, immigration, Declaration of Defendant (felony possession of an Uzi), Answer to Request for Inspection of Documents (including the driver's license of an older woman who was injured as a passenger).

I called Ming at work around five, with her taken aback, a little amused, at how I sounded. "Some problems with adjustment?" She invited me to do her laundry with her tonight, but that didn't sound very interesting. Normally it wouldn't matter since whatever we do the conversation is holding up, but I wasn't in the mood for a laundromat. Another clean well-lighted place of empty cycles, and it felt like my historical currency was being laundered.

7 p.m. Working late. I went home through North Beach on a familiar route over Russian Hill. Later I was on the phone with my brother in Huntington Beach. He recommended *Bitter Moon* (by Roman Polanski), one of the few films that he and his wife have agreed on.[4] He said their baby girl is three months old, who I haven't seen yet, and their son is two. They all sleep in the same bed, a situation far removed from my own empty bed, and not for the first time I thought a Latina wife would bring it all back home. He was in good humor, but financially life is hard, and he has little time for the things he likes to do.

Typing until one in the morning.

What if the Tenderloin instilled a kind of stasis or arrested development (not only with so many police around)? What if I absorbed a local resignation when it comes to gravitating to a terminal routine at some remove from other people? Leaving that neighborhood, I realized how distant I am from other people. The move has set a precedent when it comes to further relocations, like I would consider leaving the country.

There was someone yelling on the street, with a lunar crescent in the window.

[4] The Professor recommended *Serial Mom*, another twisted effort by John Waters.

Wed., April 20, 1994

Typing in the morning, then I tore up the guitar for an hour. The sound in here is like a hollow wooden instrument, a room with wires attached.

I went to work in the afternoon through North Beach, still disturbed at having moved into my renovated apartment, though I'm slowly getting used to it. You would think that everyone in this area has a job and no one has any kids. There are children in the Tenderloin, and people who are unemployed. There is a spectrum of humanity which I was rubbing elbows with, and one could mix and match the categories, coming up with endless combinations. For example, a Latino drag queen who's an alcoholic on parole and stricken with a rare form of nostalgia. On the other hand, it isn't like the people in this neighborhood don't have some variations in psychology and looks, they're just more subtle.

In the office with a Memorandum to Set for Trial, and a problem with child visitation.

At home in the evening with Ming coming over. I was motivated to put more things away, moving boxes and straightening up the place. When she arrived she took off her sweater, wearing jeans and a T-shirt with no bra, a woman with a swaying bosom who usually doesn't flaunt it (she hadn't done her laundry).

We were subdued for a while, like we were adjusting to a different stage for whatever it is we do with each other. I miss the old studio, but she kept saying, "You have a wonderful place," and then got motivated. She didn't like how I had arranged the front room. I was open to suggestions, which is all it took for her to go into motion. The sofa ended up at an angle by the

window, and the stereo and round wooden table were moved around until things looked more comfortable.

A bottle of wine, and dinner by candlelight (we phoned out for a pizza).

Ming pulled out one of her small mobiles from a box. It's made of wire, a crystal tear-drop, and an antique spoon with a semi-precious stone. It was hung in the window, looking like a holy coke spoon. We got into a long conversation with her being blunt and honest. She inhabits her subjective life so thoroughly it pushes other things to the periphery, and sometimes wonders if she doesn't talk too much about her past, not that mine doesn't get some air time.

I think I've heard about every guy she ever slept with. She doesn't want to be seen as a loose woman, but there is a history of her taking liberties from a young age. She related one incident when she was seventeen and met "a nice Italian guy" on a bus or plane. They got acquainted and it led to their going out a few times. She went to bed with him a couple of times (he was twenty-four), but there was an occasion when she didn't want to do it, maybe not in the mood, and said no. Apparently, she wasn't very clear, and with him in forward motion he continued and she didn't object. Afterwards it felt like the sex had been forced. She was sore afterwards, but said he was nice and walked her home. She wouldn't call it rape, but that ended the affair for her. She thought she was dumb for letting herself get into that situation.

We were talking about rape because of the woman who got an $800,000 settlement from the city. Ming was mystified at the amount, and the method of determining liability. Why was the city 80 percent liable for a woman being assaulted by a man she had gone out with (who was not a city employee)? I wondered if this sort of thing has happened to Ming. She is sadistic with some men, and keeps herself covered up in public. There is a deep-seated anger, and she needs to be in control of the situation. The downside is that being with a weaker man she has to deal with

him being boring or sentimental, or in the case of the ex-boyfriend, disappearing. This is someone who thinks the death penalty is wrong, but when it comes to rape she would hire someone to kill whoever took those liberties with her. She can't explain the discrepancy with her usual politics, and why the sexual violation of a woman is worth a man's life.

We talked about other things, including her detachment from men. She reiterated her routine about men who are supposed to know she doesn't want a relationship, she just wants to get laid, but they forget. She admitted this approach doesn't work very well. It's like saying to a man, "We should be detached," and then embracing him with her arms and legs.

A few nights ago she went out with an old boyfriend who called up out of the blue. They hadn't seen each other in five years – the break-up left a cloud over her head for half a year or more. She was not sure what he had in mind, but has no intention of doing anything with men for a long time (though no one believes her), or women either. That's an option which has lingered in her mind, but with few illusions as to women getting along any better than they do with men. And she does prefer men.

It was pushing midnight with her on the sofa, getting comfortable with the bottle of wine nearly empty, and she wondered if she should sleep over. I found an old robe for her, and she noted with some satisfaction how firm and wide the bed is. We lay there for a while, still talking, with a ghostly light reflected by the moon in the window.

Thursday, April 21, 1994

7 a.m. I woke up and touched her shoulder. She opened her eyes, looked around, and slid back into unconsciousness for another ten minutes, purring softly.

Last night she said there are times she wants to touch someone she's talking to, if only on the arm, while at other times she doesn't want anything to do with being touched – even hugging a woman friend would be an effort. She also said something about losing interest in men who're not her "equals." How she measures the caliber of a man has something to do with his mind, and whether or not he is romantic. That's a sign of weakness, in her opinion.

If some women are a lousy judge of character, it might be that they don't focus on the man, but rather on his surface generalities. You would think that he exists in the tenuous realm of her imagination, a realm which doesn't have a long memory. Time and again I've been amazed at how men (including myself) who're pretty loyal can be written off or seen in a discredited light for one wrong word or one bad night. The woman's opinion of the man is not anchored in the man himself, but in a semi-subjective mirage that she keeps floating in the mid-distance and which she has more control of (with a shaky verisimilitude). Many men have found their worth fluctuating in the eyes of a woman and wonder what happened. Aren't they the same guy as they were yesterday?

That makes it easier if a woman wants nothing more to do with a man. She pulls the plug on a hologram which had been floating in the air between them, and though he still exists he is surprised to see how suddenly he doesn't exist for her anymore. He might as well have died or disappeared, and he has as far she is concerned.

Meanwhile we were lying in bed, close together, relating our dreams (her with something about marijuana and ice cream). Mine was set in a rundown Mexican seaport with hot sunlight. The Attorney was stumbling out of a bar, overweight as usual, like the British consul in *Under the Volcano.* Ming was there, but towards the end she walked away. I went to look for her.

When her ex-boyfriend bailed out it was devastating, which implied that she was attached to the idea of their living together. However, she didn't know if she would be around this summer, and when he proposed she didn't respond, being unclear on the concept - while giving equal time to two or three other men, including me. What was he supposed to think? She wasn't very focused with her multiple personalities and various diversions. It is like she has eight arms. When he handed her his heart she fumbled it, as one might do with eight arms.[5]

We lay there with her making a rattling sound in her throat, then she got up, feeling revived, and put her pants on. A few minutes later she asked if I wanted to hang out tonight and do her laundry with her. I was not in the mood and said, "The thrill of a lifetime." She thought about it and said, "I suppose you're playing music tonight." "Good chance," I replied, that being a more tenable reason for not spending time with her.

I was typing for a few hours. It would appear the relocation hasn't affected that routine. If anything, a higher caliber of thought has been occurring from a more relaxed if not refined perspective, compared to what I was used to in the Tenderloin. It's like the neighborhood was having an effect on what was or wasn't floating up in my mind. When I was there I may have been more blocked or distracted than I realized.

Went to work in the afternoon.

6:30 p.m. I got on a bus on the way to the sound-room flat, and passed through the old neighborhood with an oddly neutral feeling, considering how much I missed it. In the flat I sat around with the Phantom and a couple of roommates. I had to weather some exposure to the tube, an empty ritual of mock-serious minimalism interrupted by commercials.

[5] She has joked in the past about having more than one uterus.

We finally went downstairs, passing through the garage with seven or eight motorcycles torn apart, and a car with no engine. In the sound-room I was hooked up to the Les Paul, having changed the strings. It was the usual thing, where I slip into a passive-aggressive mood for two or three hours. After half an hour or so the forces build up like a wind at your back, and you are pushed into a further dimension since you're warmed up. You are swimming in an element of deep metallic sound-effects like a sonic dolphin.

The Phantom was in and out of the room, constantly taking breaks. I don't like to interrupt the music. I wasn't sure about his frame of mind, being more incoherent this evening, but we had a jam with him on drums. We were trying to write a song for a while. I had a chord progression which was functional, and he threw together some lyrics, rhyming "bored" with "the Lord," and we taped it. When we listened to the tape I liked how the fact of being recorded made the song more tangible, and its provisional structure was enhanced by being caught in mid-air. The sound was closer to what I wanted. The guitar was less of a predictable current, more erratic with an occasional silence.

Towards the end of the session we went into the garage and sat on the concrete next to a MONOSHOCK SUSPENSION and listened to Nirvana. The dead man's voice sounded like raw pain in Seattle. Kurt Cobain curtailed himself, and the final curtain dropped. I had heard a lot of it before, but never gave them much attention. Listening to his songs and concentrating I was impressed, and then a little depressed. It was hitting close to home.[6]

---

[6] "… kill myself and go out in a flame of glory." (Kurt Cobain)

The glory is over the second you pull the trigger.
The only way a shotgun makes you bigger
is when you're holding it and you're alert.
If you shoot yourself you're in the dirt,
a mute inglorious Kurt.
The final curtain

I left around midnight and caught a bus which was lit up like a morgue. I was the only one on it.

Friday, April 22, 1994

Typing in the morning, then I went downtown for lunch with V. It's something how her personality changes when we leave the office. She takes her work seriously and gets into a role, but when we're in a café she can relax and open up, chattering away. She had to tell me something confidential, that she and her Filipino fiancé (after seven years) had a civil wedding at City Hall. It was almost on a whim, or maybe it was his idea. They will put off their Catholic ceremony until next year.

In the office, working on oil leases and a hit-and-run.

The Attorney related one of his stories from court. For some reason it rubs me the wrong way whenever he is being chummy. The last time I was in his Oldsmobile, dropping off some documents to opposing counsel, he put in a tape. It was not bad, Al Jolson, but I didn't know who it was at first and he was scornful. He was talking about an immigration case where a Nigerian got into this country illegally, married a woman, used her passport to bring his Nigerian wife into the country, and had four kids here (this was ten years ago). The kids were automatically U.S. citizens, which left the court to decide what to do with him since he had

---

getting no applause, a cause for silence
and regret. Though I can't be certain,
it is over, no eternal sequence,
and a re-run doesn't count. The nuance
here of self-abuse, a public séance
where you hear his voice, it's disembodied
on CD, and what if there's no God?
The glory flaming out, an empty fame
is emptier. A junkie has no name.

broken the law a couple of ways. They were reluctant to deport him since it would break up the family, or force them to send the kids to Nigeria. He ended up staying here.

This country is shot through with false memory syndrome and illegal immigration, not to mention some inflated notions of entitlement.

I was talking with Ami, the receptionist (who's in law school), about the case in Napa County concerning "recovered memories of alleged abuse." She was skeptical about the woman's story if it took hypnotic sedatives and therapists for her to "remember" that she was molested by her father. He is suing the therapists for malpractice since he lost everything – divorced, daughters won't talk to him, unemployed, etc. There's a good chance he is innocent, what with the latest statements by his daughter (who is twenty-three). Not only did she start having "flashbacks" when she was nineteen or twenty of what allegedly occurred between the ages of five and eight, but there were flashbacks of abuse which supposedly occurred until she was sixteen. That is hard to believe. I'm not sure if she thought it would strengthen her case, but it could do the opposite. Things occur to a child which could be blocked or not understood, but that is less likely with someone who is old enough to drive. Even worse, she is not talking about ambiguous caresses and wayward hands. A sign of "false memories" is when they're lurid and extreme, like the person makes up for a lack of plausibility by exaggerating their story. "In one image… she's trying to escape her father's kisses." However, "In others he's raping her or forcing her into lewd positions." In another, "She said her naked father orders her to orally copulate the family dog."

How does a court decide what happened and who's telling the truth? Freud managed to misdiagnose women who had "fantasies" of incest, but it turned out they were based on real occurrences (the setting may have been polite Vienna, but the men involved were animals). In

this case, who has more credibility? A man who was willing to bring his case to a public hearing, devastated by the loss of his family, or a depressed young woman who is in therapy and suffers from amnesia? I'm not saying men aren't capable of the worst things, even if they're "normal citizens," but you might wonder how all of these things occurred and the wife and sisters never got wind of it.

I walked home through North Beach, and it turned into a night of the living phone. It's been a while since nearly an entire evening was going over the falls of disembodied conversation. When I was at work my sister called about a rendezvous with my parents this weekend. They're staying in Mountain View with my other sister. Then she asked about the move, and I said I'm having adjustment problems. "Emotionally?" She had spent a few days in the woods, pushing kids in wheelchairs on a trail, and suggested I see a counselor. That is plausible in her world, but it isn't in mine. I would rather break windows.

9 p.m. The Czech woman called, and we were on the phone for nearly two hours. I haven't had an in-depth conversation with her in a long time. I was a little tired at first, and she has a tendency for stretching out into monologues, so I had more patience. Eventually we were touching on some topics, with her saying she loves books, but doesn't like the library. "And you used to be a communist!" (That is not exactly true. Her country was occupied by the Soviets, and there was no love lost.) She spends a lot on books, and has no interest in clothes. There is a Czech writer she likes, Stanislav Grof, who was involved in early experiments with LSD.

Both of us read Dostoyevsky in high school, with her preferring *The Brothers Karamazov*. I like *Notes from Underground*, and *Crime and Punishment*. We talked about his radical politics as a young man which put him in front of a firing squad (a fake execution as it

turned out, which didn't help his nerves). He was an epileptic with a gambling problem (having a seizure when he lost?). I thought of Kirilov, a character in *The Possessed* who shot himself in order to prove there wasn't a god, and ended up proving there wasn't a Kirilov.[7]

We talked about her difficulties as a single mother with a ten-year-old son who is hyper-active. She sees how much of her attitudes he picks up, which is not bad in some ways, with her being steeped in Buddhist teachings, but wonders if she is instilling a certain fatalism in him. She has lived for a few years in this country, mostly on a low income, and still finds it strange. She is used to a Czech trait of speaking honestly, and sometimes is confronted with a smiling fake-out which is useless in her opinion.

There are women who talk incessantly about a man they're with, an endless cycle of problems, over and over, until she is bored out of her mind and says, "If I hear his name one more time I'll scream!" This was in reference to a woman friend of hers, the psychologist who is around forty, but says she's thirty. A couple of years ago she visited the Czech woman whose Latino boyfriend had just killed himself. It happened two days before and she was sitting around "like a vegetable," but the woman went on talking about her problems with her boyfriend.

She asked how Ming was doing. In the past she had her doubts about her, and suspected I am secretly in love with Ming. That discouraged any ideas she had about the two of us. After talking with her during the move, she is now impressed with Ming as a woman who can drive a truck, go to Thailand by herself, and is not too femme.[8]

Speaking of her helping me with the move, when would I like to take her to dinner?

---

[7] There's a curious parallel with the consul in *Under the Volcano* (1947). A summary of the novel states that, "It is only by willing his own destruction that he can assert his freedom of choice."

[8] Ming, along with her half-black friend Tanya, are horrified at the prospect of having daughters who are girly-girls. The last I heard, Tanya was not on the road to propagation, spending more time with amphetamines than men, but Ming would end up having two daughters with a white man (who is the same age). I don't know how they turned out, but she has no interest in the overly feminine.

I got off the phone around eleven and called the Phantom. It was a short conversation. He couldn't make it to the sound-room, and said Nixon died. That affected him more than the death of Kurt Cobain (not).

I was sitting at the typewriter, staring at the page, when the phone rang. It was Ming, who just called to say hello. She sounded serious, calm, a little tired (and left a message this afternoon, wanting to have lunch). She went to see a documentary at the Castro Theater, *Dialogues with Madwomen*, with a woman friend – just about her only one these days. It shook her up a little. There was a line to the ladies' room, and a couple of lesbians were comforting each other after the film.

Ming and her friend walked around the neighborhood. She was ambiguous about the women she saw, mostly lesbians. They went into a gay bar where two women were "moshing" each other on a seat nearby, kissing a lot. It made them uncomfortable. They went to a bookstore where she got attention from more than one woman, and wondered if it was related to her new dress. Nothing risqué, but slightly low-cut, with her being self-conscious about her bosom. It is well developed, but she hates the idea of leading with her tits, and will do anything to conceal them. Ming was careful when bending over, noticing how much she could see when looking down the front of her dress. A woman stood nearby and said something about a book.

It felt weird to her, noting that her woman friend was in jeans and they might have been taken for a couple, femme and butch. She has nothing against women being with women, and has been in bed with a woman before, but doesn't want to be a lesbian. She asked me if I thought she could be. I was not sure how to respond to that. "BE ALL YOU CAN BE"? She doesn't like it when men are coming on to her, and finds it less disturbing if a woman is doing the honors.

Finding a girlfriend wouldn't be hard if she wanted to pursue it, but she has a hard time committing to anything. I think that lesbians would find her maddening, wanting to know where she stands or falls. It reminds me of B. who doesn't like being categorized, with questions as to whether one is a butch top, a femme bottom, or a sideways glance.

I said that sooner or later her libido would kick in, and however unconsciously would bend her in one direction or another until she is ready to go to bed with someone. She seems to think she operates on her instincts, and that intuition has a hand in it. I pointed out that her encounters with men have not been very intuitive. One reason her sex life tends to be half-assed, it is still a testing ground for her, a provisional experience. Some people are constructed differently as to what is constant in their lives, but the experimental is as necessary as the ongoing. My relations with women tend to be continual, while I am caught up in ebb and tide of writing and music.

Ming doesn't do much in the way of writing, and zero with music, so where would she find that dimension of the unforeseen/experimental? Well, traveling perhaps, which she likes a lot. But also in her relations with men, in terms of going to bed with them. She is psychologically constructed for that sort of thing, and physically as well - a woman who doesn't have to flaunt herself to be alluring, and often there is someone hot on her trail. It fits in with the modus operandi of a woman in control. She has a short attention span, and is not easy to satisfy in bed – which she has alluded to.

There is a dentist's appointment tomorrow, having her wisdom teeth taken out. She was speaking in a small voice and admitted she is scared. "It's my mouth." The tensions of her being tend to fill up the foreground. It has a lot to do with her intense allure, but there is a downside to it when she's choking on her own existence. As for the dentist: she can't stand the idea of

someone having so much power over her body. She is wary of professionals, from teachers to doctors, and even airline pilots (whose ability to handle a plane she doesn't trust, and I have flown with her). It's not surprising if she wouldn't trust a man with her heart and soul.

I function differently. We keep an eye on the disparities of each other's character and way of being in the world, like we learn from each other. It wouldn't hurt if I were more anchored in the body and immediate circumstances, which sometimes takes a hangover to accomplish. I tend to go off on linguistic tangents, while she feels like a stick in the mud.

Meanwhile, she wants to know what it's like to have your wisdom teeth out. I had it done about fifteen years ago. I was living with Simone (the French-Belgian woman), and she forgot to pick me up after the operation. I had to get home on my own and took the bus, feeling like a drugged zombie whose mouth was bleeding. Ming wants to be put under completely. I said, "If they give you laughing gas you won't care if they cut your leg off." We got off the phone, and I thought about her current worries: oral surgery, mental illness, and women who come too close.

12:30 a.m. I had been typing for half an hour when the phone rang. It was Jon in St. Helena, and we talked until two in the morning. The last couple of days he has been planting a garden behind his house. He knows a lot about that sort of thing. He took his canoe to a lake, and we talked about floating down the Russian River.

It seems like both of us are being careful with women (he is about thirty). We used to float or jump into a situation with a woman without a second thought. "Oh, you have a history of turbulent relations with men who you think are low on the evolutionary scale. Can I buy you a drink?" It reminds me of those laboratory animals which tolerate pain and discomfort in order to receive a jolt of pleasure and release, but now we're hesitant. "Once bitten, twice shy." That can

mess up your spontaneity, and women notice that sort of thing, thinking one too many vixens have gotten to this guy.

We talked about other things, including his "pinch-hitter," a small marijuana pipe.

2 a.m. Typing until four in the morning.

Saturday, April 23, 1994

NOTES

The other night with Ming in the rebuilt apartment with no lights. We went out for a bottle of wine and she wanted me to carry her, testing my strength or something. She jumped on my back and I carried her down three flights of stairs and halfway down the block to the liquor store on the corner, where she wanted to get off, all 140 pounds of her - which is not that heavy, but she seems to think it is.

On the same evening I said she made a good point about my view of women being skewed by those I've known, while living in a town which is not quite the norm. She was amazed that I agreed with her, or had given some thought to what she said.

A few nights ago, we were sitting at the round wooden table. She said, "Open your mouth," and spit a jelly bean across the table, arcing through the air and into my mouth.

There was some discussion in the dark empty apartment, sitting on the floor with a candle, as to who is more tropical. She seems to think that she is in tune with a reggae-relaxed approach to life, which I wasn't so sure about. Her frequent description of things is "hectic." She insisted that she is inclined to be "mellow," although she could have been shouting at me in a minute. "I'M MELLOW, OKAY!?"

We do that to each other, catching each other off guard with a sudden loud outburst. We were walking in the woods last week, a quiet interlude, when suddenly she yelled, "WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO WEAR TONIGHT!?"

As for the tropicality of a topical woman with the top spin of some modern neuroses, she said it's because she was born in Hong Kong, which is more tropical than here. She moved to San Francisco when she was three months old. I pointed out that I lived for years in the dirty warm embrace of Los Angeles, while she spent most of her life in an air-cooled San Francisco. Nevertheless, she might have been easygoing if it wasn't for money, men, machines, and hormones.

Last week, waiting until the last minute to begin the moving process, I was on the phone with her. She sounded surprised at my lagging. “Are you losing focus?” I said, “I suffer from peripheral vision.”

When Ming and I were at Land’s End, amongst the rocks and the pounding surf, she was peering at a boulder covered with greenish capillary veins, like copper, and said, “It’s time to take mushrooms again.” She has suggested it several times over the last few months. It is not something she does very often, and we’ve never done it together, which surprises her. She thinks we should, although it might magnify our differences. Apparently, she becomes hyper-talkative and likes to walk around. I am the opposite when under the influence.

I remember her telling me about an outing with the ex-boyfriend a couple of years ago. They went to a reggae festival on the Russian River, took mushrooms, and ended up in a tent at night, making love. One of them was turning orange and seeing UFO’s, and she didn’t have a climax. I don’t know if that’s a microcosm of her situation, but it’s hard to imagine a sensual encounter with no follow-through. It’s like something is thwarted or diffused in her life, and it leaves her with a backwash of sublimated sensuality.

I haven’t had hallucinogens since a warm October afternoon in 1987 with Nora (my ex-girlfriend) when I was thirty-five and she was eighteen. We were out at the cliffs with the waving water. I am in no hurry to revisit the experience, having had some long lysergic interludes when I was around eighteen or twenty. Those dimensions were unlocked and explored, and to some extent absorbed into my worldview. It set a precedent for being grounded in an earthbound intensity that informs the present and expands your pantheism**.**

A recording of Tim Buckley, like a comeback from the grave (he died from an overdose).

Women who inspect, reflect, deflect, and reject a man who wants to connect.

The woman from Brazil (Socorro) lives in the Haight behind a church which is a Third Church of Christ, Scientist. I’m not sure what that means, and what Jesus has to do with scientific trial and error, observation, and taking notes. Was he experimenting on the people around him? I think that science can walk on water and heal the sick, or figure out a way to distribute loaves and fishes to a crowd.

I have some parallels with my father (who is a liberal theologian):

1. Gravitating to the down and out.
2. A capacity for listening to confessions.
3. Detachment from commercial concerns.
4. Journalism.
5. Being somewhat at odds with one’s mother.
6. A preoccupation with the ancient, whether scriptures or ruins.
7. Tennis, and a preference for the West Coast.

It was raining off and on, and I was typing for hours.

I went out for a typewriter ribbon in the late afternoon, and returned to the old neighborhood for the mail. I was struck by how dirty and constricted it was. It has taken me a week of adjusting to a neighborhood which is cool and secure, instead of warm and threatening and semi-dysfunctional. I had been idealizing the gone, and going back was a reality check. It makes you wonder if one adapts to circumstances like an expanding or contracting entity, a circumstantial chameleon (which I've been accused of being).[9] The adaptations are more subtle than you realize when you're shifting neighborhood gears, with the Tenderloin a proletarian dimension with old buildings, and this area looks more middle class.[10]

I walked home, a couple of miles.

8 p.m. The Actress and her ten-year-old daughter Maya came over from out of town. I'd been thinking of spending the night with opera and the typewriter, or going over to Ming's, but it turned into a pleasant evening. Maya lost no time in establishing the mood, like her mother was the driver and the occasion was for her to socialize with me. She sat at the round wooden table, opened her book on vampires and read a few pages aloud. No, she hasn't seen *Dracula*, the movie, her mother won't let her. Glance over to mom on the sofa who waved with a guilty smile.

Maya had me playing a game for a while, and then we improvised while her mother read the paper. She found the old skateboard (from Ming's ex-boyfriend) and thought that was pretty

[9] A few years later I was jamming with one of the local long-hairs in the home of the Actress, and having run through some different kinds of music he exclaimed, "You're an amoeba!" I think he meant that I'm a sonic shape-shifter.

[10] Looks are deceiving though. A few years ago, before he moved to Paris, my friend Jacques took me to a party a block or two from here. It was an expensive flat with lots of room, and looked anonymous from the street. It's where a Moroccan cocaine-dealer lived and business was booming. The place was crowded, and there were some pretty women. He was trying to screw as many models as he could before he died or went to prison. I wouldn't say he was mechanical, but he liked to work on cars in his garage.

cool, so we slid through the French doors into the next room with both of us on it. Then I pulled her along the wood floor to the bed by the window in one long motion, and she went flying onto the bed. She played dead, which she likes to do, a slightly morbid girl, so I rolled her up in a blanket like a burrito and wrestled the whole package onto the floor.

Eventually I diverted her with watercolors while her mother and I went into the kitchen to talk. A bottle of wine and a cigarette. Maya walked in, saw her mother smoking, got angry, and wouldn't let her see the picture. She finished it herself, a nice composition of a woman's face with a green eye, purple eyeshadow, and the other eye with a black patch. The lips were black and blue, with purple around the edge and gold dots.

We ended up on the black sofa by the window, a little crowded, with a view of Russian Hill and its night lights. Maya was strumming my guitar, a little clumsy. I started forming chords while she was strumming, which led to our taking turns and making up lyrics for a song. Her mother has a lot of practice, having been in an improv group.

Then I was on the guitar. The mother held her sleepy daughter, saying it's been a long time since someone played guitar for her. She got me to play a few songs. When Maya fell asleep we went into the kitchen and got into a moody discussion. There were things on her mind which she has been waiting for the right moment to talk about. Earlier Maya was looking at a long pink scarf I had. I said it is for women and she said, "That's sexist." Maya had been striking glamorous poses with the scarf, but wanted me to wear it when the two of us went down to the corner store for something.

The mother talked about her for a while. Her daughter is in the fifth grade, and there are concerns about her popularity. She is pretty, intelligent, artistic, and generally hates boys. I think she is having to learn about her own originality versus popularity contests. A girl in her class has

had “twelve boyfriends” already. The Actress shook her head, who’s been through a few men herself, but can’t imagine thinking in those terms at that age. Maya has a boy who likes her, but he isn’t “cute” enough to qualify.

We delved into the mother’s lack of a love life, who is haunted by the engagement that fell apart six months ago. She is mystified that she can’t get him out of her mind, and it feels like unfinished business, including the possibility of exacting some revenge. That is hard to do if the guy won’t even call or respond to letters. A month ago he came over drunk and spent the night, and now it feels like a one-night stand, which she can handle with a stranger, but with someone she had been in love with it was harder. She brought up the concept of “self-loathing,” although I thought she should change the term. It isn’t something to be ashamed of when it’s one of the maddening things about a love affair. The love goes on, while the person fades away. What happens when a person is still around, but the love has faded?

She talked about feeling pent up and frustrated while having sexual dreams. The main thing is the intimacy. She misses the presence of a man in bed in the morning, more than getting laid, which she can always do if she wants, finding a willing man in a bar (where they met), but isn’t interested.

I wondered if her predicament had something to do with being an older person with a younger one. She hadn’t thought of that. I’ve been on both ends of it, with Simone who is nine years older, and a local woman who is seventeen years younger, both situations having gone on for years. With the former I was the younger one, for whom the break-up was more easily handled. She had deeper continuums which made it harder to walk away (I’m speculating here). In the affair where I was the older one I had that burden, and the woman sitting across the table with a glass of wine and mournful look is in a similar situation. Her ex-fiancé is seven years

younger. What has her in a quandary is how she used to bounce back from a failed affair in previous years, just going on to the next man. How come she can't do that now? I said she's never been forty before, or in love with someone at this later age when things have evolved into deeper waters. If something is spilled it doesn't wash away so quickly, as might occur when life is a shallow moving stream. She doesn't want to think in terms of transitory people, and it makes it all the harder to forget him. The broken engagement is an unfortunate fact that won't go away.

It's something I learned the hard way, that whatever is nice about being with a younger person, chances are the older one will feel the impact more when it ends.[11] The conversation got around to the two of us and our approach-avoidance of having an affair. Neither one is sure if it's a good idea, though we're probably intrigued. There was some reference to New Year's Eve when we were kissing and my wine-inspired hand was moving down her back. Now and then, including tonight when I was in the kitchen, she will walk up and hold me or brush against me, and it gets my nerve ends going.

I have to come to terms with my own complicity in not having a girlfriend. I am doing okay on my own, but have gone too far in that direction (while leaving typographic tracks in the form of this journal). You may wonder why your life has been running smoothly (no girlfriend), but there is the alarming fact that you have gone for months with no sex. I couldn't imagine being single for this long when I was in my twenties, but I've never been this age before. It's like having to relearn the process, including relations with women. I have stumbled into a realm which I'm experimenting with, seeing if I can live without a woman. Now I've done it and it is a phase I'm tired of, the diplomatic hesitations, and it's not surprising if I sleep alone.

[11] An extreme example of that is *Lolita*. The older man's life is ruined (it was his fault). The under-age girl shrugs it off and ends up in a complacent domestic situation – as if the mundane is a life preserver.

1:00 a.m. I picked up the sleepy daughter of the Actress off the sofa and carried her downstairs to their car. She said good night, and there was a big hug and a kiss from her mother. I had given Maya a sand dollar with a barnacle which she thought was cool, but then forgot it.

Sunday, April 24, 1994

9:00 a.m. Woken by the phone, it's Ming with a wake-up call, sounding cheerful. "Wake up sleepy head!" She's feeling better. We talked for half an hour, and she invited me for breakfast, but I had to catch a train.

It's curious how you get into a woman's force field where everything bends in her direction. She sounded pleased when I mentioned that I'll see something and think of her and want to show it to her, or have her voice in my head (which is not surprising, since we talk a lot). Sometimes it is too much, like I'm conforming to a girlfriend. We have a close connection, but after a while it sends a signal to my subconscious – why look for another woman when I have one right here? It looks and feels like love, and is in fact, it just isn't the romantic kind. And yet it's been more scintillating, mentally and otherwise, than other relationships I've had which had a sexual follow-through.

Noon: a train sliding slowly out of town. An hour later I arrived in Mountain View, with my father and his grandson standing there. The five-year-old ran up when I got off the train. I lifted him up over my shoulder with his legs still kicking and as I lowered him he kicked me in the balls. I don't think he meant to do it, but I also think he knew it, asking me a few minutes later if he kicked me.

My parents had flown up from San Diego for the weekend, and we met my sister Diane (the sociologist) and drove to her place in Portola Valley, preparing for the occasion of my other

sister turning forty (the mother of the five-year-old). It was an afternoon in the hills, with houses insulated by woods, insurance, and property values. Diane rents a couple of rooms in a lovely house which is inhabited by the ghost of Frank Lloyd Wright. The owner is retired from Stanford. The whole structure, from the architecture to the rugs, has a fine and understated style, and not a few Tibetan artifacts (I think he bought it for $700,000).

For much of the time my nephew was a manic-depressive, which is to say a normal kid who's video-accelerated. It felt like he had to occupy himself or have someone doing something to divert him, like a person who has to stay busy in order to elude a feeling of uneasiness. I might be putting too much into this, but if human beings have a Freudian undercurrent practically from birth, I think there are existential doubts and pressures as well. In his case, there was also the divorce a year or two ago. He will go through the most emotional episodes, whipping through mood swings from one minute to the next with a resilience which is amazing. He can be heartbroken and in tears (like when he has to go to bed),[12] and a few minutes later he has forgotten it, distracted by something.

I remember the Actress talking about her ten-year-old daughter who was lying in the bathtub and talking in depressing terms about her life, like what's the point of living, it's boring and repetitious. It was not something her mother wanted to hear. It would make sense if human characteristics are with us from a young age, with kids who're morbid, competitive, or cruel, and adults who're easily bored. I'm impressed with my nephew's negotiations with his mother, showing a certain self-awareness when they discuss his current emotional state and whether he should change it in the next minute.

[12] When he was an infant, his mother referred to it as "baby torture."

The divorced father (an attorney) told her that his son is becoming effeminate and demanding. I think there is a double whammy when a kid is from a broken home. He's going back and forth between the two parents, fully aware of playing one against the other to his own advantage. He is spoiled if one of his parents overcompensates for being separated, and doesn't want to be too firm. That would explain a lot of people these days, to the extent they are accelerated with a demanding attitude, while sensing something isn't right.

His mother is firm with him, an endless patient undertaking, and yet I fall back on an old suspicion that words aren't enough compared to actions (and this from a writer). Patient negotiations may work for a while, but impressing the point on a child might require something more, like sending the kid to his room (although it's full of toys). What doesn't happen as far as I can tell is any sort of physical punishment. That is probably better in the long run, but it might be called for now and then (using body language to send a message). Kids grow up with a series of soft and harder knocks until they learn what it takes to not fall off a chair or walk into a wall.

I was kneeling down, putting one of my guitar tapes into a tape player and adjusting the dials when he ran right into me, a surprise body slam. Instinctively I pushed him off and he fell back. He wasn't hurt, but surprised and there were a few tears. I wasn't impressed with my reaction, not that he didn't deserve it. However, five minutes later he was laughing about it, and gently chiding me for having lost my temper. At any rate, the point had been impressed on him that he shouldn't run over people. Apparently, he has been in trouble at school for doing the same thing, running over other kids. The rest of the time I was there he was more careful.

I was sitting under the trees when he came out – I had rolled a cigarette and was lighting it. When he sees me smoking he likes to say, "You're going to die," but now was curious, wanting to see me blow the smoke out. "What's it feel like?" I told him it's not for kids. Then he

forgot about it and wanted to do something – anything - being easily amused. I suggested standing on one leg. He tried it for a while, then it was my turn.

Later we were in back near a small tree with several trunks slanting over the ground. He wanted to climb it, but only got a foot or two off the ground. Then he wanted me to help him down. He had climbed it two or three times and I figured he knew what to do. However, he slid down the trunk before I could react. Not a good idea, the rough bark scratched his stomach. He was not sure if he should cry or not, and then decided to, although he had learned something about trees and gravity.[13]

Compared to the women around him – mother, mother's sister, grandmother – what he gets from a man, or me at least, is the hands-on or hands-off approach. Either way he's not so mollycoddled. There is the hands-on treatment when it comes to wrestling, but also when I pushed him off me. There is the hands-off approach when it comes to letting him figure out a situation, maybe falling in the process, but he has to learn. The odd thing is he keeps coming back for more, like he wants the rougher treatment. He wants to be confronted with a harder presence in order to test himself.

Late afternoon, we went for a walk with my father through a tree-embellished neighborhood which led to fields and pastures, and followed a trail along a broken-down fence. There were horses in the distance, an airliner drifting overhead, and sunlight breaking through the clouds, with rays of light on a field of dirt. We talked about the news, with my father not impressed with the revisionist accolades for Nixon. He hasn't forgotten the crimes and the corrupt pardon. He is sixty-six and doesn't assume that getting old makes you automatically respectable.

---

[13] When I was ten I fell out of an oak tree and broke my arm. We had just moved to California, having spent the previous year in New York City (on the edge of Harlem), and I wasn't used to oak trees (California knocks me out). I showed up on the first day of the fourth grade with my left arm in a cast.

We returned to the house an hour later, talking about the Bible. He has a large volume on the book of Genesis, and is interested in biblical research, including on the Dead Sea scrolls (which were found in a desert cave in 1947, but kept out of reach of the public for many years). He is open to the possibility that Jesus never claimed to be the son of God, more like a son of God (slight difference), and saying he was born of a "virgin" is probably the mistranslation of a word which meant "young woman." My father is not afraid of the facts, especially when it comes to testing or refining one's philosophy of life. The teachings of Jesus can withstand a realistic view of the man who died on a cross. The concept of brotherhood does not need someone walking on water to make it more profound.

We were sitting under the trees when my nephew bolted from the house and wanted to play hide and seek, which ended the conversation.

10:00 p.m. I was driven by my mother and Diane to the train station. My mother may have mellowed over the years, a mutual phenomenon. I have a certain wariness of women with a sharp tongue and a short fuse, but for a long time we have managed to steer clear of that sort of thing. She gave me a few things from their house, like they want to travel lighter the older they get (not being very materialistic). Her mortality, though fit and rather spry at sixty-six, was on my mind. I know that people grow old, you read about it and you see it on the streets, but when it happens to your parents it is hitting close to home. I have one foot firmly planted on the ground where the natural cycle of life and death is an absolute. It's not something you can argue with or worry about.

On the other hand, or foot, "Do not go gentle into that good night." I've been sheltered by the fact of their ongoing existence, with not much in the way of mental or physical

diminishment, but I am like a child who wants to protect his parents. I sensed that on a camping trip in the Sierras when I was twelve. My father came along, but had to hike back early by himself. The trail was near a cliff and I was worried about him, while remaining unconcerned about myself (as a boy who fell out of a tree and nearly went over a waterfall).

Now there are encroaching fine lines in my mother's face, and there is nothing I can do about it (I can hear her saying, "Well, you could call more often.") Anyhow, she gave me a small bag full of books (from a Great Book series), some kitchen knives, and a pair of boots. All you need to get by: Aristotle, a knife, and shoes.

On the train for an hour, returning to the city where it's raining. I stood on the street with a few people taking whatever cab drove up. I finally got one and was opening the door when a young white woman said something from the curb, sounding accusatory. I walked over and she said there was a woman with a sick child who wanted the cab, making it sound like I took it from her. I said I didn't know that and gave up the cab, with no response from the woman who was black. There were no more cabs, so I took the bus.

Midnight: at home, listening to a long message from Ming on the phone machine. It went on for fifteen minutes, relating her feelings and what she did today. I find it hard talking to a phone machine, and leave the most perfunctory messages. My men friends have a similar approach, but women go on at length, like it doesn't matter who or what they're talking to. I have felt like that on the receiving end of a monologue which can't be interrupted, much less turned into a dialogue. I might as well have been a machine (recording it in my head).

Monday, April 25, 1994

9:00 a.m. I had regained consciousness when there was a phone call from Ming. I think she likes the image of herself as an alarming presence in my life, either as an alarm clock or worse. She also doesn't mind if I refer to her as my personal decorator and advisor, but I threw in "personal earthquake." We talked for a while. She had a headache from the oral surgery, is taking the day off, and wanted to do something.

11:00 a.m. I went to her place and had something to eat in the kitchen. She had thrown together a vegetable stew with a tuna sandwich.

We walked to a used-book store in the Tenderloin, passing a collision in the Civic Center. She wanted to look up Gauguin and find out what someone meant about her looking like one of the women in his paintings. We flipped through his Tahitian portraits and she saw some resemblances, except the women were small-breasted.

Meanwhile, she wanted something to read. A woman friend gave her *Fear of Flying* a while back.[14] She gave it a chance, but then lost patience with it. I told her when I read it years ago I had a quick critique: throw the book against the wall and see if it sticks. I had to explain the reference. The author claimed that when she's on a date with a man she knows it went well if on getting home she takes off her panties, throws them against the wall, and they stick. Ming was momentarily stunned. "How crude," she said, and laughed.

Ming was being difficult, but we settled on Pynchon (*Gravity's Rainbow*), and something by Saul Bellow. She refused Margaret Atwood. We walked to my old place and picked up the mail. The neighborhood hit us from a familiar angle, where the people on the streets are like extras from a movie about the dregs and derelicts of society. The old, infirm, and the addicted,

[14] Erica Jong came to a women's conference in San Francisco some years ago. She was speaking to an audience of feminists, with not a few lesbians, and was booed off the stage, or booed and hissed at any rate, for having the nerve to read a poem about the joys of motherhood (she recently had a baby).

with their various physiognomies, like a drunk Fellini was directing the movie. She said it is a relief that I am out of there.

We walked to the Lumiere on California for a matinee of *Bitter Moon*.

We left a couple of hours later and found it raining, so we walked up Polk Street using her umbrella. I followed her into a used clothing store, but it took longer than I wanted. She didn't find anything except for shades, trying on every pair they had and wanting my opinion (staring with a blank expression). I ended up with a stylish grey suit and a cubist tie. The latter was her idea, which I didn't like very much, but was a good example of what holds us together. She is cubist to a fault (but not a square), a tour de force of shifting angles.

On the way to my place we picked up some fish and wine (red snapper and a Chianti). I was foregoing the office since the Attorney wasn't there. We were caught up in one of those arcs where we will be apart for a few days, then rip through a twenty-four hour stretch of being constantly together. I did the dishes and prepared dinner while she flipped through an issue of *Glamour* magazine. I got it from my sister (not the feminist one who had some scorn for it).

HOW TO GET THE SEX LIFE YOU WANT

VIOLENCE & MEN - is it them or their hormones?

PERFECT HAIR STARTS HERE!

SEXUAL SHAME: How it hurts your health

I kept it for an article I was going to do something with (then realized it wasn't worth the effort) concerning men and what they say when approaching a woman - an excuse to put down men.

There was an article on the Sistine Chapel, with a shot of Adam. It was about censoring his genitals for the trailer of a film. "The irony, as anyone who's seen the little weenie on…."

"The issue was much ado about almost nothing." Michelangelo: meet a modern woman from this country, and thank the Lord that you've been dead for centuries and prefer the company of men.

There was a survey of university students who masturbate and their frequency, male and female. "During the past month, 61 percent of males, 27 percent of females." During the past year it was 74 percent to 34 percent. Women who masturbate end up with a better sex life, and take "less time to become aroused." Ming read aloud an article on celibacy. It was presented like a new-found concept, although she has been on that lonely road for a while now. She found the magazine embarrassing, with women saying things like, "I hate my nipples."

We had been talking on and off about the film, *Bitter Moon*. I didn't have much sympathy for the main character. It was more or less his fault if the affair with a woman who was twenty years younger went wrong. He was allegedly in love with her, and yet it's seen in terms of all the sexual variations they can dream up. When they're running out of those he loses interest. He comes off as shallow, which might explain why he's not doing better as an American in Paris. We figured his stilted monologues were those of a bad writer who thinks in those terms, giving Polanski (the director and one of the screenwriters) the benefit of the doubt. They were satirizing an American (played by Peter Peyote – I mean Coyote).

Ming said the girl didn't have much of a life away from him. He was tired of her always being around, and she was more dependent on him since the script had not provided her with more dimension. He didn't have much of a life since he was a failed writer,[15] and was going out a lot and chasing other women. There were scenes – like male fantasy routines - of a young woman pleading at his feet to not be thrown out, she'll do anything, clean his house, he can even have other women.

[15] A failed writer is one who doesn't write very well, or leaves a blank page.

How to view the longevity of a connection? The American talks in dumb cliches with an assumption that affairs, however profound or deeply felt, don't go on forever. They wear out, so let's part ways with a few memories. The young French woman is imbued with an old-world mentality where that is hard to grasp. She is unclear on the concept of moving on to someone else, like people are discardable. When the emotions come too close it throws him off, and he wants something "new."

In keeping with her view of permanence and love, she goes back to him after they go through some major changes. He is in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down, and she is taking care of him as a sadistic nurse. One night she brings a black man over and they do a suggestive dance in front of him. Then she pulls the dancer into the next room where the crippled man can hear her moaning. Ming was shocked at how they treated a disabled man, and the conversation went off on a tangent. I wondered if she had done something similar. She knew what I was talking about and sort of admitted it – having sex with someone while a man who is in love with her is in the next room. She said a man should be responsible for his feelings, but that's like saying if someone slaps you in the face it's your fault if it hurts.

We were having dinner by candle light, and she was getting more conciliatory. She said she did "experiment" with men, or act out things in order to see how they respond, but forgot that real people were involved. She has to experience things first hand to learn about them,[16] but many women would hold back if they're concerned about the feelings of others or their own safety. Ming said she hasn't been with men who roughed her up because they were being jerked around. I said, "That's why you like men with manners." We moved to the black sofa and I gave

[16] Speaking of which, I went to view the bodies at the Anatomy Lab a few years ago at San Francisco State. My ex-girlfriend was a student there, and got us in. Dead people are something you read about or see in movies, but the real thing can elude you for your whole life, until it's your own body on a slab.

her a neck rub. She was saying things like, "I love men," even though "I'm anti-male." I said I've been too reasonable and cautious when it comes to women, and she said, "Since when… not with me."

I brought up an article (by Sally Tisdale) on the biological communion of women. Ming didn't believe it, like they sit around talking about each other's ovaries and mammary glands. There are women who consider themselves the context in which sex occurs. That would explain a few presumptions and attitudes. Rather than it being a mutual thing where two people generate an atmosphere, the man is going out on a limb and doing most of the work. The woman is the deciding factor as to whether or not the act occurs, and then she judges his performance. Her participation has to do with allowing the act to occur – and then she doesn't have to do much, she can just lay there.[17]

Meanwhile, appearing over Russian Hill with perfect lunar timing was the full moon with a few ghost clouds going by. I went to the corner store to get her some aspirin and returned. When we went to bed she took off her pants, put on one of my old shirts, removed a black bra and threw it on the floor.

We lay there for a while with the black and white portable on. I was staring at an eerie apparition of Henry Kissinger when she fell asleep. The accolades for Nixon are straining my objectivity to the breaking point. He was a red-baiting snake-oil salesman from a small town. It is hard to forgive and forget when someone was a profiteering opportunist and a dirty tricks afficionado with a lot of blood on his hands. Some of the hypocrisy is coming from the euphemism of the President as a "public servant," which everyone in government from politicians to police are standing behind, and yet it is misleading. You would think he wasn't

[17] I should note that *Cosmopolitan* has exercises for women which involve spreading their legs, also known as "exercises to improve your bedroom flexibility."

paid very well, and didn't retire with a full pension and body guards, and wasn't making millions from his time in public office. The only thing selfless about the job is when he is invisible and not accountable for breaking the law. He lied to congress and the public, engaged in shady financial operations, and bombed other countries.

Tuesday, April 26, 1994

Woke up around 7 a.m., with her looking calm and relaxed, but then she was still horizontal. A few minutes later she was sitting on the side of the bed and holding her blouse. I was in a black robe, and she said she likes my shirt, the one she slept in. She wants to trade it for one of hers and wondered how I would look in it. I took off my robe and put a woman's blouse on over my head (burgundy, short sleeve with buttons). It resembled a shirt I have and never wear. She has a positive opinion of androgyny. I think it is a fact of life, but don't go out of my way to manifest it. That said, I was wearing a woman's blouse while semi-erect – a common condition in the morning.

I took it off and put the robe back on. She took off my shirt, though she turned her back so her breasts were not too provocative. I don't know why she's being discreet since we have been in hot tubs and the ocean with no clothes on. It might be that her breasts are showing the effects of gravity more than she would like. At other times, amused and self-derisive, she will lift her shirt, stick her stomach out and grab it, saying, "Look at this…."

The formalities and informalities between us are in constant fluctuation. We have given each other massages with nothing on but lots of massage oil, and slept in the same bed many times. There is little or no hesitation about urinating in front of each other. Last night she didn't

think the conversation should be interrupted just because she had to pee, so she left the door open. Before she left she gave me a thin beaded necklace she made herself and wore for a while.

I went to work in the afternoon, and then went home. In the evening I was back downtown, activated by a phone call from the Actress. She wanted me to see a routine she was working on. Ming had invited me to a yoga back-stretching class in the evening, but I wasn't interested.

The rehearsal rooms for the American Conservatory Theater were near some galleries. I emerged from the elevator on the 8th floor and there was Maya sitting on a ledge, doing her homework. We talked for a while, and she showed me her notebook, some parchment she made at school, and a picture of a skeleton. She said she had to learn about the skull bone connected to the neck bone, the neck bone connected to the shoulder bone, but with the scientific terms. They were typed out on the page, so we ran through them. I was saying "Where's your mandible… your collarbone… your sternum," and she appeared to genuflect, making the sign of the cross on her bones.

Her mother appeared with the acting coach and we walked through a corridor to a high-ceilinged room. It had a glass wall with a view of the towers downtown. The Actress took her position in the middle of the room with a bench, a chair on either side (in the configuration of a cross), and lit a candle. A tape played with her voice reciting some quotes. She took off her silk blouse, wearing a skirt and a slip with a lowcut bra, and went through the motions of a one-woman routine. It included making coffee and wandering around, speaking lines which were disjointed and impressionistic. It was mystifying, with some references to pain and loneliness, and it was over in ten minutes.

Then it was time for the acting coach to give his opinion, using a careful diplomatic approach. He didn't want to discourage her efforts, but was not sure what she was trying to do. There was some talk about finding the "process," or maybe her "voice." Did she feel she wanted to develop the piece and come back in two weeks with more material? There are some genres of theater where the performer doesn't care if the audience doesn't know what's going on. Does she want that? No, not really.

I was asked for comments. I said something about the non-linearity of the lines she spoke or read. It had a diminishing effect, since there wasn't a build-up. It was hard to keep them in mind when they didn't add up. That went over well, with the acting coach saying "Good comment."

A few minutes later I said something which was less well received. I got a polite smile, and he took it in stride, but said this sort of suggestion was "playwriting." I was getting ahead of her with my ideas – she should write the scene herself. I said I could see *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* in the background while the Actress spewed an angry monologue about a broken engagement. She could stand on one side of the stage for the mystical part, and the other for the profane particulars of her condition. The latter would give the audience some idea of where she was coming from.

I come from the vantage of a writer, and I don't know much about the esoteric mechanics of the stage. She wanted to write something, but went to an acting coach who thought there was a problem with finding her voice. When I spoke with her later I said it isn't so elusive, this business of "finding one's voice." If it involves her failed engagement, that is something she has talked about in painful detail. Maybe we should tape our conversations and make a transcript.

Maya hadn't gotten much out of her mother's routine, and when the acting coach left she pointed out the window at people she was watching in other buildings. A man bent over a desk with a lamp, some guy running around on a rooftop, a janitor, and people hooked up to machines with their legs revolving. I said they generate electricity for the building.

She tried on some lipstick, a little rouge, and posed. Ten years old and she knows the routine. We drove to my place and they hung out for a while.

Wednesday, April 27, 1994

NOTES

The futilities of San Francisco
in conjunction with utilities.
To get around the incivility
you focus on your own activities.

Radical – *radicalis* – "having roots"

Financially a minimalist,
romantically a hit or missed,
and mortally a realist.
Historically I don't know what I missed.

Not extinction, but a middle class in danger of indistinction.

Much ado about forty-two,
it doesn't mean a thing,
the mental process black and blue,
I hear a vulture sing.

Article in *The American Spectator* on Amelia Earhart, reviewing a book by a woman who equated the missing aviator with the "missing equality" of today's modern woman. The woman reviewer slammed the flimsy knee-jerk feminism of the writer.

There were curious connotations – what if equality went up in a plane (a machine invented by men) and tried to fly across the Pacific Ocean and didn't make it? Who's at fault? And if countless women fly these days, it would imply equality isn't missing.

> Also, nothing against Amelia Airport, but she received her first international accolades in a transatlantic flight as a passenger (the first woman). The writer faults her for not having come out as a lesbian in the 1940's. Technically she was married to a man, so that might have had some further complications. The writer thought she should have publicly supported women sleeping with women (and she failed to bring some K.D. Laing tapes on the flight).
>
> Women in the past retained an aura of the unknown.[18] It is a smokescreen which was being used for protection and seduction. As a high school girl said to her male companion, "I can touch you, but you can't touch me."[19] Men are drawn to the unknown when it comes to science, exploration, and the opposite sex. Having a libido for the unknown can be a problem when a man is constantly diverted by strange women. They may wear the unknown like a veil, but they're conforming to the known – it's more secure. When women look at men as a known quantity it's out of habit, being so habituated with presumptions of the known, and they are stereotyping men. If they looked more closely, they might be a better judge of character.
>
> However, that requires patience. There is evidence that men are slower to judge and quicker when it comes to having a climax. Women are the other way around, quick to judge and slower with a climax.

I wore the double-breasted grey suit with a stylish cut to the office. There were compliments from a couple of women. When I walked into the Attorney's office he said, "You look like a pimp." I was working on a bankruptcy for a woman, and later talked with the receptionist about meditation, *Bitter Moon*, and litigation. She said she wants to learn how to meditate. Her mother suggested it since she can be a little wired at the expense of her family. "And future husband?" "Likewise."

5:30 p.m. V. wanted me to walk her to the underground station, probably because of the suit. That was followed by a rendezvous with Ming outside her office building. She looked nice, but I said her burgundy sweater didn't go with her lipstick, which was dumb. She had a headache, was taking too much Advil, and wonders if she'll get addicted. She was in a

[18] One problem with having an air of mystery, it gives men an excuse for not knowing "what a woman wants," and therefore relieves them of attempting to provide it.
[19] I live a block away from a high school, and I hear things.

pessimistic mood, so the repartee for much of the night was in that vein. We took a bus to my old neighborhood. The hybrids and dilapidated mutants were out in force. In the used-book store I found a few writers I thought she might like. Pearl Buck, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and Margaret Atwood. She couldn't decide until I said I would contribute and she got all three.

I wanted to drop off a book at the library, but she was headed for the drugstore, saying something about heavy-duty pads and irregular periods. When we walked into the store I commented on a display of breakfast rolls near the door. She said that stuffing a breakfast roll down her pants wouldn't work. There was a wide selection of feminine hygiene products and she finally found what she wanted and we left.

We were walking by the Opera Plaza a few minutes later. I glanced into A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books and something clicked. There was a schedule of authors who give readings there, and I had made a mental note to see one, an English writer named Will Self. The note dissolved in my watery brain, or was hidden by other mental notes and observations, but it turned out he would be here in fifteen minutes.[20]

We stayed and got a seat and he appeared, foregoing a microphone and reading from his latest book, *My Idea of Fun*. He had a forthright manner with his hair slicked back, in his thirties. He wrote *Cock & Bull*, two novellas where a woman grows a penis and a man has an ingrown vagina behind his knee. The author has a reputation in England for having the dark humor of an ex-junkie, and is "admired by such heavyweights as Salman Rushdie & Martin Amis." After the

[20] Ming picked up a book before he started and we read a few pages, *Women Who Run With Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. She had heard about it, but neither one of us were impressed. Women can speak of women in purely physical terms, almost equating the two in fact – the physical and purity – while men are castigated for referring to child-bearing hips, women who are close to the earth, or as the author put it, "the power of the haunches." What if someone published a piece of writing under a woman's name which extolls women in highly physical terms, but only using quotes from male writers? Or put it under a man's name with lines from women about women's bodies, and see if he is criticized for being condescending and objectifying.

reading someone compared him to J.G. Ballard. There was some mention of *Crash* by the latter and his eyes got wide. He considers it a seminal work and one he admires, a book I've had for a long time. It's about the psycho-sexuality of car wrecks in the bleak milieu of modern England (with a subtext that the women must be falling short if twisted metal is more interesting).[21]

He read with a certain relish. The main character, "the fact controller," was a cross between Sydney Greenstreet (in *The Maltese Falcon*, as he noted) and *Pere Ubu* (by Alfred Jarry), a pompous and sadistic person. The prose is rooted in conditions which produced a Johnny Rotten or a Lucien Freud. In this case, a Will Self - a fluent writer in a post-industrial stunted atmosphere where a cold eye is required to withstand the cold. Who knows what underlying forces have been generating certain traits and customs which are found in England? The sense of space is relatively collapsed in London (and what are the psycho-sexual consequences of that?). There is the sense of a country running out of time. The people may have sentimental attachments to their gardens, but they're also bitter and original thinkers. It's a country known for having good manners and a die-hard class struggle.

His prose was carefully constructed and somewhat condensed, as if a learned man of limited means was writing in a small room. It may have turned him into a godless disillusioned person, but being a writer can do that, along with being half-Jewish and a veteran of heroin. I suppose he would have appreciated T.S. Eliot's line:

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table… [22]

Self read for nearly half an hour and I didn't lose interest. He then took questions from the audience, like where does he stand in the tradition of English writers, which he handled well,

[21] Actually, it is a male obsession, from an iron foundry to the war machine, and heavy metal bands.
[22] "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1911)

a bit sardonic. I didn't have anything intelligent to say – what's your favorite band… what are the literary advantages of putting a needle in your arm?

When we left, Ming said she liked the reading. She also liked the movie *Naked*, a pessimistic production from England. We walked to her place a few blocks away. In the old kitchen she threw together a meal, tuna on heated tortillas with mustard. I had a beer and her none. She complained about her head hurting from the oral surgery a few days ago. Her metabolism can be out of tune, with the wrong notes being sounded in her body – not just a headache, it was her period. She even had the hiccups at one point. When I listen to women complain about their aches and pains it's like their bodies are a burden, if not a deadweight, and they're sickly amused when a man is interested in their physique.

I was in grey slacks with a thin alligator belt, a loosened black tie, and a lavender shirt. There was some question if the belt was feminine or a woman's belt (hers was dark and wide). I said it wasn't, and the older woman who lives there walked in, hearing some of this discussion as to whether I have androgynous tendencies or not. She thought that was a good thing. I wasn't objecting to the concept, but what good is it if one is sleeping alone? She said, "You haven't found the right person," while looking a little puzzled. She may have thought, like everyone from my mother to some women who are halfway interested, that there is something between Ming and me. Well, there is, but it tends to defy description.

11 p.m. We were in her room and she got into some flannel pajama bottoms with a T-shirt (her idea of heaven). Her bed has flannel sheets. There were moments when she had the harried look of a woman who is weighed down by the gravity of her organs. There were strands of black hair falling over her face and she looked glum. A few minutes later she walked over to the dresser with her hair in a wild dishevelment, her soft pajama bottoms drooping over slim hips

while she rummaged through her stuff and threw some feminine hygiene packages on the floor. She got back into bed and filed her nails.

Ming relishes the constant mental current between us, and likes to keep it going. She is testing the resilience of my feelings, making sure that I don't see her as a lover. This is a utilitarian Scorpio whose bodily functions are no secret. We talked about her being down to earth, inhabiting a realm where things are all too solid. The downside is when things become a problem or an obstacle, like rocks in her path. She isn't very good at floating above it, and gives the impression she is banging into things (that made her laugh). I said I have the unfortunate tendency to go through life at some remove from the tangible or practical. She thought she could use some of that, but I said I am condemned to the ephemeral. It is not so much a lifetime of banging into things, with hardware as a way of life, more like a floating realm of mental concerns. One gets tired of that, as if the gears are not quite meshing.

We talked about her plants, and I asked if she talks to them. She said she doesn't, then admitted that she does and it helps. I wondered if people need to talk to plants more than plants need to listen. For that matter, how did plants thrive on the earth before there were people?

She found an old robe for me and we went to sleep.

Thursday, April 28, 1994

Woke up around seven in close proximity. She likes to have someone in bed, a physical presence she can lay against, though careful not to give him the wrong idea. She rolled over and I rubbed her neck and shoulder for a few minutes – the oral headache lingered.

She took a shower while I lay there, wondering what it is about her bed which is at odds with my lower back. When she walked back in her hair was in a towel and she wore a dark green

skirt, a white blouse over a chemise, and put on some lotion while standing barefoot with her knobby feet. When she was ready to leave she told me I was lagging hard. I got up, put on the suit with an open shirt, no tie, and we walked to a corner place for coffee and pastry. The mood was pretty matter-of-fact. Ming prefers someone who can be a backboard for her comments and return the shots in kind. She said she likes it when I give her the "tough love" treatment. It gives her a chance to explain herself or vent, knowing I can take it. When it comes to critical discussions or debates, it's something she prefers in the same way she likes a penetrating massage of sore muscles. It doesn't work if you're not going deep and hurting a little, touching on the sore points. She is contemptuous of men who can't do that, or won't. There was an Italian man who was well-off and a little older. He courted her with flowers, compliments, and an old-fashioned chivalry until she couldn't take it anymore and cut him loose.

With respect to the dispassionate side of Ming, we have wondered if it's due to her Chinese background, or her relatively loveless family, and instead of wine in her blood it's more like vinegar. There is some credence to that, considering the dressing she made last night. There was so much vinegar it left me choking, but she said she could use it to kill flies.

It isn't like men aren't used to female skepticism and resistance (along with the concept that, "You don't know a woman until you've met her in court."[23]) The white blood cells attack the sperm, however metaphorical you want to get with that. The men I've known are more emotionally constant (which is sometimes taken as a limitation), with women going to extremes. Ming said it's like that when she has an affair, the woman is further into it and later further out of it. I thought of the Actress who is gushing one minute, and dry and cutting the next. We were

[23] Norman Mailer

talking about the mood swings of some women, and I said, “It’s like cancer and baby kittens.” “Exactly!”

We walked to the bus stop and Ming was a little grumpy, hoping she wouldn’t have a bad day at the office. Her view of things is determined by her moods, as if going through life on an “I like it” or “I don’t like it” basis. I don’t know if she likes her job or not because it changes, based on what sort of day she’s having. She refused to take the penicillin because, “I don’t want to.”

A bus went by and didn’t stop. A few minutes later there was another one. It stopped and she got on. I walked to my old place in the Tenderloin. There was no mail, and more construction in a hammer-head neighborhood. I walked home, making for a two and a half mile ambulation, and was typing for a while.

Phone call from B., who sounded grim. Things had blown up, fallen apart, and she was estranged from her girlfriend again. B. said she’s like a prosecuting attorney with a long brief full of points and references to any inconsistencies in B.’s behavior. Ilsa has had years of fighting and arguing with other women, so B. is at a disadvantage, being used to men who were a walk in the park (and often got no further). She is not as prone to argument, so it leaves her sounding dumb and guilty, as she put it. There was another mix-up, with Ilsa screaming at B. for going behind her back to contact a woman, and even left her phone number. B. said she only wanted to talk with another “gay woman,” because she had some questions about her current relationship. Ilsa assumed the worse, and was infuriated as a controller who has to know what B. is doing. There was the resentment of a woman who wants to mess around with other women, and suspects B. of thinking in those terms. Ilsa has a history of it, and is using any excuse to kick up a fuss and walk out the door.

B. was feeling bitten. Ilsa has a “mind like a steel trap,” being accusatory and relentless. B. admits her own character is kind of soft, and Ilsa has a certain hardness. She is wound too tight and B. is loose in that respect, which makes her more charming. She said she keeps putting her foot in it, not used to being with a woman, and is amazed how much leeway she had with men. Being with a woman is like you’re under an interrogation lamp. Ilsa has to know every last detail, the “blue print” of her life. B. couldn’t understand that, any more than she could understand why someone wants to control another person. I said the blue print might involve her psychological operating instructions, and would make Ilsa more secure if she knows her girlfriend inside out, and what responses will occur if she pushes the right button.

B. said she never thought like that, but never had to when the men around her were controllable, polite, and easily satisfied. Her intentions didn’t go that far anyhow. The men were useful or entertaining, and who cares about the finer points of their psychology? She would just as soon be spared that knowledge. Meanwhile, she is tense and miserable, and it is wrecking her self-esteem. She lost ten pounds in the last few weeks. I said something about a diet plan involving the mental cruelties between women.

I went to work in the afternoon.

7:00 p.m. I took a bus to the sound-room flat near the Haight. The evening was a little off. The Phantom was moody and tired, and we never made it to the sound-room. He played a video from an MTV special about Kurt Cobain. Old footage of the band with interviews. There were a few parallels with John Lennon (the ineptitude of other comparisons was astounding, like Elvis or Bob Dylan), and someone referred to him as Lead Belly White Boy, Jr. He had a good voice which could yell from a primal source. He was from the north country with a premature

disillusionment. Lennon and Cobain were still young men when things broke up (with the latter it was mortal). Their looks were in a constant state of fluctuation, as if mirroring an inner flux of who they were or how they felt. Lennon had so many looks you'd think there was a hair dresser following him around. Cobain had the occasional woman's blouse.

The Phantom is still haunted by the suicide, looking for clues that it was planned in advance, a foregone conclusion. He said there was an acoustic set of Nirvana unplugged where the stage looks like a funeral with candles and flowers. The lyrics are kind of sketchy. Cobain said the critics would over-emphasize a line or phrase, assuming it explained a lot, like he was disillusioned with fame. I think he liked it for a while, the wonder of being able to tour with Sonic Youth, for example. It's something when you lock into a warp-speed dimension where the songs are working and in no time you are in a coast-to-coast network of stages and recording studios.

Something in him was coming apart, however, and had been for a while. There is some evidence of it in the disjointed lyrics. The Phantom showed me a sheet of songs. With a lot of loud music the words don't amount to much, relying on some half-heard screaming phrases. It was something how vague or fragmented his lyrics were, like he couldn't carry a thought more than one or two lines. That's okay if it's a song for a loud band, but sometimes a singer who is yelling random phrases has a real madness. He is mentally disturbed and in pain. The audience wouldn't know it since that sort of staging is so common nowadays, but they're dancing to the sound of someone's nervous breakdown.

I wondered how it would have gone over if Nirvana showed up thirty years ago, and later saw a video where they wondered the same thing, using old cameras and looking like a relatively stiff band from the 1950's. Then they cut loose with one of their songs.

Someone wrote a rueful speculation that "rock and roll kills," and maybe it does when it goes to Dionysian extremes. It's hard to keep up with the amplified dimensions (too metallic for a mortal to endure). And what if rock and roll disguises a disease, puts it in a different room, and sells it as an audio diversion? The originator of the tunes, a manic screamer with some quiet moments, not only when the heroin is kicking in, may wonder what he has to do to get his point across. Fire a gun into the crowd? "I don't have a gun… No I don't have a gun…."[24]

Maybe he meant it when he said, "I think I'm dumb."[25] I think the dumbest thing you can do is put a shotgun to your head at twenty-seven. Who knows what other factors had an effect, like inherited traits that lead to self-destruction, or he lost some brain cells with the drugs? There was a friction in him when it comes to existence, and it may have generated a voice, but he couldn't bear it anymore. The heroin was a way to numb it. Dying even more so.

Another possibility, assuming there were multiple factors converging on a night in April with no moon, involved his wife. There are women with a critical edge who are insulting and a little bossy. I think his wife (Courtney Love) was like that, calling him an asshole. She thought that she could push him as hard as she wanted, being an industrial-strength harpy, and that's saying something in a rancid middle-class empire.[26]

Meanwhile, we were sitting in a rundown flat with a blue light from the tube. I picked up an old hollow body with an f-hole. It looked like the only music I would have for the evening, so I was on it for a while. It's curious how so much is sublimated when I hold an instrument. It

[24] "Come as You Are" (1991). In one of his last cultural contributions before he overdosed at the age of twenty-one (out on bail for having allegedly killed his girlfriend), Sid Vicious made a video where he's onstage and singing "My Way". At some point he pulls out a gun and starts firing at the audience.
[25] "Dumb" (1993)
[26] A few years later I was involved in jazz and poetry readings at Club Deluxe on Haight Street. There was a woman who would go onstage and yell at Courtney for killing her husband.

leaves me in an oddly passive state, which is a blessing when recording sessions have a hurry-up-and-wait approach. You sit around like an audio zombie with a sleight of hand, a fluent coordination, waiting to be heard.

The Phantom apologized for being lame and not going to the sound-room. He said he's turning thirty tomorrow.

Friday, April 29, 1994

12:30 p.m. I met V. at the office and walked to the Hunan place for lunch. Smoked ham and garlic, rice, tea. The conversation wandered all over the place, with her curious questions and matter of fact responses – everything from office gossip and swollen breasts to the sin of despair. Walking back to work, she asked if I thought she would be a good mother.

In the office, a typical situation with the Attorney. He called me at home in the morning, angry and perturbed. Why hadn't I finished the bankruptcy forms so he could file them that afternoon? I said I left a note that some of the numbers were wrong, which they were as it turned out. He also said on the tape he meant to file it Monday (wrong again), and finally was mistaken about where to file it, thinking it was the U.S. Bankruptcy Court downtown, but the woman lives in Oakland, as I found out when I went there in the afternoon.

While I was gone a woman came by the office and picked up the file for her disabled brother with a medical malpractice lawsuit which the Attorney had fumbled. It was thrown out by the court for failure to prosecute diligently. He wrote a letter to the client, sounding like he was on top of things when it came to delivering the papers "forthwith" relating to the final dismissal. So attentive and concerned when it's too late. The Attorney had been looking forward to a big settlement.

Phone call from the receptionist out front, a client of ours had come and gone, impatient that the Attorney wasn't there. Her first words on the phone, "That was one rude motherfucker who just left…." I find it amusing, the softspoken swearing of a young woman whose parents are from India, and who is traditional in some respects. Ami[27] is slender (ninety-three pounds), with a fine-tuned wariness of food, and is easily put off by the smell. She is often bored or impatient at the front desk, dealing with rude men and women on the phone, and has a law class at night. There was some reference to the "fucking computer" not working, and she put on her lipstick while we were talking. Her dark eyes are beautiful.

5:00 p.m. V. wants me to walk her to the underground transit station whether or not I'm ready to leave. I returned to the office, finished the work, then walked to a coffee shop (Oh La La) with marble, wood, brick, and glass. The Czech woman was closing and doing inventory. She said she would be done by six. When we left it was nearly eight and I was in a daze, having promised her dinner for helping with the move and she wasn't going to let me forget it, which was fine, but I hadn't expected things to take this long, or for her to hand me a broom.

For a while I got absorbed in a book she had, *How We Die* (1994) by a doctor in Connecticut (Sherwin B. Nuland).[28] It was $24, though she couldn't afford it. I was impressed and couldn't put it down. There were pointblank descriptions of when a patient dies from a cardiac seizure and it's right in front of him. The first time it happened he was a young intern. He

[27] Rhymes with swami.

[28] She also wants me to check out a book by Stanislav Grof, *Books of the Dead: Manuals for Living and Dying* (1994). He is a Czech psychiatrist who was one of the developers of "transpersonal psychology and research into the use of non-ordinary states of consciousness," and he lives in San Francisco. He is associated with psychedelic therapy and holotropic breathwork. "In the late 1970's Grof proposed a psychological hypothesis to explain the near-death experience (NDE)." He thought the tunnel vision was related to the birth canal. "Susan Blackmore claimed the hypothesis is 'pitifully inadequate to explain the NDE. For a start the newborn infant would not see anything like a tunnel as it was being born'." ("Near-Birth Experience", Wikipedia/*Skeptical Enquirer 16*) This is someone with a birth canal telling someone without a birth canal how it works.

walked in to check on a newly admitted patient, a man in his fifties with a heart problem. The man suddenly had a seizure, jerked up, yelled, clutching his chest, and died with his eyes bulging. The intern cut open his chest for an open-heart massage, grasping the muscle of the heart (this was forty years ago and he used the methods of the time). Only later did he realize that he was yelling at the dead man to breathe. There was a scientific explanation of the "death rattle," which shocked the hell out of him.

A curious mood, thinking about mortality in the backroom of a closed coffee shop. When we left we took a bus over Nob Hill and ended up at a Oaxacan place on Polk Street. Fish tacos and a dark Mexican beer. Afterwards we walked to my apartment. She was in the mood for a hot tub and sauna, but could not decide. A wild man on the accordion (an old Czech friend) was at Café Babar in the Mission, but I wasn't interested.

Having asked for a neck rub earlier, she settled for an expanded version on the bed. She took off her shirt and lay on her stomach while trying not to show her breasts too much. She said she didn't want them massaged, it would make her feel strange. We've been naked together at the beach and in a sauna, but it depends on the mood she's in. Having gone without a man for months now she is bitter and resigned. If she gets aroused it stirs up a resentment full of static, ghosts, and who knows what else.[29]

The night we ended up in bed, a year or two ago (which was some time after her boyfriend killed himself), she seemed to have conflicting forces in her, and bit me hard on the cheek. She later apologized, saying she didn't know what came over her. What was not uncommon was her lying there and judging my performance - it took an encore presentation to

[29] In 2007 I had an affair with a woman from Argentina, a professor at UC Berkeley who was about my age. We were capable of steaming up the windows when parked in a car, but being aroused below the waist would leave her in tears – I couldn't go there. When she was younger, in Buenos Aires, she was knocked unconscious by something slipped into her drink, and the man she had been seeing (though she told him it was over), had his way with her.

get her approval. Meanwhile, I focused on her back and neck and shoulders, sitting on her butt and dripping the almond-scented massage oil on her skin. She liked it, but was getting a little touchy about the feelings it aroused.

11:00 p.m. I walked her to the bus (half a mile). When I returned I called B. who had dropped off a four-foot palm tree last night. I thanked her for it, and was dragged into a long analysis of the situation with the other woman (over an hour). It looks like things are over, though I've heard that before.

1:00 a.m. I read an issue of *Harper's* magazine in order to pull myself out of the emotional fluctuations of the women I'm surrounded with. I need to come up with a new direction, or to re-engage an old one of language, books and writing. It reminds me of a book my father used to have, *The Mind Can Keep You Well*.

Saturday, April 30, 1994

Typing in the morning. Later I was lifting a vine over a piece of driftwood which Ming had brought from Alaska when the phone rang and it was her. We talked for a while and she sounded upbeat, having been in bed all morning talking on the phone. She went to the Elbo Room last night with her other male escort – long hair, forty-plus, motorcycle, a reformed alcoholic.

Ming is a warm and scintillating dead-end street in some respects, and for all I know her indecisive nature is contagious. It wouldn't be so bad if there weren't several other women who have loved and lost. I've gotten stuck in an isolated corner while I listen to a chorus of women who're confused about romantism, and it's getting to me. I would like to break out of this world view, and the first step might require a change in personnel.

She asked what I did last night, and wants to do something tonight. I brought up *How We Die* and she said I was being morbid. She thought I was having a party this weekend for the Actress. I said maybe in a couple of weeks, and would deal with the situation when it's right on top of me. "I'll deal with it when she's on top of me."

Typing for a few hours, then I tore up the wooden instrument for a solid hour with the usual mercurial improvements, as if getting warmed up is a transformation. After a while you slide into a quick coordination and unheard-of versatilities which don't necessarily stick around. When l put the guitar down I went up on the roof and got my head blown off, which was refreshing.

Afterwards I straightened up the place, took a shower, and reviewed my journal from a few years go. Around seven I was getting restless, feeling like Ming had set me up, making sure I would be around for when she had enough of one guy and would go on to the next. She was supposed to call or come by before six. It left me hanging on a Saturday night, but then B. called, in the mood for something. She said the Actress called and said that her and I might be going out. I called her, made a quick decision to meet her at the Vogue Theater, and left around 7:40. It turned out I missed Ming's call by a minute or two.

I was relieved to be out with someone else, or out at all. I was wound up like a spring from being in all day, and walked all the way. It was over two miles, walking through the Presidio woods in the waning light with the wind moving through the eucalyptus trees. When one is tired of the trial and error, there's a trail and air. I hung out on the corner near the Vogue, waiting for the Actress. It was getting dark, and it seemed like every other car had a glittering middle-class couple or a single woman looking like her own accessories get her in the mood. I

have these interludes where I take a break from Ming and it's refreshing. My involvement with that woman comes with a pessimistic cloud that hangs above her head (and mine).

The Actress drove up. I said I felt like someone waiting to get picked up by out-of-town women. We went to a nearby seafood bar and grill and sat at the bar, a dark old place with polished wood. There was a woman in her mid-fifties who was talking to us, a tough cookie who was relieved to find out we smoked, and even more so when she heard I work for an attorney. She had some questions. This is someone who could mention in passing that she had a son who died of AIDS, and what it felt like hearing another woman say that those who died of AIDS deserved it. I said, "Maybe you wanted to punch her out." "Oh yes."

I was talking with the Actress, having a glass of wine and her a vodka gimlet. Another woman, maybe sixty, came over. She had a cigarette with the group and left the Actress laughing, having related an exchange she had with a woman who is overweight. The latter said,

"I see you're still smoking."
"Yes, Mary, and I see you're still eating."

9:30 p.m. We went to see the film, *Hudsucker Proxy*, by the Coen brothers. I don't mind movies that are stylized or exaggerated, and *Barton Fink* was good, but this fell short of that. They may have limited themselves in doing a genre take-off, sticking to the 1950's in a big city. There was a newspaper office with a fast-talking woman reporter who I fell for in no time. I read a couple of reviews which described her as being weak in the part, or didn't like her role, but I did - along with the rest of her, a slender woman with dark hair (Jennifer Jason Leigh). A few reviews: "An utterly soulless enterprise… A jeering, dreamlike comedy with nothing much on its mind except how neat the Coen brothers are and how stupid or contemptible everybody else is, including everyone in the audience… Has suicide, smoking… Made up of borrowed parts… Few

of the Coen Brothers' films spike the vein of pure pleasure as easily… The finest of all of them…."

11:30 p.m. We walked out of the theater. Both of us were so-so about it, noting the allusions to other films. She was not impressed with the woman reporter, and said it wasn't a big deal, her acting technique, or maybe didn't want to hear how much I liked her.

We drove to a bar for a bon voyage party - a friend of hers was going to Greece and Turkey for a few weeks. I met her once or twice a year ago, and she had an odd bunch of people with her who were drinking a lot. We hit it off. Late thirties, Jewish, from New York City, and she seems to know everyone in the local bars – we were in three that night. She works as a bartender, lives in North Beach, and wore a low-cut blouse with one of those push-up bras that display the breasts as if they're on a platter. A nice-looking woman with a strong political consciousness - the conversation veering from absurd exchanges to historical estrangement. There was some disdain for the revisionary treatment of the late Dick Nixon. Younger people may not know the history of the man, but the consensus was that someone better put a stake through the coffin.

The two women were lapsing into bawdy and sarcastic remarks, and someone said the marijuana is stronger now than when we were twenty, but the acid is weaker. The Actress went to the Fillmore recently and got so stoned that she could barely handle it.

By the third bar I had had a couple of Irish coffees and a beer (the others had martinis), and it was after one in the morning. I was talking with the Jewish woman about Istanbul, and how it is a letdown when I return from a trip. It seems that both of us have had enough of this town. She called a cab – knowing the driver – and all of a sudden I was leaving. I kissed the

Actress and floated home in the back seat, talking about the Tenderloin. Two weeks out of there and its hold on me is fading.

At home there was a message on the phone machine from Ming, saying it's twenty to eight and call her when I got home. I stayed up for a while on the typewriter, riffing off the letters in the word "PERSONAL."

> Pour an entity some rum and sound off on the news and all the losers.
> The prose of an emoting writer stabs the ordinary with a nervous analytic language.
> Pounding an electric radio the sleepy occupant knocked her antenna loose.
> The port elusive and ruined in a storm; the old neighbors are anonymous and lonely.
> The poet emulates a resonating sensuality and other nouns afforded by the literary.
> The perfumed expectations of Roberta on the sofa, an odd neurotic atmosphere of love.
> Personality an effect, a residue of the soul, an omnipresent nerve with ambiguous limits.
> The pussy in Europe is a reason for singing, an ontological necessity, amoral legs.

Sunday, May 1, 1994

Typing in the morning. There was a phone call from B., sharing her doubts about her girlfriend who called last night, sounding reconciliatory. B. thinks she wanted her to come to a bar where she was with another woman, and B. was losing sleep over this. We made plans for her to come over around 12:30 for the Cinco de Mayo celebration.[30] She said she would drop by a metaphysical institute on the way to my place.

2:00 p.m. She arrived and was in a hurry for us to go to Mission Street, like the fact of her being late had nothing to do with the situation, or the likelihood that it was over. I was resigned to missing it, and though I would have liked to go I had a good session on the guitar. We went out and took a bus, by which time she wondered if I was in a bad mood. Some of my replies were coming back with a negative spin, and yet I was calm. I was thinking of Ming – I

[30] It's a "showcase of Mexican ethnic identity" which is far more prevalent in the U.S. than in Mexico. Making a fuss in public over your reflection in the mirror is a time-honored custom in this country, and everyone does it. It's a near-hysterical reaction to the specter of anonymous assimilation in a country full of assembly lines.

don't mind spending time with her, but it eclipses any efforts of being with someone else, and leaves me in a platonic limbo.

When we got to Mission Street we found the event was over. B. had gone to a tarot card reading which took a long time, dealing with the situation with her girlfriend. We walked around. I was feeling fatalistic, and she took my arm. Near the Zuni Café we found a cactus shop, and then a vintage furniture store with $3000 mirrors (wrought iron), and a $4000 sofa (art deco – and a hundred times more than what I can afford).

We were walking back towards the Civic Center, it was windy and cool, when she noticed a hot tub and sauna place down the street and said a hot tub would feel good, what with her tension and back aches. I didn't say no, so we went in and before I knew it we were getting a room. B. is one of the more discreet women I know. She was in a hot tub a while back with a woman friend and they wore conservative swim suits. Of the four women who helped me move, she's the only one I've never seen naked. Now she was ready to throw all caution (or clothing) to the wind, though worried that her pony tail might get wet.

She arrived in the room a few minutes after me. I was sitting on the redwood hot tub with a leg in the water, no clothes on, and smoking a hand-rolled cigarette. My admiration for her went through a transformation, knowing how circumspect she is, and yet she didn't hesitate to take her clothes off (like she does every day) and walk over to the tub. The last thing I expected, being a little moody that day, was that we would have a pleasant hour and a half in a hot tub and sauna room. I've seen her in a swimsuit at the beach, but this was different. The refinement of her figure was apparent, with a long flat stomach and a dark bush. She is a little more slender above the waist, and her breasts are perfect. There was no attempt to hide herself, whether standing waist deep in the water, or lying on the side of the tub with one knee up. When we were

in the sauna I was on the upper bench and she was lying on the lower bench with one foot rocking my leg, and not concerned about keeping her knees together.

In the hot tub she suggested giving each other back rubs. That led to a close encounter with her sitting on the edge of the tub with her legs in the water. I stood there, leaning in between her legs, while she rubbed my shoulders and I rubbed her feet. Eventually it was reversed, and she said my hands were "healing." I've had a lot of practice, having known some tense women.

The second time we were in the sauna she lay on a towel and I straddled her, sitting on her behind and then her legs. She didn't mind my genitals on her skin, and we were slippery from the sweat. She liked having her bottom gently mauled. In other words, it was a lovely unforeseen experience. It was showing in her eyes which were glowing, and she was more relaxed than I've seen her in a while, almost girlish. I sensed the softness of a woman who is capable of being seduced, or would allow it to happen, which I find endearing.

There were moments when the situation was a little ambiguous (if not amphibious), like she would have consented if I made some moves, but I was careful. I didn't want to disturb an atmosphere that was so calm. It's a toss-up whether a woman likes it or is put off when a man is headed in a sexual direction. Most of the time it's better to hold off on the overtures. She may be tired of those, but it isn't hard to clear the air. Laying her hand on someone's cock is subtle, requires no effort, and it sends a message.[31] Meanwhile, the phallus was behaving itself, more or less. It was getting hard when we were at the front desk reserving the room (I suffer from premature erections), and then relaxing when we were in the room. Now and then it was semi-

[31] Not necessarily. A few years ago I was in a hot tub with a lesbian from Nicaragua. She was in her early twenties with a luscious figure and I was being polite – assuming she preferred women. We were sitting cross-legged in the sauna and she reached over and lifted my cock to the side, saying it might get squished by my leg. That was nice of her – we were friends – but it didn't lead to anything, even when I had a hard-on in the hot tub, or weighed her breasts with my hands (she wondered if they were too low).

erect and then subsiding underwater, like it couldn't decide if it should rise to the occasion or not.

To reiterate, she is thirty-three, from an old conservative family in New York with an historic house full of antiques. She went to private schools and was well off, has a good heart, and an intellectual curiosity which might amount to something if she got off the phone and found the time to read – there are magazines and papers piled up in her crowded little apartment. For what it's worth, a Libra who is one of the more socially restless women I know. Adding to her character, with paradoxes bordering on the paranormal, she has a shy erotic manner, and the possibility of a love affair is just below the surface as it hardly is with Ming. And yet as a companion I am more in tune with the latter, with whom I can spend twenty-four hours at a stretch, no problem, talking for hours. I'm not sure that would be the case with B., and this is mystifying.

Would an astrological metaphor be useful here? It is suggesting some of the angles, how an Aries is connecting with a Libra or a Scorpio. It's odd that I am thinking in these terms, or that I'm getting sweaty with a woman who is having an affair with a woman – though they're not all that compatible. We took another cold shower. She told me how much she liked the massage, and wants to do this again. I was surprised at how familiar she was in the hot tub, finding some reason to be touching me all the time, holding my foot or leg (close, but no cigar). We dried off and put our clothes on. She stood there in a white lace bra while fastening the side of her black slacks.

When we left the place the wind hit us with such a force it was disorienting, or maybe it corresponded to reality. We took a bus, with her slipping back into a quandary. She was

supposed to call her girlfriend and resume the negotiations, but wanted my advice. Just thinking about it made her stomach hurt. She is not used to dealing with women and assumes I am, or that I know something from experience. I told her what she's going through is not uncommon for a lot of men. They have been with women who are artificial and controlling, with mood swings that would take your breath away. They feel like they are being tested, and have to jump through hoops to show their usefulness or manageability.

The girlfriend likes a good argument once in a while. It stirs up the atmosphere, and puts a little drama in her life. B. hates to fight, which leaves her at a disadvantage with a sharp-tongued vixen.[32] She was torn between going back to my place or her place, and finally opted for hers since she was so relaxed it made her sleepy. She kissed me and got off the bus.

I rode home in a daze, not having had much to eat. I got home around six and found a couple of messages. One of them was from Ming, saying she went shopping for headphones and a shower curtain. The phone rang, but I ignored it. I didn't want to talk to her. Later the phone rang, by which time I was resigned to talking to anyone. It was the Czech woman, saying she would drop by after work.

I nearly fell asleep, and then she arrived. Both of us were tired, with her lying next to me on the bed. She brought some apple turnovers and *The Holotropic Mind*, and said she wouldn't mind a hot tub. We lay there for a while, half asleep, and then the phone rang. It was Ming. We had one of the more perfunctory conversations we've had in a long time, mainly from my putting so little into it. Both of us were in a mood of "Don't complain and don't explain." She was aware that something was wrong. I shut off the current, but she tried to talk like nothing was amiss, or

[32] I was going out with a college woman a few years ago who volunteered at the Lesbian Abuse Hotline. The rates of domestic abuse are similar to those of straight couples. There was a study of straight couples which showed that half of all domestic fights and arguments are started by the woman (a conservative estimate in my opinion).

to show it was of no concern. She said her evening last night was "uneventful," and would have come over if I was here. She didn't know she was late, but that's how it goes. The guy would have dropped her off on his motorcycle. It's the only friend of hers who bothers me. I think he ended up spending the night.[33] After twenty minutes we got off the phone.

A few minutes later the phone rang, and it was B. The Czech woman was on the bed, reading something. B. hadn't slept (her phone kept ringing). There was a warmer tone in her voice than I usually hear. You would almost think our interlude in the hot tub meant that we were lovers. She is still upset with her girlfriend, and had half a mind to come here and avoid her, so we talked about it for a while.

8:30 p.m. I walked the Czech woman to the bus. It was a nice night with no wind, and the western sky was clear. She was commiserating with my being a friend and/or consultant for a few women. If you open the lines of communication it is sometimes all a woman wants. Either it's a special situation and she doesn't want to mess it up with her body, or she prefers to operate her sex life from a more guarded position, whatever lip service she might give to wanting men who can communicate.

I walked home thinking how observant she is, having recognized my mood, as well as a certain bottle of whiskey in the corner store. I like how she pronounces "clitoris" with a Slavic accent.

[33] It never bothered me when she was sleeping with her boyfriend, but here is someone who she keeps at arm's length and it still bothers me. Something about his background puts me off. He was a businessman in New Jersey with a drinking problem and some shady friends – the kind who show up at his door one night and ask for help in disposing a body. It made him leave New Jersey for the West Coast where he bought a surfboard and let his hair grow long.

Typing until one in the morning. I was going to say that things were feeling pivotal again, but that is business as usual on a spinning planet.[34] It's been a curious turn of events where I'm emerging from the weekend feeling distant from one woman and closer to another. B. is like a soft-hearted planet surrounded by an asteroid belt of dizzy and confusing distractions and concerns. If one is stuck in that orbit it is not so edifying, but if you get through to her there is an oasis of "love minus zero." I knew she had it in her, having felt warm currents coming in my direction, but we were preoccupied with other people. She had the feeling I was under the influence of another woman. On the bus I said that I was feeling distant from Ming, which may have been encouraging.

Monday, May 2, 1994

NOTES

> The inconsistencies of waning competence - a good description of the Attorney.
>
> Holding patterns rule the world.
>
> If diversity is the spice of life, I'd rather have a spicy wife and find diversity in the variations which occur in a realm of thought, if not a fine-tuned living arrangement.
>
> An upcoming lecture in this town by Gloria Steinem, "At Sixty." The chronological accomplishment is added to her resume, along with the fact of being human. The lecture/interview is called, "Moving Beyond Words." I suppose she will express herself with body language, an interpretative dance.
>
> When I was with the Czech woman in a Mexican café there was a table full of young women. It was a fountain of female hysteria, given the shrill outbursts and the horse laughs, telling jokes about chlamydia and lesbians and other things which had to be whispered. When we left the Czech woman was scornful, expressing some doubts about people in this country. She thinks they lack substance if they're self-invented (or, conversely, if they're social constructs with no manners). You can call yourself whatever you want, from a woman who runs with wolves to one who walks the dog. If there is not

[34] An old friend, the poet Jack Hirschman, calls it the "endless threshold" (the title of his book of poems which came out in 1992).

more to it, it's like buying a blouse with the words SUPERIOR BEING on the front (in rhinestones).[35] She is amazed at how much in this culture is feigned, if not profane.

Earlier that evening, waiting for her at the coffee shop, I went out in the alley. Within a few seconds a black woman walked up and was already talking. No black person talks to me on the street unless it is a hustle, and this was no exception. She was either disturbed or a fine actress, and maybe I was tired, but I stood there and listened while she told me her tale of woe. I noticed that she wore nice clothes and had some defiant tears, saying "Fuck black people." She wasn't impressed with how infrequently they come to each other's aid, and walked away with most of my change.

Later that night, at the corner store near my place, I was waiting for the Czech woman to buy a bottle of whisky and a black man walked up, telling me his story. He lost $15 somewhere, like we're both supposed to commiserate in this unfortunate twist of fate. He was a large man with a scar on his forehead.

Reading the paper. There will always be news of the old neighborhood, keeping me informed and bringing back memories. I'm never far from the Tenderloin. MAN KILLED IN TRAFFIC AFTER BEING SLASHED. It was on Geary and Hyde, two blocks from where I used to live, and a corner I walked by every day. 8:30 on a Friday night, a drug dispute, one guy was stabbed. He ran into the street and was hit by a car. Never a dull moment when someone has a knife.

An article concerning the CIA agent who got life in prison, no parole, for "aiding the KGB." "He gave the KGB the names of Soviet officials cooperating with American intelligence – many of whom were later executed." That would be the worst part of it I think. He "dismissed the idea that his actions caused any significant harm to his country… 'There is no rational need' for most CIA operations." "I had come to believe that the espionage business as carried out by the CIA and a few other American agencies was and is a self-serving sham… the information our vast intelligence network acquires at considerable human and ethical cost is generally insignificant or irrelevant to our policy-makers' needs."

Give this man a book contract. Though he is forbidden to profit from it, he could turn into a twisted hero if he's blowing the cover and excuses for the CIA. It is closer to the counter-productive than to counter-intelligence, and it's known for missing the facts and making things worse, dragging the reputation of the U.S. through the mud and blood. They couldn't even find one of their own, considering how long he got away with it.

---

[35] Many years later I was at the airport and a young woman walked by with THE FUTURE IS FEMALE in bold letters on her T-shirt. I was mystified by what, the bad science? Propaganda which is so self-serving it's a form of public masturbation? I wanted to ask her if I have no future, and how long do I have. It seemed like another version of the pathetic fallacy, where human emotions are attributed to objects or the weather. It's even worse than pretending God is a man (talk about heretical reductionism). I had a girlfriend who swore that God was not a woman, because no woman would come up with menstrual cramps. The gender question is resolved if there's no God.

> Curious how his wife, who was "aiding, advising and encouraging her husband's activities," and benefiting from the ill-gotten gains, was given a much smaller sentence (about five years). She could be out in two or three. If someone is the driver for a hold-up in which someone dies, they are an accessory to murder and get a stiff sentence. If the spy and his wife had gotten a divorce, half of everything would go to her. I keep running across this discrepancy, where the woman is automatically entitled to half of the money, whether or not she had anything to do with earning it, but when it comes to a criminal endeavor she is not an equal who deserves a similar sentence. It was even said that Ames' wife "has experienced emotional problems since her jailing." Like what, no else does? And yet she may have driven him to it, wanting more money or a bigger house. Meanwhile, he's cooperating with the authorities "in exchange for a lighter sentence for his wife."

I was typing when there was a phone call from B. - more stuff about the other woman, giving a blow-by-blow account. She wonders if this is what it's like for men who're with a woman, and doesn't think she could stand it (if she were a man). I said she hasn't been in a full-blown love affair before, and kept things in a lighter vein when she was going out with men, so maybe she isn't used to the psychological vicissitudes of love.[36]

I don't know why she tells me everything, but there is no one else to talk to. Most of her friends are straight, and she doesn't want to come out of the closet. One thing she doesn't understand is how some people are jaded when it comes to sex. Maybe their lives are dull, so their main diversion is some variation in the bedroom, but she and the other woman are not on the same page. One of them writes a love poem, while the other rents a video with pierced genitals in it.

I went to work, with not much going on (and the Attorney bounced a check). I later walked home through North Beach.

[36] On the other hand, she is well-versed in the psychological vicissitudes of having a sister.

Tired, not enough sleep for the last two nights. One night a week I want to get a lot of sleep with no coffee, alcohol, or cigarettes. When you're young your health is handed to you on a metabolic platter, but later it isn't. I went to sleep early.

Tuesday, May 3, 1994

I'm feeling more settled and at home near the water, a few blocks from Alcatraz. Every day another transparent layer of arrival has settled into place. It is a slow process where your molecules are being reconstituted from one neighborhood to another. The old one is being dismantled and this one is taking its place. Oddly enough, I seem to be getting more attention from women.

After typing for hours I called Michael, the ex-fiance of the Actress. We're old friends now, but with conflicting schedules and he lives out of town. He has a background of poetic writing, and a foreground of a tennis court (we made plans for the latter). He works long hours as the head chef for a men's club with gourmet food and topless women writhing on a pole. Waiter, there's a breast in my soup. It's on the border of North Beach and the financial district, and he said there was a constant turnover of the girls. He has hardly any cooking utensils or silverware at home, and said he was pulled over on his motorcycle: no license, three speeding tickets (a $300 fine).

12:30 p.m. B. called, responding to my message, and was more than willing to meet on the courts on Russian Hill with vultures circling overhead. She said she spent the night with her girlfriend and things ended on a "nice note." However, I would hear what sort of mixed messages she was getting, even when lying in bed. Ilsa said it isn't the kind of relationship she wants, which left B. feeling hurt.

I walked a couple of blocks and up the steps of Russian Hill. It corresponds to climbing a Mayan pyramid[37] and is a workout in itself. I found the courts were locked and the nets removed, a net loss for the afternoon. There was a sign about unsafe conditions, and I talked to someone in a Water Department truck. There is a reservoir beneath the courts and it needs to be repaired. The courts will be out of commission for a long time.

B. showed up late (having been on the phone, her social instrument). We walked down the hill with her holding my arm as she often does. It was half a mile to some windblown courts where we had a long workout. She likes to stay around the baseline, having long rallies with that strong forehand of hers. I tend to be all over the place – including the net – and for once she wasn't talking through the whole workout. Something else was making its presence felt, like how we are in sync. I don't know if knocking a little ball back and forth would constitute a dialogue, but it felt like we were striking a balance.

Nearly one and a half hours on the court. I think that swimming has improved my tennis, along with the circulation in my brain. We walked back to my place and had lunch. She is easily distracted, and was picking up this or that object or painting for a close inspection. There was more conversation about the situation with her girlfriend. She doesn't know if it's dead in the water or what, but knows they're not hitting on all cylinders. She can't stand this business of constantly "analyzing our relationship." It sounds like the woman has gotten it from books, using the technical jargon. Maybe they should write out their "goals", and by comparing those will ascertain if they're in love or not.

I wasn't in the mood to go to work, and finally didn't. I took a shower, and she did the same, walking out with a towel around her. She put on a blouse and a short skirt and sat on the

[37] A few years later I went to Chichen Itza in Mexico and climbed the pyramid (91 steps, 98 feet high). On later trips there were the pyramids of Altun Ha (Belize) and Tikal (Guatemala). Eventually, I made it to Egypt and sat at the foot of the Pyramid of Giza. It is 450 feet high, and no climbing is allowed.

bed, liking how firm it was. Another thing that wasn't working with the girlfriend, she has a water bed which gives B. a sore back. When she referred to her back pain I brought out the almond-scented massage oil. She took off her blouse and lay on her stomach, wearing briefs which she lowered off her butt, having found out that having her rear end massaged was pleasant. She lay there, more or less nude, and I sat on her wearing pants and an open shirt. The sunlight of the late afternoon was coming through the bamboo blinds and slanting across the bed. Drops of almond oil were landing on her back and I rubbed it in. The situation seemed to agree with her.

B. talked about our mutual friend who lives in Marin, a part-time actress (Phoebe) in her late thirties whose problematic affair with an actor is slowly tearing her apart. It is on and off again with constant arguments. What mystified B. is that she would let herself become strung out, losing sleep and not eating. B. wondered if Phoebe was doing it on purpose, like it was the role of a dramatic suffering heroine, the kind she doesn't get onstage.[38] B. thought it was a form of self-mortification.[39]

Eventually she rolled over. I said I wouldn't make a point of massaging her breasts, but that was hard to avoid if I was doing her chest muscles, and she said, "That's fine." She put a pillow over her head (maybe the sun was in her eyes). I gave her the full treatment from her neck to her feet, including a maneuver where I lifted her from the back of her neck with her head falling back. She said it felt good. I was still impressed by her figure, with firm muscles and the bare hint of her ribs (losing weight). I said she has good bones, and she said no one ever told her

[38] Phoebe told me she would get typecast as a dumb blonde or a prostitute (though not very sexual in real life). She had a small part on an episode of *Miami Vice* as someone's girlfriend.

[39] While B. has no patience with the victimology that Phoebe indulges in from time to time, she has a Sapphic affection for her. While it's unrequited, and barely acknowledged, Phoebe thinks that being a lesbian would help her career. It would be another role, with trendy social networks for a pretend lesbian. However, what if she lost track of what is real and what is pretended? What if being a lesbian became more real to her, and she was only pretending to be an actress?

that before. This is the last woman I thought would be willing to take her clothes off and be rubbed all over with oil. Having decided it was therapeutic she was calm, with no resistance. At some point she wanted me to bear down on her lower stomach, pushing hard on the edge of her pubic hair and moving upwards with the heel of my hand - like I was rearranging her inner organs.

Eventually I got off her and rolled a cigarette. She sat up with her bosom taking on another form. I loaned her a pair of dark green corduroys with a belt which she had to pull to the last notch. She is 5' 9" with a thin waist. When she stood up from the bed and had a shirt on, she said she is heavier than I think. I figured I could lift her up, and did, using an embrace which nearly led to something else.

7:30 p.m. We went out. A friend of hers had passes to a sneak preview, *When a Man Loves a Woman*. I wasn't interested, but she said "It's free," like that makes a difference. I said I'm not that easy. She said I should go to the theater, check out the film, and if I'm bored I could leave. We met her friend Jackie in front of the theater, a woman from New York who was short with dark hair and thick glasses. I met her at the journalism awards a while back, a quick sarcastic woman, and we seemed to hit it off. We ended up in the second row (the place was packed), and staring up at the screen. Jackie said she had an ex-boyfriend in the audience. I suggested she walk on stage to get his attention. She said she would strip and show him what he's missing.

B. had bought some popcorn and was talking with Jackie about the film, saying it's about a woman with a lot of problems, and a man who stays with her no matter what. "So it's a fantasy," I said. Jackie laughed and said to B., "I like him."

Two hours later it was over. The film was set in the city we live in. A man meets a woman who is spontaneous, fun-loving, and a bit on the wild side. She has a kid from a previous marriage, and they have another. He's an airline pilot, which is to say a steady person with a firm grip on life. The blonde has a firm grip on a vodka bottle, though he doesn't know it yet. Things start to fall apart after they're married, culminating when she gets home (he isn't there) and can barely stand up. She downs some aspirin with a bottle in one hand, hits her little girl, gets in the shower, is sick to her stomach, and crashes through the shower door. Her daughter walks in and sees her passed out on the floor. "Mom?"

The woman goes through detox and meetings and it seems realistic, where the hard part of being an alcoholic is after you quit. She was using it to float her personality and now her personality is on the rocks, a dry echo of her former self. She's so dry it's like sandpaper, and she has to reconstruct herself as a sober woman. Having a healthy husband around becomes unbearable. It puts her own shaky situation in further contrast, and she says when he looks at her with longing it makes her skin crawl (partly because the woman he fell in love with was an illusion). He finally gets the message. His feelings are rejected, and he is ejected from the nest. It's like she wanted him to be hurt and confused like her. He attends group therapy sessions for people who're married to alcoholics, and becomes a little unhinged. That can happen when you love a woman who is in a love-hate relationship with herself and vodka, and it crowds you out.

Not surprisingly, her problems are more significant than the fact of him being an airline pilot. That is secondary. Only towards the end do you see him in a cockpit, but what is flying a 747 through a rainstorm compared to flying herself? The point is brought home when he's with a Chinese babysitter and has a flight to catch, but she can't stay and is in the doorway getting

angry. “You’re not suggesting my life is less important than yours….” No of course not, you’re a babysitter, he’s only an airline pilot. He had to beg her to watch the girls.

The screenplay was written by men. He loses his temper once or twice, but there are scenes where the woman is dancing circles around him, emotionally and otherwise. He’s just there, solid with a half-smile. Even worse is the drippy stuff between him and the little girls. It is one of those films where in lieu of anything else going on – like dialogue or a plot - they compensate with close-ups, and those were hard to take from the second row. I could almost feel the tears dripping on us.

B. was not impressed, and thought the alcoholic life of the woman should have been developed further, with scenes of her stumbling around drunk at home. She didn’t think Meg Ryan was very good in the role, and looked too young (at twenty-nine). I thought she was okay, but you get tired of a character who is tired of herself towards the end - being erratic, self-absorbed, and fluctuating all over the place. After detox she is pious with her detox buddies, with whom she has more in common than with her husband. All the man can do is wait. A man could wait for months or years for a woman to come back to him, but she might decide a man who waits for months or years is not her type.

An airline pilot with his feet on the ground. I thought there was a subtext here, him being a Latino (Andy Garcia), and her a white woman with an overbearing mother. There were scenes with the latter which reminded me of how an audience can be easily amused. I don’t know how she could afford that beautiful two-story house in the upper Haight - I think she was a school counselor. Or was he footing the bills, which didn’t prevent him from being kicked out? The

subtext had to do with a Latino vs. non-Hispanic white, the substance of the former as compared to the flighty impatience of the latter.[40]

I went with B. to an old bar, wood-lined with a fireplace. We sat by the fire with a glass of wine and talked. If the film was made in the 1930's would it have more snappy dialogue and well-defined scenes, considering old films were often adapted from the theater? Now they conform to the inflated presence of a big screen.

She brought up the other woman, with B. suspecting she has one foot out of the affair. I walked her to the cable car. A kiss goodnight, and walked home.

Wednesday, May 4, 1994

Typing in the morning. There was a phone call from Ming, who sensed we're at a low ebb and the tide is out, at least on my end, but she refused to believe it. She suggested a workout at the pool. I said okay - I was planning to go anyway - but later had second thoughts. If I want to get her out of my system, and she just wants someone there to fill the void, why am I meeting her at six?

I went to work in the afternoon. There was a lot to do, including a last-minute Status/Settlement Conference Statement.

6:00 p.m. I walked to the pool and sat in the lobby. She walked in a minute later, having changed into a sweatshirt and tights with her black hair down, looking a little tired. I got her a glass of water, feeling polite and semi-formal. The current between us had been shut off and it

[40] Those circumstances were reversed with the Czech woman when she had a Mexican boyfriend. He was a moody alcoholic and a neo-poet, while she is an Eastern European with a coldblooded logic. When she left him the second time, he killed himself in his mother's home (which is to say he made a mess and let her clean it up).

was a little awkward. An idle conversation going nowhere, with occasional stares or glances which communicated something between the lines, like a refusal to succumb to each other.

We finally went downstairs to our separate locker rooms, and met in the weight room where we worked out for a while. I left her with the dead weights and headed for the pool and swam a mile. I felt like a hydrofoil towards the end.

I met her in the lobby with both of us feeling better, the edifying side-effects of a workout. She said she was out of shape and "panting" when she went up the stairs, constantly concerned about getting heavier. She recently confessed to having a non-feminist attitude when it comes to worrying about her figure. At the table she peeled a tangerine and gave me some. When we got up she wanted to leave the peels on the table. I said we shouldn't and she said, "Since when are you so conscientious?"

We walked a block on dark wet streets with a foggy drizzle. She had suggested having dinner, then changed her mind a couple of times about where. She didn't want to cook and it would get too late if I did. Finally, she suggested a 1950's retro diner, and managed to not only change her mind again, but had the direction wrong, insisting it was further up the street. I said it's a couple of blocks down Mason, which it was, oddly enough. We ended up in a red vinyl booth with everything shiny and metallic. I said it's how I feel after a swim.

She had developed another roll of film from her Thailand trip, and showed the pictures with a narrative of who's who and where, including a "trek" with a few others. They visited a village in the backwoods of northern Thailand, riding elephants and long bamboo rafts in a river. There was a wipeout in the rapids, she got drunk with the local people one night, and stoned another. No opium. There was a shot of palm trees and the ocean near her hut on the island of

Koh Samui, where she spent a week alone and got tired of being taken for a prostitute by white guys who were used to that sort of thing.

A couple of shots of her looking tanned with a big smile. I said she looked happy, and she agreed, like it was another lifetime. It occurred to me how rare that look is these days, though I saw it when we were in La Jolla last year. In both cases, she was on vacation in a warm setting, and a man was waiting for her when she got home.

That reminds me, a recent conversation about a party a few years ago. She was twenty-one and drinking and smoking pot. She ended up in the bathroom with a guy, and later said she let it happen because he was from out of town and she wouldn't see him again, while knowing that someone who carried the torch for her for a long time, an old friend (same age), was on the other side of the door and going crazy because he knew what was going on inside. The elements were converging in that moment when she had a fleeting sex act on one side of the door, and loyal love on the other. It required two different men for that. It's hard to locate all of that in one man.

We didn't have a lot of personal discussion, though we might have if we made a longer night of it. She was talking about other people with occasional parallels to what we're going through. There were passing innuendos with a cutting edge. The woman she lives with, Leonora, has a daughter in her early thirties who had an affair. It went on for a few months. The daughter wasn't satisfied with the affair, but was depressed when the man quit. She said he "wasn't able" to give her what she wanted. I took issue with that. What if he didn't want to? That has a different connotation, like saying someone isn't able to walk a mile, or maybe they don't want to walk a mile. I wouldn't be surprised, having met this woman in that flower-crowded flat and found her bending things into a pessimistic angle which would slide into the bitter or the

maudlin. Ming won't admit that people often have irreconcilable differences, and a man isn't automatically "weak" if he bails out. The assumption is that every woman is a standard-issue human being with an easy-going ethical presence, and anyone who leaves her is a coward or out of his mind. The ex-boyfriend walked out on Ming a couple of months ago, and she took it hard.[41] There were condescending comments about him. He interfered with her plans, and took away an energy source (himself), along with a persona mirror which helped her stay in focus.

I was gravitating to a lighter mood. The last few days of distancing myself had opened my eyes and mind to other possibilities. There are other women, and what have I been doing getting so wrapped up with this one? I had the feeling we had retired to our separate corners, being twenty-four and forty-two (and good luck bridging that).

I walked her to the main drag. It looked like obsidian with intense lights, and we were panhandled by black men. We waited for the bus. She was vague about which one, and tired from the workout. We finally took one to Van Ness, walked a few blocks, and parted on the corner. On the way home I was thinking I should take into account what she's going through, from the boredom of an eight-hour job to not getting laid. It's not surprising if she is becoming hard inside and doesn't want to be hurt. She can't afford to have a weakness, which is everything from falling in love to saying you're sorry.

When I got home I walked into the kitchen, turned on the light, and went over to the sink. I glanced out the window and saw a bare-breasted woman in her kitchen, maybe twenty feet away. She seemed to be in her late thirties with her hair a bit disheveled, and wearing nothing from the waist up. It was a warm night, and a little humid following the rain. I turned the light out for a few minutes and stood there watching as she moved around in her kitchen. It was a mild

[41] They are in their early twenties, which is known as "the carnivorous age."

form of voyeurism, considering that she was so obvious about it. There's a downside though, your life is put on hold while you watch someone else. Maybe that is one of the attractions, not to look because they are alluring, but to get your mind off your problems.

Thursday, May 5, 1994

Typing in the morning. I have to wonder if it's a typographic crutch, or a fifth wheel on the vehicle of my existence. I'm not sure if it is improving my sense of touch, but I have to do it, like an empty momentum or a rearview mirror on receding events. I'm having mental doubts, but physically things are on the upswing. One glass of wine in three days. Swimming, two-mile walks, and a woman whose existence has been gracing my life. You wonder if the territory you are mining, or surveying, as a writer is too close to home. It's not bad if you write about what you know, especially when you find out there is more to the known than you thought. Also, it is not unchallenging to delve into the psychologies of women.

I thought of a novelist in his thirties who lives in Northern California, William T. Vollmann, who I give more respect to than reading time. He reported on the rebels in Afghanistan a few years ago, and recently was in Bosnia. He was nearly blown up as a passenger in a jeep which drove over a landmine (they were in restricted territory), and the driver was killed. He had minor injuries. I admire someone who would go to those extremes to ascertain the facts.[42]

That reminds me, Allen Ginsberg got himself kicked out of Cuba some years ago, and made a public incident of it. I wondered why I've gone so far in the other direction, where

[42] Many years later he gave a reading at City Lights and I went to hear him. He had a new book, *The Lucky Star: A Novel*, about Jesus returning as a female whore in the Tenderloin (a part of town that he's obsessed with, and the seamier the better). An older man in drag accused him of not attending the funeral of his driver, which he admitted. It turns out Vollmann is into cross-dressing, but that's another story (*The Book of Dolores*), wandering through a warehouse with some whiskey and a flashlight late at night.

obscurity becomes a hideout. I came of age when many were going public, from protest signs to amplified stages. It wasn't like I didn't like it, but I stayed in the shadows. It may have something to do with how I was brought up (to take the high road with a low profile). Or maybe I'm subverting the dominant paradigm when people are subjected to a video exposure and a sense of privacy is burned away. In light of such a glaring light I've gone in the direction of the mental-private, like I heard the call of the 19th century.

Then there's Harold Brodkey (*The Runaway Soul*) with a closely examined personal approach. There was a review in *Time* magazine of his latest book, *Profane Friendship*, where the reviewer admitted his disinterest in "erotica" of the man-to-man kind. He also said there was nothing much going on in the book. "Nothing is operating." He doesn't have the "software to induce the intended physiological response to the author's erotic obsessions and these are the essence of the book." I don't know, by software does he mean the orientation of his genitals? I would think the essence of a book is the language itself and how it's put together. You don't have to be a homosexual to get something from the writing, and Brodkey is not exactly chopped liver. He's known for putting words and sentences together in an original vein.

Went to work in the afternoon. There were a couple of complaints for personal injuries (car collisions), and a rebuttal from opposing counsel (our client versus the U.S. postal service). It's a flimsy harassment case, and the logic of his argument was a tour de force. It is the sort of thing I like about the law, but most of the time it's found in pleadings from the other side. He blew her dubious hot air victim case out the window.

7:00 p.m. I took a bus to the sound-room flat, and sat in the kitchen with the Phantom on his day off. He was in his usual condition of being broke and not all there in terms of sobriety. At

some point we were talking about women, but not in the most serious vein. He is preoccupied with Chinese women, but it usually isn't happening. I said they have vinegar in their blood. That may or may not be true, but might explain a few things about some women I have known. I wanted him to see things in a realistic light, especially since he is alone. He said there is "a white girl" who is interested, but he isn't.

I related a recent episode where I was in a hot tub with a woman and giving her a massage. It made me wonder if I was being too careful when it comes to sexual overtures. He said, "Did you poke her?" I said, "No." He looked at me like I was out of my mind, and went through the motions of gently slapping me. He wanted to bring me to my senses, and said we're even. He is haunted by episodes in the past when he blew an opportunity, and said his problem is more on the conversational level. If he ever found himself with a naked woman who wanted a back rub he would not hold back. I said she is a friend, and is having an affair with a woman. He said you can get another friend, and the worst thing that could happen is if she says no.

We went downstairs through the garage with an array of motorcycles in a state of disrepair. The sound-room is in back, and my head almost touches the ceiling of a black-walled room. I was hooked up to the Les Paul, and ended up recording a long instrumental with him providing an erratic drum beat. I went back and overdubbed another guitar, and later added a walking bass. This went on for two or three hours, with the Phantom operating as a drunk technician who was messing with the dials and switches. He's more about structure, while I'm spontaneous to a fault. There were times when I was cutting loose, picking up signals with a sleight of hand, but it didn't get recorded because the engineer was too obtuse.

Sitting in the garage and taking a cigarette break with half a beer. It would seem that sound effects are all the intoxication I need. My timing would be compromised by other

substances. There was a slogan spray-painted on the wall: KILL BOB DYLAN. He said it wasn't him, he likes Dylan, and plays his songs. It was one of the mechanics, maybe the thrasher who lives downstairs and works on motorcycles. He related an episode where a friend of his punched Dylan recently. The latter was wheeling a paraplegic friend of his around, and the two of them were arguing. The Phantom's friend hit Dylan, and was jumped and pounded by his bodyguards. Dylan apologized.

10:30 p.m. I left before he could put on any more Nirvana. I don't want to hear "Dumb" again.

Friday, May 6, 1994

12:30 p.m. I walked the last few blocks to work in the rain, and met V. We walked to the Hunan place. I held her umbrella over us as we were rubbing shoulders, or would have been if she wasn't a foot shorter. We talked about Miss Universe, and a woman having a sex change operation to become a man. She was curious about the latter, though unclear about some things. She thought if a woman had injections it would produce sperm. The person having the operation is a police woman (V. read about it in the paper). It's a long and complicated process, taking male hormones to reduce her breasts and grow hair, becoming more masculine. As for the Miss Universe contest, she said I should watch it. It's in the Philippines, and I think she takes it seriously.

There was a lot to do in the afternoon, including a Last Will and Testament for a woman who would "give and bequeath" her possessions to those who would survive her, while emphasizing the fact that you can't take it with you. The dull thud of possessions when compared to a spirit on its way out.

6:30 p.m. After work I walked to North Beach and dropped into the Inner Dimensions shop. It has a good collection of rocks and fossils and minerals, like clumps of amethyst. I had a prolonged conversation with the woman who works there, with no one else around. She was attentive and somewhat knowledgeable about rocks and minerals. She brought me a heavy crystal, an octahedron about four inches across, for $40. I said I could put it on my desk next to the typewriter. She said it was known for facilitating "objectivity" and the mental process.

She told me that minerals have spiritual qualities which she is sensitive to, like electro-magnetic fields. I said I was looking for something for my brother. There was a necklace made of small stones, including "ghost light" and amber. She wore a long flowing outfit, an idiosyncratic woman with a blooming flower in her hair and a long braid. The hair in front was dyed turquoise, along with her eyebrows (Anana's not anonymous).

I walked home, rested for a few minutes, then went to a house-warming party. It was down the hall, and put on by a couple who lived here for a long time, but were burned out last year. Their place was above the apartment where the fire started and they lost everything. We're on the top floor, and the two units in back were open to the stars by the time the fire was out. They recently moved back in. I was dreading it a little, thinking it would be a stiff gathering of tenants. There was some of that at first, but they had invited a horde of friends and acquaintances, and people kept arriving. Before long the party was raging. It didn't hurt that there was so much wine, and a refrigerator full of beer. The manager walked around with a pitcher of Manhattans, and hors d'oeuvres were laid out on a table. I should have eaten something before commencing with hours of wine and conversation in a noisy crowded place.

I talked with a couple who used to live across the hall from me, and moved out two weeks before the fire. She teaches English to kids and he's a photographer with long hair, in

keeping with a general atmosphere of people who are gainfully employed, but not adverse to taking acid. The woman took seven months off a while back and traveled around the world with a couple of friends. Mentally very precise, and for a while she was sitting with some guy and practicing their written Chinese characters. I was intrigued, and she said, "Do you know any Chinese characters?" I said, "Just one, but she isn't here tonight."

I spoke with the man as people were loosening up and the drinks were flowing. There was not much music, oddly enough, even with recording equipment and microphones in the room. The guy who lives here has a radio show on KUSF (satire), working with a group of people who do the writing and the voices.[43] He said they've had some problems with censorship. I think he and his wife do computer graphics for a living. I talked with a woman involved with the radio group – in her late twenties with white hair in thin long braids and a tambourine. There were a couple of excursions to the roof (one floor up), and it was raining.

The photographer and ex-neighbor said they were a little confused living across the hall from me in 1991. They couldn't tell what woman I was with, there being a steady stream of women coming and going. It occurred to me how isolated and erratic, if not downwardly mobile, I've become, especially compared to this gathering of people. Some relatively middle-class stabilities were out in force - it only requires a steady income and a significant other.

---

[43] 90.3 FM – one of the best college stations in the country. It had 24-hour programming by 1981, and "soon garnered attention by playing new underground music: it was one of the first radio stations to play punk rock. Many now-famous acts also first gained exposure on KUSF, most notably The B-52's and Metallica." There was a heavy metal show at 2 a.m. on Saturday nights which provided some adrenaline for whatever you were doing. I listened to Bebop and Beyond with Miles Mellough, and met him at the Paradise Lounge one night. My Iranian friend, Farinaz Agharabi, had a classical guitar program, and invited me to the studio to read my poems. A Chinese program would come on at 6 p.m. In 2011 a show was interrupted and everyone was told to leave. The station had been sold for $4,000,000 to a classical music conglomerate run by a woman. It had functioned as a community service to such an extent that the SF Board of Supervisors voted 8 to 3 to oppose the sale (to no effect). I was later talking on the air with a Latina comedian/actress, Edna Mira Raia, who worked with KUSF-in-exile in a warehouse.

1:30 a.m. I left and made it home alright, having to walk down the hall. I brought a glass of wine with me which I didn't touch. Half an hour later there was a phone call from Jon in St. Helena. We talked until 3:30 in the morning. I was having coffee and juice, and there was an assortment of topics - women, rivers, and dead bodies.

4:00 a.m. Went to sleep.

Saturday, May 7, 1994

I felt the effects of last night, not hungover so much as sleepy and tired. I was reduced to a primal state which isn't bad once in a while if you like a change of pace. It took a while to get something going on the typewriter, though. I wonder if the frame of mind you go to sleep with affects your thinking in the morning. It can leave you thoroughly unraveled if you were hanging out with amplifiers or a wine-soaked party the night before. I often read a little before I go to sleep. It gets my mind on track for a morning session on the typewriter.

B. called in the afternoon, who often has several things on her mind, or places to go and things to do. The options and distractions pull at her peripheral vision, who is "other-directed" to a fault. She complains sometimes about not being able to focus. There was more stuff about the other woman. She is sick of the negotiations, and at any moment there is an iron fist inside the velvet glove (sometimes without the glove). The comments leave her feeling slugged in the stomach. No wonder she has stomach pains. Her girlfriend said that she should come out more fully, not for the girlfriend's sake, but for her own. Ilsa sounds like a hard-drinking businesswoman who got it all from relationship books, like she learned about love from an instruction manual. She can express the sentimental feelings of a pseudo-enlightenment, and then

will turn on a dime, becoming a bitch-on-wheels - further evidence that the sentimental is the flipside of the vicious.

Meanwhile, there were a couple of events, a party, and negotiations later that night, and even me if she had time. I said I wasn't interested in the party or events. Maybe it would help if I was there for the negotiations (speaking as her attorney-at-love). I might be there in a remote sense, as she was taking notes from our conversation to support her own position.

Early evening, I went out for half a pound of coffee, and then straightened up the place. I'm gravitating to a tried-and-true condition of being at home like I am primal-fused to my surroundings. I'm taking a break from Ming, and the further away I get the more at ease I am. There are occasional withdrawal pains since she can function like a drug. She will inhabit a man's life like a chemical or smoke in order to get a better grip on him. It gives her a foothold in his psyche in which she can get comfortable while learning how to operate it. She will soak into him in the process of assuring herself that he's reliable.

Ming will nurture these connections like a plant she's taking care of, watering the rapport. There is a benevolent side to it, I shouldn't make her sound like a slow-acting poison or something with its talons embedded in your mind, and some of this is my fault. I get distracted by a woman who is headstrong with emotional blocks that would stop a truck. After a while the fucked-up situations and the self-absorption are too redolent of being young. When I am shaking loose of that it's with a vast relief.

Early evening, phone call from the Actress. She was a little upset with her daughter and her ex-husband (the journalist from Puerto Rico who turned into a Dead Head and a drop-out). I

said I didn't have any plans for the evening, but there was an old Kurosawa movie on Channel 9 if she wanted to come over. That sounded good to her.

8:30 p.m. She arrived, and we talked for a while in the kitchen with her going through her recent miseries. One of her woman friends is out of the country, so I was filling in. She is so imbued with the magnitude of her emotional states that it drains any patience with mine. That isn't so bad, but even then she didn't think I should be tired from the party last night. It was "unwarranted" and "only wine."

She admitted she can be at odds with her daughter Maya, and dreads what will happen when she is a teenager, bucking the headwinds of her mother. Maya is opinionated, giving mini-lectures on the men she goes out with, or when she has a cigarette. I'm usually impressed with how the mother enforces discipline, even when the rules and methods seem a little arbitrary, like she got it from a book or magazine. I had a similar thing with my own mother ("How to tell if your child is on drugs."). Maybe it is hard to avoid, but it is something how she's often not in tune with Maya, even when it comes to having a pleasant day together. It seems she misinterpreted what Maya felt like doing. They made a long drive to an amusement park called Great America, but the daughter was not amused. She didn't want to go, and rode back in silence. The mother had to take into account that her idea of fun is not the same as her daughter's. The latter is wound more tightly in some respects (a Libra, and her mother is a Taurus). The Actress dropped her off an hour early at the ex-husband's place. He wasn't there, but his roommate was. He later left a nasty message on her phone machine, like this was wrong. You would think she left the girl outside with the door locked.

9:00 p.m. She stretched out on the bed. "Where are you going to sit?" I took a chair with

a black and white portable tuned into *The Seven Samurai* (1954). It was nearly three hours long, and directed by someone who knows how. We were transported to a village in Japan in the 16th century. There were scenes that flow into the next, what a concept. Kurosawa applied himself to time and space with a floating camera. There were flurries of people running through a village with the camera tracking an attack. Villages would hire wandering samurai to protect them from bandits, but otherwise they didn't want them around. The bandits could be worse than a tornado.

The death of the samurai tradition: however strong a man was with a two-handed sword, he couldn't stand up to a gun. It's like a robot. Hiding behind a wall in a room full of frightened women the gunman made his presence felt. The samurai fell, throwing his sword in one last gesture of an obsolescent way of life. The bandits were defeated, but only three of the hired samurai survived. There is a scene of farmers planting in the warm light with music. The women are bending over putting rice in the ground while the men accompany them with drums and flutes. The Actress said she'd rather be on drums.

Her mood swings are significant. When she comes down on a thought or attitude she puts the pedal to the metal, which I think is how she found her way into acting. She was gushing in a positive vein one minute (over a hand-painted cigarette lighter), and critical and condescending the next. It's enough to give you whiplash. It was even an affront to her that I don't get colds or headaches. She said I should since I have an unhealthy lifestyle, "… staying up late, drinking and smoking." I'm not sure what I could do to oblige her, but if I said, "You're giving me a headache," that wouldn't help.

I walked her to her car around midnight. She had a Mexican beer that night, while I was avoiding alcohol.

Sunday, May 8, 1994

Typing in the morning. I had nearly forgotten what it's like to be focused on the typewriter for hours. It feels like your head is a magnifying glass, with your concentration moving across the page like a point of white-hot light. At some point I went up on the roof, going from a close-up to a wide angle. It was windy and clear, with the hills across the bay receding in the distance.

There was a phone call with my parents (who were on two phones). My mother thinks I'm special for some reason, and would like to see me more often (no pressure). I heard about the yellow poppies by the pool, and we talked about my visiting next month. My father is organizing more trips to Tijuana (for constructing straw bale houses for the poor).

My brother got on the phone, a sarcastic therapist, and said, "Happy Mother's Day."

4:00 p.m. I walked over to Fort Mason on a stunning wind-swept afternoon with the entire bay in motion, the white caps in a watery migration to points unknown. A warehouse on a pier was showing the work of graduate students from the San Francisco Art Institute. It's like a cross-section of the next generation's neuroses and psychoses. Not to mention their provisional solutions and revisionary convolutions with imaginary speculations in a redefined location. A refined vocation if a graduate can get a job.

There was someone playing doctor with the photographs.

References to internal inheritance energy and being a "passive receptor of information," not to say, "unrealized cognitive constructions."

"A feminine identity" involving a room, old photos, and a recorded voice.

"In Asian culture the basis of all philosophical and religious ideals has been originated from nature, universe, and god." What a concept, no one ever thought of that before. A photographer whose pictures were developed by the universe.

Some David Salle homages or rip-offs.

Something on the wall or floor looks like it was found at a yard sale or "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart."[44] You can delve into the subconscious until you see the light, which is probably the light outside, which looks more scintillating than the psycho-residue in here.

Now and then I came across a painter with a certain realism at the service of a halfway original approach. Jane Harrison with her plants, above and below ground, including a mandrake and a lady's slipper.

Karim Hamid, with half a dozen compositions like an offspring of Francis Bacon. There were blurry images of a woman sitting in a chair with her legs spread.

A Latina woman made drapes and curtains using Army camouflage material.

A woman sculpted torsos of women out of clay. The writing on the skin was scratched in with a stick.

I was there for over an hour,[45] and then went out, walking along the pier on the side protected from the wind. There were pieces of sunlight floating on the water, sails in horizontal motion, and the foreshortening of a long warehouse. I had a magnified view of things, having been inside and staring at aesthetic abortions in a dead light. I emerged into the wind and nearly

[44] W.B. Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion" (1939)

[45] I was here a few years ago for the graduate show and had a few hits off a joint before going in. I drifted through the psychosomatic hallucinations until I was at the far end of the warehouse. There was an area with chairs and windows overlooking the water. It was windy on the bay with gulls and sailboats being pushed around by invisible forces and I found it mesmerizing. I forgot that it was nearly closing time, and when I got up to leave I found that I was locked in. I don't like modern art enough to spend the night with it, so I wandered around, looking for an exit. Eventually a janitor let me out.

got my head blown off. There were Chinese people fishing. I headed over to Black Point Battery and sat on the ground with soft grass and pine needles. The wind was moving through the trees while an ocean liner went by.

I went home and had a workout on a wooden instrument while watching *60 Minutes*. There was something about corruption and bribes in Mexico, followed by llamas in Peru and a phone call from B. She is spending the weekend with her girlfriend and things are a little touchy, barely holding together. They might see a therapist. I continued on the wooden instrument until the guy downstairs started pounding. It was not even 9:30. I got a note from the manager that someone (probably him) complained about my playing after 10 p.m., but I don't think I was. His credibility is running out, an irascible and retired radio DJ.

I was switching channels, and ended up with *Thelma and Louise* (1991). I'm not sure what all the fuss was about, and kind of liked it. The feminist message may be open to interpretation:

> *I've come a long way in a Thunderbird convertible with dry hair.*
>
> *I dreamed I made the men listen when I pulled a gun.*
>
> *I can always pick up a hitchhiker in tight jeans and an open shirt. He may be on parole, but nobody's perfect.*

A couple of guys were unapologetic at the wrong end of a gun, and it was in the hands of an angry woman. One died, and the other got his truck blown up.

For a supposedly feminist film it has an odd ending, with feminism driving off a cliff. Even worse, it leaves you up in the air. Things were quasi-realistic up to then, not violating the laws of gravity, but as the car flies into the air the movie freezes. Maybe it would be a downer to see it fall, or the concept of a fallen woman isn't used anymore. Or they want to leave room for a sequel. A parachute pops out of the trunk – Louise had it installed in case she went too fast. They

slowly descend to the river below and float on seat cushions all the way to Mexico where they open a family planning clinic.

Actually, they end up in a port town running a broken-down rooming house with iguanas crawling around at night. Thelma spends much of her time picking up Mexican boys on the beach and drinking too much. Louise likes to stand at an open window on a hot night and rub lemon juice on her breasts. A ruined alcoholic preacher from the States arrives with a bus full of women tourists and she falls for him. Thelma tells him that she always depends on the kindness of strangers and bends over. Louise gets mad and they get into a fight, tearing each other's clothes off around the fire. The tourists are shocked out of their minds, and Louise uses her boobs to cut off Thelma's oxygen (which undermines the image of the nourishing woman). Thelma passes out and has a vision of the desert. When she comes to she returns to the States and goes to Death Valley, an area called Zabriskie Point.

There was a curious line from the Kurosawa film last night, saying those who think about themselves too much will destroy themselves (tell that to Louise and Thelma).

11:30 p.m. On the typewriter for a couple of hours, thinking about others.

Monday, May 9, 1994

NOTES

THELMA AND LOUISE - there was a sequence of commercials which was aimed at a certain demographic, including:

a Sensor razor for women
First Response – put it in your urine stream and test for pregnancy

The last scene froze with two women driving off a cliff. Cut to a news flash about a car wreck on the highway.

I was reading an old journal yesterday, with references to "cultural degeneration" and a "collective pseudo-subjectivity."

B. said she doesn't like being tested by her girlfriend, and if that's what women do to men she wouldn't put up with it. She also found it doesn't work the other way around, testing the tester. Someone with testosterone may find out things he doesn't want to know, and might prefer an illusion of the feminine (especially if it's connected to his erectile function).[46] He might find that she is not as honest as he thought, much less innocent. The problem of testing what's beneath the surface is you might be disillusioned. There's a scene in a Woody Allen film where he is in a boat and being rowed across a pond by a woman. It is dreamy and he trails his hand in the water, then pulls it up dripping mud. The pond was shallow.

If you wonder who is generating what in a relationship, like you're sitting in a well-lit room but not sure where the light is coming from, you turn off your end and the room goes nearly dark. What does that suggest, the woman just reflects? And then to compensate she has a controlling attitude.

A few years ago I was with Nora and Ming (who were twenty-one), and we walked over to Black Point Battery. I had recently hurt my leg and was limping. It was of little concern to them as they were talking nonstop to each other. When we got near the cliff I thought I would try something. I couldn't walk any further as my leg hurt, so I said as much and sat under a tree, seeing what they would do. They left me there without a second thought, continuing down the trail and heading for the pier. I later met them back at the apartment, feeling underwhelmed. Imagine two men walking with a woman who is limping and they leave her under a tree and walk away, not wanting to interrupt their conversation.

I've had conversations with women where I ask them things like where is north (no idea), how far is the moon (20,000 miles?), or the sun (not sure), and what is the speed of light (the what?). How about the speed of sound (doesn't ring a bell). I might be teasing more than testing, and it doesn't affect my feelings for them. It is more disturbing when a woman doesn't know when the Civil War occurred, or where Tunisia is, or who the Sex Pistols were. Don't even mention old writers. It's like a woman is insulated from irrelevant (in her opinion) information by her estrogen. It doesn't happen to all women, but enough of them are stricken by a lack of curiosity which is so mundane you wonder if they're anchored by it.

An article in *Utne Reader*, excerpted from *New Perspectives Quarterly* (1990), by Ali A. Mazrui (a sly and professorial man from Kenya). He had a documentary film about Africa a few years ago, and found a way to satirize the white man every chance he got. That included a reversal of those documentaries on Africa which show bare-breasted

[46] Men are famous for their self-delusion when it comes to women. It is often at the expense of women, but it also can provide them with a mask to hide behind.

black women in their natural habitat. In his film the local women are demure and covered up, and it's the European women on the beaches who're bare-breasted.

The essay had a number of non sequiturs which one could question. He's an expert, so I'm on thin ice, but what do we have to go on except what's on the page? I assume it has to stand or fall on its own merits, and those are questionable as far as I can tell. "SHAKING FREE OF COLONIALISM. Africa needs to move forward to the past." I wonder what he means by that, and which past is he talking about? The legacy of which tribe is a useful model for an entire continent?

He describes Africa as a continent "struggling to correct the disasters of history, creatively destroying (?) its colonial inheritance as a prerequisite to designing a new kind of development that makes sense in authentic African terms." There is some question if development makes sense in "authentic African terms," when said development involves the use of machinery and inventions and methods which come from those of European descent. And how can he speak in such terms if our view of Africa is blurred by generalities (as the magazine noted).

What are the authentic terms that would include such disparate countries as Morocco and Uganda and South Africa? And "creatively destroying" is an odd way of putting it, when most African countries with black governments have managed to end up worse off than when the colonial powers were there. Perhaps they are destroying the roads and schools that were constructed by foreigners, and reaching back into the past for wooden statues which make it rain in the dry season.

"Their borders were chosen not by the natural flow of history but through the arbitrary decisions of Europeans. Our struggles with these artificially imposed boundaries are not so very different from the ethnically inspired movements… most notably in Eastern Europe." Standard stuff, and begging for some further interpretation. What is the "natural flow of history"? Is the ebb and tide of societies and power struggles and inventions a natural flow? Do the Mongols under Genghis Khan reveal the flow of history? How about the spread of Islam at the point of a sword? Are tribal wars more natural if they fight *au naturel*? Did the flow dry up for those who never left the Stone Age?

Cultures are colliding and colluding, mixing and recoiling all the time. He seems to think that Europeans are outside the natural flow of history, like they're timeless (tell it to Herodotus). It's keeping with the natural flow if people stay at home and kill their neighbors. What about the Arab slave trade, was it natural? There are boundaries and borders around the world, and populations with an arbitrary mix of cultures and religions. Does that mean they can't live together?

Typing for hours, and there was more of it in the office - everything from a Request for Dismissal with Prejudice to a Last Will and Testament.

I was at home in the evening when the Czech woman dropped by with her ten-year-old son. She brought me a rose, and didn't stay long. There were a couple of documentaries on Channel 9 (the public channel), with a wooden instrument in hand. An ancient Roman city, and the pyramids in Egypt. I was going back in time.

Tuesday, May 10, 1994

In the morning I called Ming at work, having thought about it for a while. I figured I had gone on long enough, looking at her from a distance like the dark side of the moon. It clears my head for a while, but then it gets tedious, like I'm taking it too seriously and I come out of it, having reinforced the detachment which runs through her veins. She sounded fine, and immediately agreed to coming over for dinner tonight, and a play tomorrow night. There was a thread here which refused to break, however much I waiver at times. She finds it odd that going to bed with a woman I have little or no connection with doesn't appeal to me.[47]

I went to work in the afternoon, in a good mood. V. called and said, "You come here." She wanted help with a work-related letter. I went home a few hours later, picking up some things along the way – fish, green onions, wine.

7:00 p.m. Ming arrived, pushing her mountain bike through the door and looking casual as hell. She tore off her shirt, revealing a T-shirt from Thailand with primitive figurines and women with stylized reproductive organs. In no time we were back on an even keel, though I was on a wooden instrument for a while, and she was flipping through a couple of art books she hadn't seen before – Frida Kahlo and Hieronymus Bosch. She said the latter is "hectic."

[47] A few years later I was talking with a friend who makes confessional comic books (Mari Naomi, whose parents are Jewish and Japanese). I said I preferred having sex with a woman I'm in love with, and she said, "You're such a girl."

Not sure why I was so at ease, but maybe my life is easier than hers. She was going on about her schedule, having a full-time job and learning about small businesses. She wants to open a café someday. Somewhere along the line I managed to make dinner – rice with Cajun catfish fried in green onions, green peppers, and lemon juice. We went through a bottle of wine and started another.

Talking in the front room with incense, a candle, and the radio on low. Ming was lounging on the black sofa by the window, and our discussion of a movie – *Thelma and Louise* – segued into the history of her sex life and some of mine. She can't believe how turbulent it has been doing nothing these days. She is basically turned off and is developing a shell. Another friend is spending time with her, the forty-year-old long-hair guy, who seems to bring out a more prosaic side of her. That is what she's gravitating towards these days, and for all I know it's what she's made of. How do you really know someone or what they're like if the observer is affecting the observed? They try to hammer it into your skull that they are not what you think. You might as well be one of those poets from another century because she doesn't have those feelings – all the more so with the breakup a couple of months ago. It was a lesson she has taken to heart, turning it to stone if it wasn't already. I think it is one reason he left, but she is determined to look at life from a utilitarian standpoint, including her relations with men.

I want to write like Stendhal (among others), looking for those fluctuating and misleading moods of people with their psychological discriminations. I look at her in that light because I know her better than anyone else, considering how open she is. We talk about anything and everything. There is a distance which is in keeping with the writer and his subject (or an artist and his model). It isn't always positive. I feel the breezes wafting off an icy core, or is it the mechanical (she does like motorcycles), but there is a mutual current which could keep the

conversation going for years. She knows I write about our situation, and I don't think she cares about being shown in a good light. I could combine the perspective of a Stendhal with that of a Lucien Freud and put them at the service of the journal - assuming I can be as clear-eyed as those two. You have to reach for something beyond yourself.

11:30 p.m. She jumped up, it being late for her, and asked if I would walk her downstairs. She wheeled the mountain bike down three flights and out the door and said goodnight. I haven't kissed her in a month or more, and don't plan to anytime soon. She is aware that I've been treating her like someone who is slightly toxic, but it doesn't bother her, and said she has a certain respect for someone she can bang heads with. I went upstairs where there was more coffee and wine. We nearly finished two bottles, with my having gone three days on one beer. It was more than I usually have, but I was operating on some kind of overdrive, not tense or angry, but I slammed through an hour or two on the typewriter.

I realized when I was trying to go to sleep around two in the morning how wired I was. I figured it had something to do with her. We get into an intensive current that goes on for hours, and when she's gone I feel it. It's a mental habit, the long conversations, and so much of it concerns her life that it becomes hypnotic. Is she using my mind like a reflector of herself? I'm more or less autonomous when my mental gears are turning, but sometimes a woman knows how to operate a man like an instrument, if not a computer. She is fairly honest about using men for sex, and I don't see why she wouldn't use them for other reasons. Ming admitted she has never suffered unrequited love. I said, "How fortunate," and would she ever put herself in that position? Probably not, too vulnerable.

We touched on other things, including an historical novel she found in the bookstore, *The Good Earth* (1931), by Pearl Buck. She was so absorbed in the story of farmers in China it made

her cry, but it was hitting close to home.[48] I found a surreal writing exercise we did a while back. She was amazed at what comes out of her head when given half a chance. I showed her some pictures from the art student show, with her becoming skeptical as she viewed them. "Anyone could do it." She knows what she could get away with as an Asian woman who expresses herself however she wants, while getting sanctimonious attention.

Meanwhile, there was tension in her back and shoulders, and she showed me a stretching exercise she learned. I don't think she was suggesting anything, though she has in the past when wanting a back rub. I didn't respond, and wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole at this point. Maybe with a ten-foot soul. I have the impression hers and mine would fill the room (like the apple of Magritte),[49] to the point we can't get out the door (and consequently stay in for the evening). However, when it comes to anyone's psychology, when you are stirring up the depths you could be throwing everything at each other, from confessions to deflating observations.

Something I forgot to mention, though not sure how she would have responded. At the art student show there was a display of old Native American photos, along with a recent one of a good-looking woman with long black hair. She wore a necklace and nothing else, while standing in a rugged terrain. There was a comment about how beautiful she was, and how she could steal a man's soul if he wasn't strong enough to get close without losing his sense of himself. "I gave

---

[48] Flash forward to an essay entitled "What's So Bad About *The Good Earth*?" by Charles W. Hayford (Education About Asia, Winter, 1998). "The China family… was not the nuclear family, based on a romantic love contract… but a multigenerational community of the living and the dead… Both genders subordinated individuality to group and hierarchy…." Ming grew up feeling subordinated as a female in a Chinese family. Her father bought a woman in China who would become her mother. In *The Good Earth*, "We see child-selling, wife-buying, foot-binding, infanticide, and self-sacrifice to the point of starvation." Pearl Buck grew up in China, spoke Chinese, and married "one of the first scholars to scientifically survey the Chinese farm economy and proselytize for technological modernization. She went with him to village after village, building on the knowledge of the common people she had as a child."

[49] *The Listening Room* (1952)

her my heart but she wanted my soul."[50] She could wear it like a jacket, a vicarious dimension. A woman does things to a man which are rarely brought up in court, but sooner or later he can sense that she is sapping his will.

I was lying in the dark past three in the morning, not in the mood for "a dark night of the soul" routine. I finally turned on the light and lit a cigarette. I read most of a long essay called "The Idiocy of Race" by Ivan Hannaford in *The Wilson Quarterly* (it came from the Attorney's office). I'm not sure if it was so well written, or I was in overdrive, but I inhaled it.

Somewhere after four in the morning I passed out, thinking the bed is hard, and what if a feminine woman walked into my life, looked around and decided she liked it. I would give up the ghost then and there.[51]

Wednesday, May 11, 1994

2:00 p.m. I went downtown a little early and picked up a writing pad and theater tickets, having called Ming at work. She was interested in going last night, but now was hesitant or unconvinced. She changes her mind by the hour, which might have something to do with the angle of the sunlight (or what happens at night). If she was short of funds I could loan it to her, but as soon as I said the play has stirred up some debate she said, "Okay."

I dropped into the Berggruen Gallery and stared at a six by six-foot canvas. It was $14,000 worth of silver paint and that's it. You can admire the brushwork or maybe the title, the concept of the show being "silvers, blues & greys." There was a "meta blue, grey two pearl, here & there grey nine." Also "interference Silver #2 and "critical opalescence #2" (sounds like a lipstick). Not to mention, "Elsewhere."

---

[50] Bob Dylan, "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright" (1963)
[51] Next month, as it happened.

There was not much work in the office. V. had her wedding ring, half a carat for $3000, and was teased by the women. She asked if I would walk her to Union Square after work, like it was a fresh experience. She related some of the office gossip, “I have a big mouth.” It was mainly about Maria, the Filipina secretary who is nineteen, and the twenty-four-year-old clunky Republican type who is a legal assistant. I heard about how their first date went, including his lack of experience when it comes to kissing. She’s been after him for months and is getting frustrated, like she isn’t sure if it’s worth the trouble if he never had a girlfriend, which is hard to fathom, but it happens. She even lay her head on his shoulder to initiate something with their heads close together, but she is disenchanted, having to initiate the conversations in the office. Even at fourteen I wasn’t that bad.

Maria sits at the next desk in a swivel chair, and my typewriter faces her. Her outfits range from cute and sexy to femme fatale. Her blouses are low-cut and she bends over like her tits are made of throw-away glimpses (and she’s an unwed mother). She was mounting a seduction, and told V. about her strategy of wearing whatever she thought would work and “bending over.” I told Ming about it a while back and she was a little embarrassed, but attracting the attention of men has never been a problem for her. She would have the same effect just standing there as someone else would bending over in a low-cut dress. However, she is not into feminine guile (I don’t think), and likes to come on as one of the guys. Some men find that a relief, but it includes a male propensity for no commitment.

5:30 p.m. I picked her up outside her office, looking nice in black pants, a brown coat, lipstick, and long black hair. She said she overslept this morning and only had a few minutes to wash her hair and run out with her hair wet. I said, “Did anyone scream?” “No, but they were

just being polite." We took a bus to her place, and were back in tune, which is one of the strange things about this connection. It seems to have a self-healing aspect, not to say self-generating. Maybe it's me, considering what a sourpuss she is. Just kidding. I'm impressed with her capacity for being annoyed. "I'm getting irritated" is a common phrase, while I tend to be more buoyant, at least around her.

We threw together a meal with pasta and artichoke hearts, and shared a Bass ale. She put some garlic bread in the broiler and a minute later it was smoking and burned. The fire alarm went off.

Ming and I were talking with her roommate and a homosexual attorney in his late thirties who runs a tight office. He likes to come over and get into a game of Monopoly with Leonora. It's like they are regressing to their childhood, whatever it takes to get their minds off work and be in close proximity to someone else, monopolizing their attention. He said it must be spring - he found himself wanting to jump on a man on the bus.

7:30 p.m. We took a bus and got to the Stage Door around ten to eight for a play by David Mamet (*Oleanna*). I didn't see the Actress. We went in and found our seats in the balcony, not far from the stage. I saw her sitting on the other side, and she called out, "You're late!"

The lights went down, the stage lit up, and we were transported into the office of a college professor. He was on the phone while a young female student stood nearby, shy and nervous, at her wit's end about school. During the intermission the Actress walked over and we went outside for a cigarette. She was with a woman on the heavy side with a nearly shaved head. I think she prefers the company of women who won't steal her limelight. The first act had some fast talking, mostly him, and already you sense what he might be doing wrong when counseling a confused female student. He is too effusive, chummy, and emotional – he would have been better

off maintaining a certain distance and formality, while having less concern for her. He hit her over the head with his concern, which included an arm around her shoulder. It was a fatherly gesture which might be misinterpreted, and of course it was.

I had a sinking feeling when we returned for Act Two. They were talking a month later, a little stiff, and whatever she would accuse him of had occurred. She wrote a report, but it went to the tenure committee, laying out his transgressions on her personhood. This is a touchy person of thin substance and not much character. He is amazed that she is reacting like this, but he has the assumption that this isn't high school, and being in college she would have some intelligence and back bone. He wants to work this out without her going to such drastic and dogmatic lengths.[52]

He is a non-conformist who became a professor, while putting down the institution. It represents the "virtual warehousing of the young." He is playing fast and loose with her beliefs. Part of the problem is he comes from the looser 1960's, with assumptions of open debate, freedom of expression, and a non-puritanical view of life. She is all too redolent of a neurotic and financially worried person who wouldn't think it spineless to report him. The man supported lower academic standards and open enrollment, and this is what he gets.

He is trying to bring out what is human in her (as a teacher would), and can't believe it is so truncated in a college student. But teachers are increasingly surprised to find their students can't even read very well. Meanwhile, she wants him to see her side of things, a subjective warp compared to his. An arm around her shoulders is a hairy thing about eight feet long, and it cuts off any possibility of escape.

---

[52] Camille Paglia was a professor for many years, and was embarrassed by the victimology of many female students. "Colleges should stick to academics and stop their infantilizing supervision of students' dating lives, an authoritarian intrusion that borders on violation of civil liberties… Too many young middleclass women… seem to expect adult life to be an extension of their comfortable, overprotected homes…." (*Time* magazine, Sept. 29, 2014)

He is all about dispelling the distance between people, and assumes there is a common ground we can agree on, but it ain't necessarily so. She is a good reason why schools should be more stringent about who gets in, and he's a good argument for not erasing the distinction of teacher and student. It reminds me of parents who want to be on the same level as their kids. They took however long to arrive at their quasi-enlightened state, and assume their kids are ready for it too. However, kids can be a little conservative, as the Actress's own daughter has shown. They need some kind of order, a structure they can depend on. They find it disconcerting if their parents are kind of wild, and wish they would put their clothes back on.

I was cringing in Act One when he walked around to the front of his desk and sat on the edge, leaning over while she's sitting in a chair. You know he's too close, however much he wants to shorten the formal distance between them. It still feels like an imposition of his authority, the very thing he's trying to avoid. He's coming close to her as a professor in his office, on his own turf. He's like a bull that walks into the china shop of her psychology with good intentions, and he can't help knocking something over. He manages to step on her lines and cause confusion in a student who is trying to get a grip on the structures and demands of a university - which he wants to deconstruct from the comfortable perspective of someone with a job. A quote from David Mamet in the program: "That's always the trick that bad acting teachers use… they make themselves incomprehensible, and they humiliate you."[53]

When the play was over we stayed for the discussion, with a third of the audience returning to the lower seats. The director was a friendly man with a background in leftwing theater in England. He was more of a feminist than Mamet is, saying he thought the professor

[53] That sounds like the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. I have his book, *The Order of Things* (1966), and heard him speak at UC Berkeley in 1983. He practiced sadomasochism (not in the classroom), and his writing is often hard to comprehend.

had a sexual current, however subtle, when he put his arm around his student.[54] If it was a male student he probably wouldn't have, but a man in the audience said it happens all the time with coaches and athletes, along with an occasional pat on the butt.

The comments were all over the spectrum. A retired professor and another older man were not impressed with the professor in the play. An older woman was not impressed with the female student. A woman spoke with a calm well-modulated manner, saying Mamet is good with dialogue, but he's a misogynist. I thought his portrait of the student was realistic, but that doesn't mean it was politically correct. The opinions of the men varied more in form and content than those of the women. Some of the guys could hardly talk, but that didn't stop them from trying, which was tedious. Most of the women were more fluent, but with less variation in their observations.

I wasn't sure if I should throw an off-the-wall wrench into the proceedings by bringing up *The Blue Angel* (1930) or *Educating Rita* (1983). I wanted to ask how the play is misogynistic. If the professor was on thin ice with his student, the thin ice being her, he broke through to his detriment. She freezes over and he drowns (losing his job). If she was presented as a less flimsy woman the conflict might have been avoided, but there wouldn't be a play. People were objecting to the disparity of power between the man and woman – as if that is unusual in a teacher-student relationship. "Students and especially female students, do not see themselves as having equal power. Their professors have the power to…." If they want to be the equal of a professor, they should further their education.

Is the student shown as being frigid and neurotic, like this doesn't occur in real life? The situation involves a breakdown in communication between people from different cultural

[54] I think a sexual current is included in the life force, all the more so if it's subtle. It is found in anyone who's breathing, even those who're academics.

backgrounds and different ages. It isn't like the professor looks so good, but the fact remains that he is far more damaged than she is by this teacher-student relationship. If the woman was more fluent in the language, and had some backbone, there wouldn't have been a problem (or a play). Were the women in the audience objecting to the premise that a woman could be knee-jerk and vindictive? It sounds like the old paradox of men knowing women better than women do. They have seen them in the worst circumstances, like a difficult love affair. The same goes for women. Men cannot believe how badly they speak of other men, but they're not having affairs with men and wouldn't know.

We left the theater and walked around the neighborhood for a while, looking for coffee in a place we could agree on, which took a while. We ended up in a 24-hour diner on the corner, having coffee and tea in a booth. For over an hour there was a heated discussion, the sort we get into sometimes where we're going toe to toe with each one armed with a long stick held in both hands. We parry and thrust from every argumentative angle we can think of. Later on the bus she said it was deeply satisfying. It isn't often that she finds someone who will give her a good argument or debate. I'll do it on a whim, for better or worse.

We went off on a power tangent, which is one of her obsessions. She tends to view everything in terms of power struggles and competition, and it's wreaking havoc on her love life. We were talking about teacher-student or man-woman showdowns, along with job-related concerns about who has power over her. She told me once that she likes to go out to dinner because she likes being served.[55]

[55] Maybe that's empowering for her, but it's the opposite for me. I feel passive and reduced while sitting there and waiting for some food in an impersonal public setting. But then, I almost never went out to dinner when I was growing up. There wasn't room for that on a minister's salary.

Ming said there are people with power all around us (and wondered who has more, her or me). I asked her to be specific. Is it an unearned power? Is she upset that at twenty-four she doesn't control the real estate in this town? Does she know anything about real estate? With respect to those who control the real estate, what are the odds they have been working at it for a long time? For that matter, having brought up political power, there is nothing stopping her from running for office. You have to start somewhere, and usually not at the top. She said she couldn't be the President (having been born in Hong Kong). I said that isn't the point, she could be some kind of leader if she put her mind to it, or in fact her entire life, as most people do who arrive in those positions. She could make an effort, but if she's not elected that is not necessarily the fault of the system.

We talked about why I don't feel put upon by the discrepancies of power. I don't see everything in those terms, and there are limits and conformities that go along with power. Meanwhile, no one could arrest us while we're having coffee in a late-night diner. I have certain assumptions along the lines of citizens and their rights which sound idealistic. As for power, I can't complain if I don't have something if I'm not willing to make the effort.[56]

She said something about not feeling free, and that really got me going - her being someone who does whatever she wants. Given the conditions of so many people in other parts of the world, or even in this country, for her to say that was kind of twisted. She thinks she can't feel free when other people are homeless, and having knocked it around for a while she said that economically we're one step from the gutter if things go wrong.

I said, "Maybe so, but that's like saying you don't feel good because any minute you could get run over by a truck. It's possible, but since it hasn't happened it's in bad taste to

[56] It's possible I'm under the influence of a few Beat poets, like Gregory Corso. He said, "Standing on a street corner waiting for no one is power." Or maybe it was just a powerful corner.

pretend there are tire marks on your back. Especially for those who really have been run over by trucks. And what of people who work as doctors? It doesn't do a patient any good if a doctor comes down with a psychosomatic illness when he or she is with their patients – like they identify so closely with the sick and injured that they're feeling bad as well. That would get the contempt of any patient who needs a functional doctor.

She was musing about this. I deflected every attempt she made, and she finally said it was true. She does have liberties and options, and it doesn't make sense to tie her sense of freedom to the problems of others. She could be focused on those and lose track of the actual amenities of her own life. It's just that injustice makes her angry. I said maybe she's a slave to her anger and that hit her between the eyes, admitting that was possible. There are times she will make herself angry just thinking about something.

When we left the diner we walked through the deserted streets and caught a nearly empty bus to her neighborhood. I asked if she wanted me to walk her to her place, it being late. She said yes, and I could spend the night as well. I wasn't sure about that, but walked her to the door. I went inside and was sitting on the edge of the bed with her throwing me some purple long-johns before I realized that I would probably spend the night.

I wore those with my shirt open and the grey suit hung on a paper screen. There was the usual maneuver on the side of the bed where she took off her blouse, put on a loose sweatshirt, removed the bra from underneath, took off her pants (wearing some sexy briefs), and pulled on a pair of sweatpants. It made her look younger. After dealing with her facial creams, she was lying in bed. There were more photos from Thailand, with her smiling on the back of an elephant on a sun-speckled trail. The small wooden shacks of the people in northern Thailand, and the women with their weaving.

1:00 a.m. We lay there with the light out and the bed next to the curving windows. I was staring at a star, with a few vapors going by. I turned away, but she was lying close and still talking.

Thursday, May 12, 1994

7:00 a.m. Woke up. She lay there as long as she could, then headed for the shower. She returned with her hair in a towel, and went behind a folding screen to change into her clothes, saying it was because of the windows. I was still in bed when she came out from behind the screen in a white buttoned blouse, a tight grey skirt, and burgundy tights. She sat at the foot of the bed, wiggled out of the skirt, and commenced to sew a button on the back. There was the usual repartee, and I threw off one line after another (she thinks that I'm a little edgy in the morning). I said she radiated waves of insomnia – not from last night, but the night before when she left my place. She brought it up a few times, intrigued at the notion that I might be losing sleep over her.

In the kitchen we made scrambled eggs with a lot of onions, and had some coffee. She wondered why I don't think it is sufficient having women friends, and if they want to unload their problems on me while reaffirming their identities (I think that's how she put it), I could do the same with them. It's just that I never, and she emphasized <u>never</u>, lean on them in that way. I lean on the typewriter. I said there was an imbalance, with too much of the platonic. Oddly enough, that is something she values highly. It's like being appreciated for her mind and her presence, knowing how some men would like her for other reasons. It gets me what a low opinion she has of sex. It is easy to come by if she wants it, but not so easy when it comes to being satisfied. "I'm insatiable," she said. A man is a walking vibrator who isn't hard to

summon, but he might have feelings. The woman is a pent-up nervous system in need of lubrication and relief who's burdened with her physical maintenance.

8:15 a.m. We walked fast down two flights of stairs. I was in a hurry and when we hit the sidewalk I said, "When you live on the edge you can't afford to trip." Some of our conversations have a facetious tone. She objected to the premise of my living on the edge, pointing out how orderly my life is and that she knows what I am doing on any particular night. I said there are other edges she doesn't know about.

I rode home on the bus, and was typing for a couple of hours.

I thought of the power discussion last night, and how people look at a broad historical context rather than the individual. There are black people who over-estimate the power of whites, and people with a lower income who over-estimate the power of a higher income level. It leads to the overbearing presence of the nouveau riche, who are compelled to throw their weight around while being conspicuous with their consumption. They have an exaggerated view of power, and it shows in their behavior. What about a poor man in another country who sees an ordinary person in this country driving to the store in an average sedan? The latter might not think they are imbued with much in the way of power and privilege, and yet for someone living in the dirt it looks like a futuristic power glide.

Ming said she felt powerless when it came to deciding how much money goes to the military and how much goes to breast cancer research.[57] I said it isn't like she doesn't have a voice, it's just that others have a voice too, and she is often outvoted. More to the point: the entire population is powerless when it comes to having an effect on the military-industrial

[57] "… [A] new report finds that for every prostate cancer drug on the market, there are seven used to treat breast cancer, and federal spending on breast cancer research outpaces prostate cancer spending by a ratio of nearly two to one." *Business Week*, via the National Prostate Cancer Coalition (2007) The mortality rate is similar, but it usually hits men when they're older.

complex. It does whatever it wants, no matter who is in the White House, and drains as much money as it can from the government with very little oversight.[58]

Meanwhile, does the average man know he's being sized up by a woman from the position of a power struggle? He doesn't know what hit him, the covert strategies and resentments, until he realizes he is being judged as a member of an allegedly powerful group, rather than being seen as an individual, and is used accordingly. "I gave her my heart, but she wanted my [sociological status]…."

I went to work in the afternoon.

The receptionist was in a bad mood – headache, bored – and had to go on a "fucking errand." In other words, walking a few blocks. I told her about the play, and it turns out she has never been to one. I showed her the program and she said she is familiar with the subject, a recent phenomenon which is overblown. Actually, her arriving at the age of reason is a recent phenomenon, being barely twenty-one. She said her high school in the Oakland hills had a teacher who was known for being a lecher. It was usually covert, but the girls knew if they would "bend over" or something he would improve their grade (also known as grading on the curve). He liked her eyes.

I walked home through North Beach, a route that takes me by the strip joints. One of the porno shops had a MOTHER'S DAY SPECIAL a while ago (with the sign in front). I was thinking how it used to be a time-honored custom for men to visit a brothel. They would go there

[58] Flash forward to September 10, 2001 when the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, admitted on the news that the Pentagon had lost track of $2.3 trillion in military spending. Oddly enough, the next morning the section of the Pentagon in charge of financial records was destroyed, it being 9/11. Even more odd, the airliner that allegedly ploughed into the building completely vanished, leaving no debris, no black box, no hole big enough to accommodate an airliner of that size, and no photos either.

on a regular basis, whether married or unmarried. That doesn't appeal to me, so why am I thinking about it?

I dropped in on the rock shop. The same woman with blue hair and a quietly responsive manner was there. I am sometimes fooled by that, forgetting it's her job to be pleasant and communicative, but we were getting along. I said I liked the fluorite. She kept showing me things, and even took my phone number when I inquired about a quarry. I would like a simple marble slab for a coffee table, and she said she would look into it. I bought a small pin with a holograph of the earth for someone, and walked home.

Books, a wooden instrument, and typing.

1 or 1:30 a.m., went to bed. I was lying in the dark, nearly asleep, when the phone rang. It turned into a half-hour conversation with the Actress. She said she couldn't sleep, being upset about something. There was tension at work, among other things. We got on the subject of the play, and why she was annoyed at how it portrayed women, or one woman, as being weak and vindictive. She seemed to think the playwright had contrived an unlikely person. I wasn't sure about that. If the character was more resourceful and intelligent, then chances are there wouldn't be a conflict. The professor would have been less compelled to put his arm around her shoulder as a distraught student who was barely able to speak. For that matter, she wouldn't have been in his office wanting to talk about her grade if she had been a little more adept, and she wouldn't turn the administration against him on such flimsy grounds. That sort of thing is done by someone who is weak, which is one of Mamet's points.

I think that men are represented in plays as having faults, so why not women? The woman is a common type that I'm familiar with, a semi-puritanical and under-educated drip.

That is part of the dynamic here - what happens when an older person with more substance interacts with someone who is younger and with much less substance. The Actress felt the play was contrived to make his outburst a foregone conclusion, and the audience is behind him at that point. I said the woman's parting line was pretty provocative - "Don't call your wife baby" – coming on top of everything else. I wasn't surprised when he finally lost his temper, but a slap would have been more than enough.

A point I forgot to bring up: the cover of the program was a photo of a naked woman as seen from the side through a swirling mirror effect (the name of Oleanna comes with connotations of a failed utopia). I thought it was misleading and beside the point. The bent mirror was in keeping with the distorted perceptions of the people involved, but there was nothing naked or sensual about it.

The Actress said she resented ACT for putting the play on, like they did it for the sensationalism of it, and to sell tickets. She mentioned a play at ACT last year, *The Duchess of Malfi*. I saw it with B., who was shocked when the main character faced the audience with no clothes on. She thought it was demeaning for the woman in that role (who wasn't young), and wrote a letter of complaint to the theater. I reminded the Actress that the director of ACT for the last couple of years has been a woman, Carey Perloff, who is well-schooled and intelligent. For that matter, a couple of national magazines were edited by women who steered them in the direction of lurid news and nudity. I am referring to *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* (where the actress, Tilda Swinton, was shown topless in a full-page photo). Even *Playboy* is run by a woman. In other words, women are moving into positions of power and influence, while continuing to vote, but life goes on. I don't think the politics are more enlightened, or that fewer women are posing with no clothes on.

2:00 a.m. We got off the phone and I went to sleep.

Friday, May 13, 1994

NOTES

The other night, after returning to her neighborhood I wanted to drop into the Morphos Gallery, but Ming steered us into the shop next door for a hair consultation. I sat there while she discussed her hair with a man. Then we went into the Morphos, but she found it morbid and mundane.

She referred to her list of errands, like all she did last Saturday was cross things off her list. It was all about tangible concerns - not just laundry, bills, plants, cleaning, and the farmers' market, but hair, skin, lotion, nails, her figure, clothes, etc. I was going to saying something about her sounding like a woman, but I have the feeling there are men for whom those kinds of things would be the norm as people who exist in the real world. I'm not sure where that leaves me. I have a hard time applying myself to those things, while applying myself to things that many people barely notice, like panning a stream of consciousness.

For many women (including Ming), when it comes to men it isn't that they're not a good judge of character, it's that character is often not a priority. They have material concerns, and are after something else. A man is useful for a number of things – his organ or his motorcycle, his ability to function as an escort.

Last Tuesday was the birthday of Fred Astaire and Sid Vicious.

We were looking at photos from Thailand last night. There was one of a young man who knew pop songs and had "a beautiful voice." She said the sound of someone's voice can be more effective than what they're saying, like it bypasses the mind and goes directly to some other reverberating membranes (of remote remembrance). I've noticed this on some occasions when I'm singing and a woman is moved in ways she isn't when I'm talking – though what I'm talking about requires more thought, and what I'm singing could be any dumb lyrics. No matter, it reverberates.

Listening to the radio, KPOO, a woman with a breathy voice said, "Jazz… the music of the people." It took a while to register what a non sequitur that was. Where does that leave folk songs? What music wouldn't be a music of the people? Chamber music? Those aren't people in the audience? No violins for the common man. How many listen to jazz anyhow, compared to other forms of music with a lot more record sales? Ironic, when this "music of the people" is found in the New Orleans Room at the Fairmont Hotel.

12:30 p.m. I went to the office for lunch with V. She wasn't there. I went outside for a cigarette and she showed up a few minutes later. As we walked to the Hunan place I told her about the rock shop and the woman with blue hair, who also dyes her eyebrows. V. thought it was strange and amusing, and made a gesture below her waist. "Did she do it down there too?" I said I didn't know (but am willing to find out).

Smoked ham and tea, while we talked about this and that. She went on about her assistant, Maria, who is losing patience with the white guy who has never had a girlfriend. I said I've been kissing girls since I was fourteen, so that was hard to imagine (and for V. as well). It turns out that growling little vixen in the office has "low self-esteem" when it comes to men. You could have fooled me. If her ego was any bigger she would have the lawyer she works for fanning her with a palm branch.

V. said that men tend to elude Maria's grasp and fade away, including the one who got her pregnant. That left her in a position of staying with him while he brought home other women. It gets me how some women can be wrong about a man, enduring a horrendous situation with a jerk. But there are other forms of torture that they put themselves through, like securing a thin waist. There are levels of female masochism which have less and less to do with a male-dominated system, and more to do with the pathologies of being human (female version). A woman can be stressed out over an emotional nuance which is nearly invisible to a man, and so for that matter is a few pounds.

I've known women who are tired and bored with the dramas of their women friends, and wonder if they play the martyr in order to liven up a dull existence. I think a lot of soap operas are in line with that, commiserating with the pathos of a melodrama (cue the organ music). And yet how many of the viewers are women with a driver's license who answer to no one.

If you're materialistic and obtuse, you might be prone to bad choices, and maybe you're a bad judge of character. Sometimes the character of men is barely in their frame of reference ("Every woman adores a fascist"),[59] but that can have consequences for both parties - for a woman when she realizes there is more to a man than a haircut, suit, and muscles, or for a man when he realizes that a woman has no interest in his mind. That is maddening after a while. I think women are more likely to make dolls of men (or see them in those terms), than for men to make dolls of women, and not only because those women grew up playing with dolls.

There is a legendary tendency of women to react to how a man says something, rather than what he says. It is dehumanizing and impersonal for a man if what he says is only soundwaves to a woman. It's like his tone of voice is undermining the content of the words. Some women fall for the meaningless when it is softly spoken. I think of all the words I've wasted in what amounted to communication breakdowns.

V. was talking about Aisha, the black legal secretary who is on the loose side, and who I get along with. She responded to a personal ad from someone with a Ferrari, that being his main mode of attracting women. When she called him she was surprised to find that he was vain, like she wasn't compromised herself. She wanted an affair with his Ferrari, so his character was not her main concern. She now lives with an older white man who is loaded. He bought her a computer and a car, and who knows what else?

5:00 p.m. V. walked by my desk and said she was leaving. I think she expects me to walk her to the station every day. When I returned to the office I finished my work, then walked to the pool. It is more out of the way than when I lived in the Tenderloin. I had a cigarette in the lobby, but the pool was full, so I walked home. 2 ½ miles.

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

Fell asleep early, and woke up around one in the morning. The lights were on with the radio going (not loud), and I went into the other room as the "Adagio" by Albinoni began. It left me staring at the black sheets of the bed where I had been unconscious. I went back to bed and lay there, semi-conscious, for an hour or more. I finally turned on the light and read the journal for a couple of hours. It's like your whole life (one segment of it) is passing before your eyes in slow-mo.

5:30 a.m. The eastern horizon was growing lighter when I went to sleep.

Saturday, May 14, 1994

Another twenty-four-hour period which can turn into an isometric struggle as you weather a continuum of isolation which is semi-deliberate. It happens when you're not so good at making plans, and a day is polarized with a typewriter on both ends. It is a magnet for the iron filings of the language. In other words, it was an uneventful Saturday, although your own existence is an ongoing event. Maybe the writing is an attempt to convince myself of that.

Typing in the morning for hours, followed by a work out on a wooden instrument which was interrupted by a phone call. Then it took off while I sat in the kitchen and went into a light-fingered exploration at the speed of sound.

The phone call was from B., who had a slight cold. She still had a few ideas for the weekend, since Diversion is her middle name. I had a few ideas for the weekend too, but they're the sort I would explore with a typewriter. She made it sound like she was going to come over and would get back to me on that, making other calls (having been on the phone for hours, while throwing out old newspapers which were mostly unread). She has done that before, where I am

set up as a back-up plan, making sure I'm there in case her other plans don't work out. It's like a crutch, having to line up social events so one is not alone in a room confronting one's existence.

There was a Greek festival in Oakland, and a dumb play in the evening which she didn't know about, but planned to go anyway. Her socializing is haphazard, and I often hear a night out was boring or a failure, but her main concern is going out. It gives a form and purpose to an evening, where you set up a pivot and everything else revolves around it. If it's a play you get dressed and go to the theater. You know you will have a place to sit for the next couple of hours, because you reserved a seat. In a sense, you have reserved a place for yourself in the near future. You sit through the play and then go have something to drink. It is a tried-and-true routine. Sometimes the play is forgettable, but the process consumes an entire evening.

I have a similar method with a pivot in the morning and the evening. It's the typewriter, around which the hours bend. It constitutes a purpose and a motivation, whether or not it amounts to anything.

B. said she received a disturbing letter from her mother, to the effect: *You'll be thirty-four in October, what are you doing with your life? An ex-boyfriend from ten years ago has a few kids and "manages a $50 million fund."* Not that B. could have stood him for very long. She has a background of private schools with a conservative gentility, but there's a limit to it.

What got her though, her sister called a few times and hung up a few times. She was being critical (they're twins) since B. let her know that she is having an affair with a problematic woman. The sister was having none of it, saying B. was only doing it because she's bored and it isn't worth it, women are too much trouble. It seems the sister has been playing both sides of the fence for a while and B. knows it. One affair was with a woman who turned out to be a borderline mental case. For much of the year the sister lives with their mother in Brooklyn.

Recently a friend was visiting, and the mother got wind of it when she saw the woman leaving the sister's bedroom early in the morning. B. thinks her mother doesn't know about her own affair.

Her mother is concerned, expecting more of her daughters when it comes to being on sound financial footing (B.'s footing involves a dance floor). She wonders when they will get married and have babies. The sisters grew up without a man in the house, so there's that. Meanwhile, things are relatively smooth and quiet with her girlfriend. There have been no arguments for a week. She said she hates having to tread carefully. The way she portrays their relationship is like: talk softly and carry a big vibrator.

6:00 p.m. I lay down for a while and nearly passed out, then went out. I walked a few blocks to Black Point Battery which overlooks the bay. It was built "as an emergency response to the Civil War," and never used. One cannon remains. It is aimed at Sausalito and could blow a sailboat out of the water.[60] I sat on the soft ground under a tree with the wind moving through the eucalyptus trees, with their creaking trunks and branches. The light was fading in and out, in keeping with my mental distractions.

On the way home I passed the wooden houses of an ex-military base, looking like a time-warp from the 1940's. There was a rushing sound of a eucalyptus in full sail. The tree was twisting out of the ground with a massive torque. It was tall and blown through by the wind.

8:00 p.m. I got absorbed in a Kurosawa film, *Yojimbo* (1961), set in 1860. An out-of-work samurai wanders into a village which is caught up in a dispute between warring factions. A dog trots by with a bloody hand in its mouth.

[60] The Spanish were on foot when they stumbled on the bay in 1769 (they thought they were in Monterey), having been sailing past it for two centuries. The entrance to the bay was obscured by fog or otherwise hard to see.

Toshiro Mifune is playing one side off against the other. I was impressed with the range of his acting. He is self-effacing with a comical presence, but sooner or later with a sudden swirl of robes there is a sword in his hand and someone on the ground. Imagine if Charlie Chaplin, another destitute figure on the road, was to whip out a sword and do away with someone in a second. The character is like an expert butcher with enormous patience and a lightning reflex. He doesn't waste any time when he goes into motion. No long sword fights, just a sudden flurry with an economy of movement. He makes every gesture count, as I suppose it would have to when you fend off half a dozen men. Three or four quick moves and that many men are neutralized and he is walking away. He's something of a Lone Ranger type, or the Lone Ranger and Tonto rolled into one, but without a horse or gun. Kurosawa was inspired by westerns.

The second film was *Sanjuro* (1962). I was planning to turn it off (I never watch two movies in a row), but it was holding my attention from one scene to the next. I saw it years ago, but the only thing I remembered well was the last scene, a showdown with the other swordsman. There was a silent face-off within a few feet of each other. A long two-handed sword at the waist of each man, and suddenly it's over. In one quick gesture of removing the sword from his waistband and slicing up and out at a slant (while ducking) he froze while the other man was spurting blood and slowly falling.

I was on the typewriter for a while.

1:00 a.m. Phone call from Jon in St. Helena, and it went on for nearly two hours. He had been drinking on and off for most of the day, but it didn't affect his conversation that much. He said the Phantom of the sound-room was there the other day and spent the night. Jon was surprised at how much his friend is drinking these days. I think he will admit to being an alcoholic. Meanwhile, Jon has been working in his garden, though it's 80 degrees in the

afternoon. He wants to build a mahogany hot tub, and is tired of isolating himself. No wonder there aren't any women around. I know the feeling.

He was shocked by the news footage of countless bodies floating down a river in Rwanda.

3:00 a.m. Read the journal and fell asleep.

Sunday, May 15, 1994

NOTES

Yesterday was a sixteen-hour stretch during which there were moments of feeling lonely, but they're short-lived, to the point you wonder where the time went – not getting around to anything practical. I still have boxes which I haven't opened.

The time-span is broken into one or two-hour segments which fall away like rocket stages. Enough of those in a disjointed continuum and you have gone through an entire day. For example, during the week:

2 hours typing
2 reading
3 office
1 walking
1 guitar
2 the phone
1 television
2 typing

It varies from day to day (less phone/more typing), and there is a couple of hours for meals and mundane things, by which time I have thoroughly inhabited another sixteen-hour stretch. The routine is a four-dimensional structure which supports a man, like a trellis for a vine.

Then you lay unconscious for eight hours like you're on a long-distance flight to another planet. It turns out it is this one in the morning.

Article in the paper on banning automatic weapons, but not near-replicas. That's like saying you can't go over 80 miles per hour on the highway, except with certain kinds of vehicles.

An article on City Hall, with some corruption and ineptitude involving tax collecting (with respect to stadium parking), to the tune of $10,000,000 lost. The tax collector is resigning, which is to say, getting off easy. There was some suggestion that it is because he's black, as if to say he took his position on a ceremonial going-through-the-motions basis. It's like a cargo cult of civic responsibility, so you can't hold him accountable.

Even worse, "the final audit is expected to be completed by month's end, but Deputy Tax Collector… said the city attorney's office has advised him that the document 'is confidential and not a public record'." Say what? The head of the District Attorney's special investigations unit: "I can't imagine how that would not be a public document." No kidding. How can anything involving public funds, much less with the likelihood of misuse, be confidential? Someone unclear on the concept here? The public is better off if the government is transparent. That makes it harder to hide the embezzlement of public funds and the conflicts of interest.

I dropped in on a gallery the other day at the Academy of Art. The television was on, and they often have runway models on it for some reason. At the moment it was the mayor on the runway (Willie Brown), waving and posing with the flashbulbs going off.

An article on the number of executions in China. There were over a thousand last year and maybe forty in the U.S. - with the additional qualifying factor that we don't know of every execution that occurs in China, where the news is more censored than here. How many are unreported, with people just disappearing? It's off the record in a country without a free press. Not that people don't disappear here as well, but it tends to be more obvious. John F. Kennedy was a public execution, and so were Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. Oddly enough, they tend to be on the left side of the political spectrum.

It isn't like this country doesn't have a high body count. It's just that in the land of the free it's not the government that does most of the killing, it's the people. They execute each other with a greater frequency than is found in most countries, in the neighborhood of 20,000 or more each year. Let's hear it for individualism.

Ming brought up something concerning the law office where she works (as a receptionist). There was a look of concern on her face. The law firm represents the city in this case, and one of the attorneys is involved with a lawsuit to dismiss a male student from nursing school. The student has been heard vowing revenge on the law firm, and feeling suicidal he wants to take a few others with him.

The employees were warned, but for some reason no photo of the guy was handed out, even to the guard downstairs. For that matter, the law can't do anything since it was a rumor, nothing more than hearsay. You wonder where the limits of free speech are. I

don't think it is tolerated if one makes bomb threats on a plane, but the rights of the individual have to be protected, even at the expense of everyone else.

During a recent late night call the Actress said something about harassment (we were talking about the play). She brought up Anita Hill, who she said was "nailed to the cross" for her efforts to keep a conservative black judge from getting on the Supreme Court. If so, it was a cross of silver and velvet, with silk bindings and no nails, seeing as how she benefitted greatly from having worked with Clarence Thomas. She goes around the country giving lectures, going to dinners, and being treated like a politically correct princess. I think she was used by the Democrats who wanted to keep a conservative judge off the Supreme Court. It makes you wonder about ulterior motives when the hearings were blown out of proportion to an absurd degree.

At any rate, it was politically advantageous to give a womanizing lecher like Bill Clinton a pass, and his sins far surpassed those of Thomas (and I'm saying this as someone who never votes Republican).

Meanwhile, Thomas was nailed to a cross examination, and he had some reason to be sweating. His appointment to the Supreme Court was hanging in the balance, and over what: some careless remarks to a colleague, a grown woman, who he helped. I don't think her career was ever in danger. If anything, it was enhanced by all of this, while making accusations of verbal improprieties from ten years before.

There was a curious sequence at the end of the play (*Oleanna*), when the two of them froze in a pose of sheer estrangement. The lights went out, and when they came back on the man and woman had dropped their roles and looked relaxed. They approached the front of the stage while holding hands and looking at each other with respect.

I need a shower curtain, shoes,
a long extension cord,
the very fact I think about it
means I must be bored.

I need a dueling tape-deck and a
halfway decent girlfriend,
otherwise I'll turn into a
nervous wreck: the end.

An article in the paper on Jean-Pierre Leaud (who was in Truffaut's film, *The 400 Blows*). He was talking about his latest film. In "… Philippe Garrel's *The Birth of Love*, which won the Silver Lion award at Venice, he plays a middle-aged writer, frustrated in romance." (No comment.)

I met Garrel in Paris in 1976 when I was twenty-four and spending a year in Europe with Simone. We were staying in a cheap hotel near the Sorbonne, and visiting my old professor from San Francisco State, the Greek poet Nanos Valaoritis. He kept an apartment in Montparnasse, and was taking a break from teaching. Through him there were introductions to the poet Gregory Corso, the actress Jean Seberg, the art critic Alain Jouffroy, and nearly the actress Dominique Sanda (I was gone that day).

One afternoon we went to a small screening room in a public building across the river from the Eiffel Tower. We were there to view the rushes from a film Garrel was working on. He was in his twenties with long hair, a short French guy who was no stranger to drugs. He seemed out of it, or stoned at the time, and his footage with no sound was rather inconsequential to put it politely. There were idle shots of Dominique Sanda (who was in *The Conformist* and *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*), like a screen test. I'm sorry I didn't meet her, but Nanos did. He made an impression because he didn't know who she was, so he wasn't giving her the star treatment and she liked that.

There was some footage of Nico in a dark room with a fire. She was going through the motions of lifting a gun to her head (no sound). We never heard her voice, though she sang with the Velvet Underground in the 1960's. Nico had a long affair with Garrel. She also fell in love with heroin.[61]

It all bordered on the vacant, and Corso of course was not very patient. He was talking out loud, saying "This is boring," and "What's the big deal?" His occasional benefactor, Jean Seberg, had a sanctimonious response, telling him to hush, "We're viewing the work of an artist." Afterward we went to dinner at La Coupole with her sitting at the head of the table and footing the bill (I think). Simone and I were sitting across from Corso who drew The Sorrow of Saturn on my placemat. He was trying to get some money out of Jean Seberg, ostensibly for dental work, so he could buy heroin.

Anyhow, Philippe Garrel.

Early morning. I woke up from a dream with the light streaming across the floor from the windows in the front room. I had an erection that wouldn't quit, probably from the REM phase,

[61] Flash forward many years. I looked her up in Wikipedia, and it said that "Nico claimed never to have taken the drug while in the Velvets/Factory scene but only began using during her relationship with Philippe Garrel in the 1970s." She was born in Germany in 1938, just in time for World War II. I went to see her in a punk club in North Beach in 1979. I found it underwhelming, since it was just her on a harmonium. I think the club was half-empty, or maybe that was the mood. I later regretted not trying to meet her, though she was known for being difficult. She died in Ibiza in 1988 when she fell off a bicycle.

having been asleep for about three hours. It's inconvenient when you have to take a leak. You stand in one end of the bathtub while producing a high arc to the other end (almost).

The dream:

> There are massive freeway overpasses, underneath which, lurking among the columns and supports, is a subculture of people who don't have much. I have just come into the possession of an expensive jeweled bracelet. I think a gambler had to get rid of it, maybe it was stolen. I walked around and climbed through the girders under the freeway looking for somewhere to hide the bracelet. I went by a couple making out in the shadows and thought, "They're not coming up for air." I found a hidden ledge and left the bracelet there and walked away (not sure why I didn't wear it, maybe not my style). However, it turned out the freeway was in the process of being torn down by machines which lower an elevated roadway to the ground. They do this without much warning or concern for anyone loitering or living under the freeway, though most of them had left by then, alerted by the noise of the machines. I ran back into the maze of a collapsing freeway to retrieve the bracelet. I'm dodging and ducking the falling tons of jagged cement until I realize it isn't worth the risk. It's a tense situation which I could walk away from, and I do by coming to.

I went back to sleep for a few hours, and woke up with a dream-powered erection. Both were fading as I became more conscious.

The weekend turned into a tour de force of isolation in a continuum of thought and concentration and what else? An isometric psychology. I delve into it once in a while, but I wouldn't want to make a habit of it. You realize how much you depend on the presence and responses of others. When you go without other people for a day or two it's like you're falling forward into space and time. You end up feeling stoic, under pressure, keeping a grip on yourself and what you're doing. I think it would be counterproductive in the long run.

It doesn't sound like a long time, two days, but it is relative. If you go for two days only using your left hand, or doing without something vital (like food), the hours stretch out. What gets me is how deliberate it was. I'm not very good at making plans, never knowing what I feel like doing until the last minute. The situation tends to give way to the typewriter, and the muses

know it. I think they orchestrate a lot of this in order to maintain a grip on my shoulder. They sit there like a stern angel driving away the women and diverting my attention.

I could have called someone, but I didn't. It turned out several women friends were out of town. I suppose you learn a few things, and it gives you some perspective when you stand back from the usual socializing. Your head clears and you see how some men and women are full of life because they're always around others, constantly refreshed as they reflect the energy and emotions of others. There are women I have known who're never alone. They wouldn't dream of cutting themselves off from that stream of consciousness or fountain of communal human energies. It keeps them going, and it generates their facial expressions. It is something of a dependency, and many can't think for themselves. A group mentality becomes a habit.

You wonder if some people become writers not because they have a special talent, or their observations are more accurate, but because they have an aptitude for being alone and that's where the words come from. They're not collapsing in the quiet, and it gives a lot of thoughts and questions time to materialize in a space a couple of feet from their forehead. I also lean heavily on a wooden instrument. I couldn't handle this without it. There are mental forces where you're thrown against the ropes, or the steel strings of a guitar.

4:00 p.m. I went out for a long walk on Polk Street, picking up a few things. Black beans and ginseng for the unsung, a Black Hook porter and some grains. There was a woman working in the health food store who I used to like.[62] Drop into a bookstore on a whim, Hog on Ice, and

[62] I still like her, but the crush has gone away. We were like hips that pass in the night, if not broad daylight. It was a close encounter, and she paid me a visit when I gave her a note, curious as to what I had in mind, or who I was. We parted on friendly terms, with her committed to someone else. There was an encounter (a year or two later) which was more revealing. She was standing near the ocean with no clothes on while I walked along the edge of the water. She was with a man, so I kept on walking, not sure

had a close encounter with the history of erotica. It was potent and poetic, from Franz von Bayros to "Anonymous." A long-limbed languid lady lifts a leg, and lover man is going on at length. In addition, there was discount psychology.

I flipped through a book, *The Wild Girls' Club*, by a young Jewish woman from New York. Her name sounded like "ankle radish," and her writing was about as appealing. It purportedly shows how modern women are very blunt, but I'm not sure if that's a sign of progress. Men are accused of making fornication vulgar, while women make it sound as appealing as day-old leftovers in the refrigerator. Some of the most mundane accounts of sex have been from women, and you wonder if that is why so many are uninterested in sex, or require a massive effort to get them in the mood.

It was curious how salacious she was. There were early experiments with a video camera, recording various body parts which were rendered in unflattering terms. A lot of men wouldn't want to see things in such a cold supermarket light, as it would go a long way in discouraging the urge. Getting a woman's point of view can be a harrowing experience. A traditional romanticism has been deconstructed and demystified, and given a heavy dose of Lysol. Maybe it is New York City, like there's something in the water where the terminal mundane is magnified.

7:00 p.m. On a wooden instrument in the kitchen for an hour, feeling like a virtuoso of the loveless (or in other words, delusional). At some point I was on the phone with the Actress. I think she's turning forty-one today, and I thought we might do something. Maybe she was expecting more in the way of plans, but she took off for Mendocino yesterday with her daughter and just got back. They want me to come over, but they live in Marin. For the first time in a long time I regretted not having a car, but she said they will drop by tomorrow night.

---

about approaching someone in those circumstances, a large-breasted woman with red hair. Hello, Fiona. (Many years later, in a cybernetic after-life, we kept up a remote connection on the internet.)

I turned on the tube, a documentary on toads and frogs. There's a wood frog in Canada which remains frozen all winter and comes back to life in the spring. That was followed by a frog orgy in a pond, with a foam of whipped-up sperm. I was feeling kind of lonely, so I went up on the roof, which was a spiritual experience. A little cold, with some wind, the vapors moving across town like a force of silent UFO's coordinated by the moon. A star, a planet, and a plane. I sat on the deck, leaning against the door. The deck is a platform for viewing outer space.

Half an hour later I went downstairs, revived by the elements and the void, if not the view itself (it provides some distance in my life). Getting out of the apartment helps, but it wouldn't have been the same if I was sitting in the alley with the garbage cans. I was back on the typewriter for a couple of hours, testing my limits. How far can you go on words alone? You wonder why you put yourself through it, feeling like the fellow in "The Hunger Artist," (a story by Kafka). Or the guy in *Altered States* who experiments with sensory deprivation. There are those who make a desert of their life in order to walk around having visions. They become delirious in the pressure of being and nothingness, or something to that effect. I know it's relative, and many would be not be impressed with the ontological pressure of a weekend spent alone. The fact of it is amplified when one is living alone. You push a pre-existing condition to an extreme to see it more closely, like a man who senses shadows in his life and wants to see what total darkness is like.[63]

It appears that I am restless and dependent on others, and wouldn't be surprised if I have multiple personalities (the very thing I wonder about Ming). Or maybe they are characteristics, for example:

---

[63] Flash forward to 2007 – I met an older woman at a yoga retreat near Santa Cruz, a professor who taught a form of meditation, and we had an affair. I would visit her in Berkeley and sometimes found her in a silent mode, spending the day without speaking. She tried a more severe meditation which involved immersing herself in the darkness of a cave for a day or two. It shook her up, being harder than she expected. We talked about it, and when I said that babies die for lack of touch she burst into tears.

a) The detachment of a lone wolf.
b) At home in a crowded nightclub.
c) The urge to be a disembodied spirit.
d) Obsessed with women.

I suppose you have to step back and let all your facts, I mean facets, and personas come out, as they will when it is quiet. Given a mental overdrive it is exhausting, like you're sweating out a lot of shadows and rumors. You find out if the pressure on your life is self-inflicted, your own worst anomie at times. It may be purifying, but it's way too sober, like I'm going through detox. Not to say my friends are intoxicating, but….

The Ramones were on the radio, having fun in the warm California sun.[64]

1:00 a.m. I went to bed, or tried to, but should have known it wouldn't be easy, having built up a resistance and momentum for a couple of days. I was tired but a little tense, so it took a while before I fell asleep. I lay in the dark while the doubts were floating up. I'm haunted by a few women, and one in particular. We talk so much it leaves a stream of woman-oriented consciousness running through me. I think she wants to instigate that sort of effect until there is an endless conversation in my head, and it continues when she isn't there. I said as much, and she approved. She likes having someone she can talk to and discuss things with, but I'm spending too much time on her.

Some women can insinuate themselves into the inner mental circuits of a man, not because they want to marry him, but in order to instill an image of themselves. It's something they can count on to reflect their life and keep them in focus over the months and years, and it

[64] I saw them in 1978 (Santa Monic Civic), and 1988 (the Fillmore – with the band emerging at full volume from a cloud of dry ice smoke). I hardly ever see the same band twice.

assures he won't forget them. Ming wants me to monitor her life and tell her if and when she's getting weird.[65]

Monday, May 16, 1994

9:00 a.m. Woke up feeling like I slept hard. There was another dream, some forces have been stirring the subconscious lately.

> I was talking with a man in prison, maybe giving legal advice. He had been out on parole, but was accused of kidnapping a young boy. It didn't look good for him, but he hadn't done anything wrong. The boy didn't think he was abducted, they were hanging out. The convict felt good in the company of an innocent kid. It was a relief from what he was used to (other convicts, for example), but everyone assumed the worst.

Typing in the morning, distillations of a mortal on location, and I realized something else. Caught up in those isometric struggles I had gone another weekend without cleaning the kitchen or taking out the garbage. There was a phone call from Ming at work. I wondered why she hadn't called last night when she got back, and she apologized, saying she was tired but the trip was worth it, although it rained one night and the drive up was a bit much. Actually, it didn't sound so good. 4 ½ hours on the back of a motorcycle on winding roads while it was getting dark. Nevertheless, they had a lazy day or two at Salt Point (which is further than Bodega Bay).

She said, "How was your weekend?" I said it wouldn't have been more different if I had died or been arrested (an exaggeration). I was isolating at home, becoming studious and

[65] I had a girlfriend in the early 80's who I had known for ten years (Cybele), and she wanted me to tell her what she looked like before she put on weight. I was her personal historian in that respect. It seems that living in the present didn't do much for her memory. We lived together for a while (she had a dream that we were a happy couple), but it lasted half a year. We remained friends, the past receded further in the past, and the woman had her secrets. But she relied on me to remember how she looked in her younger days. She was gorgeous with wild blonde hair and sensuous lips, a radiant vision of a woman who worked in a café in the Haight. She impressed me further when a women's dance troupe she was in performed at Project Artaud (I inherited their studio when they went back to New York). At some point they took off their clothes in front of the audience and put on other outfits, changing their social profiles. I remember her tits jutting out as a lesbian ran around naked and leaping into the air while spraying herself with underarm deodorant. I have a good memory, but being around a memorable woman helps.

concentrated. She thought that would be good for her to do because she wants to "get my life in order" (a common phrase of hers), and might forego a trip to Humboldt with some friends next weekend. When you externalize your struggles by leaving town you deal with things which aren't so personal, like roads, the weather, motorcycles, and drunken people. It gets you out of yourself. If it becomes a habit, then you might be on the road for a long time.

12:30 p.m. Phone call from B., who was going on about her girlfriend. They have a counseling session tonight, and she thinks she will be outnumbered since it will be two lesbians and one bisexual. She wondered what she should do or say. One bone of contention: her girlfriend wants her to tell her straight friends about her, and won't be introduced unless it's on those terms. B. is not comfortable with that just yet. Ilsa sounds a little phony, saying B. should do it for herself. B. doesn't know what to think. She doesn't want to be drawn into an exclusively lesbian world (or labeled as such), which has been happening when she hangs around with Ilsa. She said they go to bars in a gay neighborhood (the Castro), and she has had it with the private club atmosphere. The attitude of being superior to straight people is getting on her nerves, partly because she doesn't see any evidence of it.

I went to work in the afternoon, but there was not much going on (the Attorney was in the conference room). I talked with the receptionist. Her hair had been long and straight, but now it was moussed and tangled. I said it looked like she hadn't combed it. "Thank you." It seems she isn't getting along with Aisha. Ami thinks she has an "attitude" and is "fucking condescending." I don't know if it's an arriviste routine or what, but she doesn't like it.

V. was in a pleated silk dress, and said, “Do you like it?” I didn’t say no. While we were talking I brought up the Bay to Breakers race (which was yesterday). The fastest woman is 5’ 1” and weighs 85 pounds.[66] V. said, “I’m fat.”

I went home after two hours.

6:30 p.m. The woman from Marin and her daughter arrived, with the latter on the intercom downstairs. “It’s the police.” Maya is 4’ 8”, under 70 pounds, and showed me how she can put two hands around her leg past the knee (wearing shorts). I told her the long-distance runner’s weight, and said,

> “What if you didn’t grow anymore?”
> “I’d kill myself.”

She is used to the company of adults and her theatrical divorced mother. She is self-aware, and having some difficulties at school. “I hate it.” We didn’t linger on the subject as there was a warning look from her mother. Maya feels like she has few friends and isn’t up to speed, academically. The former surprised me, but she said the girls in school are sort of “dumb.” She isn’t connecting with her peers, a tomboy with an avid curiosity and some artistic leanings.

We had a nice time on the fire escape on the fourth floor over the street. I had to discourage her from spitting. Also burping. I said, “What else can you do, besides burping and spitting? Never mind.” We were sitting behind the railing and looking down, with Angel Island floating at the end of the street. She called to people walking by, and was chewing on a rope of red licorice. It was four or five feet long and she devoured all of it. Then we climbed up the

---

[66] Flash forward to 2012, “Ethiopian, Kenyan Lead the Way at SF Bay to Breakers Race” (cbsnews.com). That’s no surprise, but the fact that a “woman was the first to finish the course” was hard to believe. Her time was 39 minutes and three seconds. In second place was a man. His time was 34 minutes and 41 seconds. What’s wrong with this picture? A little social engineering took place: “… a time ‘equalizer’… allows the women’s field to start the race about 4 minutes and 30 seconds before the men….” Even then he was only a few seconds behind her. I think it undermines the concept of equality when it’s more about results than equal opportunities.

ladder bolted to the side of the building to the roof. I was underneath her just in case. We walked to the deck and she climbed over the picket fence, with a long suspension bridge in the distance.

Back in the apartment she went through the drawers in the kitchen and found a plastic space ship, a yo-yo, and a small propeller. There was also the guitar in the living room, but she said, "I'm bored." The mother opened her presents (which V. said were boring and didn't cost enough). A couple of large shower gels (vanilla bean and strawberry), a card, and a pin with a hologram of the earth which Maya wanted. They tried out the scents, with Maya claiming she didn't have a scent, or maybe it was "dirty sweatshirt." She sat between us on the black sofa while smearing vanilla bean gel on her knee to see if it worked.

The sequences here are a little jumbled. At some point Maya wanted me to do a song on the guitar (I had changed the words to "Fly Me to the Moon" so it sounded like a break-up tune). Then she strummed the guitar while I formed the chords and her mother and I improvised some lyrics, where the mother met a guy in a laundromat and ended up with a naked wedding. I met a girl in the frozen food section of a grocery store. I thought she was posin', but she was frozen.

The Actress pulled out a sheet of lyrics she wrote. They were on a theme of love lost, or impossible love which leaves you crying, hurt, etc. Maya read the lyrics out loud and – with her mother in the other room – stuck her tongue out and rolled her eyes. The Actress wanted me to put some music to her words, like a song would come together by spontaneous combustion. I showed Maya a couple of chords with her thin soft fingers on the frets. I think she has an aptitude, and also plays the viola. The Actress tried it and was even worse on the guitar than Ming, which I didn't think was possible. She strummed and hit some awful notes, and we wondered what to call it. I said,

"Mother Needs a Psychiatrist."
"She already has one," said her daughter.

I was going to give her a card with lines like, “I’m still having a difficult childhood.” The two of us went through half a bottle of wine, and she snuck a cigarette with her daughter out of the room. It was nearly ten when they left, and past Maya’s bedtime. I walked them to their car in a light rain.

There had been some discussion with the Actress about her writing something to perform, a one-woman routine. She has an acting coach, a dramaturge, but isn’t getting very far with it. She may need a writing teacher for motivation or direction, having tried everything from Joan of Arc to growing up in Montreal. I think what she wants to express, and admitted as much, has more to do with her anger and confusion about men, the last one in particular. However, she is reluctant, thinking it’s been done before. Everyone has their own story, and it’s often the particulars that make it worthwhile, but how personal does she want to get?

10:30 p.m. Ming called earlier, so I called her back. We talked for an hour until she was getting sleepy. I stay in contact with her as a reality check, and keep to our usual wavelength of benevolent detachment with a lot of reverb. It goes from the sarcastic to a kind of soul communion and back again. The chemistry requires a certain distance though, or else it would be choked off.

Later that night I was reading the journal and came across a quote which was disconcerting and revealing, by the writer William Gass. A 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 transubstantiation of them.

Sounds familiar, being judged on the basis of materialistic side-effects (or should I say

objectified?), whether income, height, or housing, with the man himself remaining an irrelevant blur. That might explain why many women are not a good judge of character, by their own admission and to their detriment. Their perspective is less personal and more social, thinking in terms of place and reputation in a realm of group-think. The men are interchangeable when you have a sociological outlook. When women speak of wanting to marry a lawyer or a doctor, the men are defined by their occupation. The individual matters less than his social position (but the individual is where a few pathologies are lurking).

If some women have a life of slippery promiscuities and legendary indecision, it may have something to do with navigating by external signs and surfaces. There are men of dubious character with lots of money, and a woman clinging to it like an abalone on a rock. It helps her to withstand the ebb and tide of life, and the man remains a stooge. His character is less important than his bank account, on which she is intently focused.

Taking the above into account, it's rather odd when women complain that men don't like them for their minds. I wonder if the anger of some men comes from being out of focus in a woman's eyes. A man is lashing out when he feels depersonalized, not to say insulted when a woman doesn't listen. Why would she, if he's just a socio-economic profile and she only listens to herself? Maybe he is raw material which a woman wants to mold to her specifications, like altering a dress. He is there to be customized and verbally whipped into shape, or reduced to a manageable dimension. That would be presumptuous on her part, but the presumption goes well with her wardrobe.

Imbued with the significance of her feelings, it is hard to take seriously that a man is human just like her - especially if women are life itself and men are expendable. I see women working on a man's psychology like they're operating a strange machine whose effects they're

trying to figure out. They may have the sex drive of a dish rag, but behavioral modification is their middle name.

Several women friends were with men they wanted to have around for a long time, but they rode the men too hard. It's like the man was hidden by materialistic concerns and their own short-sightedness (a side-effect of narcissism). They were sharpening their claws on someone so objectified he might as well have been a rug nailed to a piece of wood. If a man is treated like a sex object it doesn't sound so bad, at least he's getting laid, but he realizes sooner or later who is in control.

How could these women have been so wrong about the psychology of their men unless the men were so objectified (and the women so self-centered) that the women didn't realize their own effect? They were devastated when it fell apart, admitting later they would hit a man with friction as soon as he got home from work. This was roughly the scenario for Ming a few months ago, the Actress last year, and the Czech woman a couple of years ago – where the man didn't walk out on her, he killed himself.

B. had a suitor, but was oblivious to the fact of there being a real person behind the superficial role she had assigned to him. He might as well have been a cardboard figure who could drive her around, as if that was all there was to him, and as far as she was concerned it was. She led him on for nearly two years, a polite escort who was satisfied with a goodnight kiss, while assuming they were headed for the altar. She wasn't focused on the feelings of the man, or would have known what was going on inside him. It took her a while to figure it out, but she had no intention of getting married (things came to a head when he was making plans for her to meet his mother). The fact that she was wasting his time and setting him up for a letdown was hard to

acknowledge because she didn't see him as a person. He was in love with her, but men are easier to manipulate when they're in love.

I've often been impressed with a woman's awareness, so it's a quandary when they are so obtuse with men. With Simone, for example: we were together for nearly ten years, but at some point I was reeling from her jealousies and arguments which lasted for hours (which was partly my fault for succumbing to the situation – it takes two to tango). It felt like she couldn't see me, much less hear me. We had been together for years and she was still wrongheaded about the man she lived with. There were suspicions that had little substance, and arguments that she would save for when she wanted a little drama. Out of the blue I would be hit with something. And what is frustrating, while absorbing all that nervous friction coming at you, is that you're just a blur to someone. Your words are wasted, and if you can't communicate then what does that leave? She was barely aware of what it was doing to the relationship, and how much I could take before I wanted to live alone.

The ex-girlfriend from a few years ago is much younger, and we were together for five years. I was impressed with how mature she was about arguments, and generally steered away from those. I thought it was due to her awareness of others, but it was more because she didn't like friction or drama. Nora had her own version of "it's not the man but his aura, effects, and place," where it doesn't matter if you walk out on him with no warning. The decision only involves one person, and what you're walking out on is not the man himself, but a life style, a living arrangement with a beat-up car, and not a human who might warrant talking to before you bail out (having lined up the next one). She later said she had to be cold-blooded about leaving or

could never go through with it. Within a couple of months she had returned and was insinuating herself into my bed, but the bloom was off the rose.

Similarly, the woman I was with through much of 1992, who was about my age, decided to end it. I got a letter with no warning. Actually, I was a little dense, and there were warning signs along the way. I had women friends who thought she was a spider woman, her home was sterile and metallic (a converted warehouse), and she had a history of estrangement from her own daughter ("Any fool can have kids," she said.). At any rate, she was controlling the agenda, and the man was incidental when it was time to write him off.[67] I wrote a letter in return which burned the bridge that she had closed.[68]

Ming and I have a history of close encounters and ambiguous collaborations, from massages with no clothes on to the both of us in a bathtub with a bottle of tequila. One night we were getting more familiar than we usually do (it was several years ago). There must have been a few drinks, and maybe a smoke. She wasn't wearing much, so maybe there had been a massage. My hand was on her silken bush, and I was ready to go further, but she sat up, muttering something to the effect, "It takes me forever." That may be true, but I had lots of time. Most of the time I know it's better if we keep the sexual on a low flame on the back burner. It seems to

[67] It turned out my apartment wasn't clean enough, and I had "phallocentric" tendencies. That's hard to argue with when the phallus is centrally located. I think she meant I wasn't gynocentric enough, although she never said anything. She may have had a point, but I've been sleeping with women for a quarter of a century and no one ever told me that. And technically, "Phallocentrism is the ideology that the phallus, or male sexual organ, is the central element in the organization of the social world." I'd be having a lot more sex if that was my philosophy. Reminds me of a young man at a nude beach who was hung like a satyr. He kept it half-erect by an occasional sleight-of-hand, and walked around as if it was his calling card, a way to meet women. It didn't work, there was muffled laughter, and he retreated to his lonely towel.

[68] A year later we found ourselves standing side by side in front of a painting in a gallery. Her hair was a tangled concealment, but I knew it was her. We didn't say a word while staring at the painting for a minute, then walked away.

bring out the worst in her, and sooner or later the men become expendable or alienated if they go to bed with her.

What happens when a woman's love for someone is entangled with external, even superficial, aspects – "place and reputation, money, effects." All of those could go through an adjustment and throw her off. It doesn't mean the love is not affecting her, like when a young girl is in love with a rock star and has his poster on the wall. The man is indistinguishable from his glamorous side-effects, but that doesn't mean she isn't losing sleep. She could be mooning over someone on a shallow basis, and it feels like love.

Women say they have a hard time understanding men, but that is not surprising if one's view of them is skin deep.

On a more tragic level, you wonder how well a woman knows a man. I'm thinking of one of our clients, the Latino in his late thirties who is a mild-mannered truck driver. His girlfriend was a legal secretary (who I met). She had his baby, and two weeks later they had an argument. He was drunk, but she must have known he has a temper if you push him too hard, especially when he's drinking.

In the midst of the argument she yelled, "The baby isn't yours!" I'm not sure you could say anything worse under the circumstances, and he lost his mind. He picked up a knife (another reason not to argue in the kitchen) and stabbed her, and before he knew it she was on the floor and dying. It didn't matter how mortified and sorry he was for a heat of the moment reaction. He's now doing ten years in prison for second degree murder. I don't have much sympathy for

him as nothing warrants that sort of response. Anything would have been better, even slapping her. At least she would be alive, and probably living somewhere else.[69]

Tuesday, May 17, 1994

Typing for a few hours.

I went to work in the afternoon wearing a dark suit and feeling upbeat for some reason (it was against my better judgment). I am sometimes on the verge of a peripheral suspicion that there is a monthly mood shift of the astrological persuasion. At any rate, there was an air sign on the way.

I was working for a while, then went out for a cigarette. I have to walk up to the next floor, a small balcony with a view, and brought my tea. I had rolled a cigarette when the door opened and a young woman pulling a cart with letters appeared. She was taking a break, and was friendly and charming – leaning over the railing and wondering what it would be like to jump. Black hair in a pony tail and a UPS uniform. Maybe twenty years old, and 95 pounds as she later told me. You have to be able to lift 75 pounds to work for UPS (and the union takes some of her wages). At the moment she is on the 25-pound level because she hurt her knee training for the race last weekend. I think she is a Filipina. I let her do most of the talking, though now and then responding or asking something. There was an ease about her, and when I finished my cigarette and was ready to leave I told her my name and she gave me hers (Julie), and held out her hand.

5:00 p.m. I was supposed to rendezvous with Ming for a workout. I called her at work, but she had gone home early. I called her place and she answered, sounding sleepy, having been

[69] When Ming was going to San Francisco State she had to write a report about battered women, and was going to interview the person who ran La Casa de las Madres. It offers a refuge and counseling for women, and is open 24/7. She asked me to go with her, and we brought a tape-recorder. After a while she ran out of questions, and I continued the interview. I was impressed by the woman's dry acknowledgment that most of the women go back to the men who abused them.

sleeping for a couple of hours. She was having hot and cold flashes in the office and didn't feel well, her whole body was stiff and sore. It was one of her worst periods, which she had missed for two or three months (because of stress, she said). So much for the workout. I said I would call her later.

6:00 p.m. I walked to B.'s studio apartment on Bush. We were in the kitchen for a couple of hours, talking, having a beer, and eating strawberries. She said our friend Phoebe is in a difficult relationship, and is draining it to the last drop of melodrama.

Closer to home, there were two letters from a guy who's been carrying a torch for her for a couple of years, who she regards as a friend. He is amusing with a quick mind and a motorcycle, in his late thirties, and a bit unstable with his drinking and emotions. This is the one who was smashing wine bottles at his birthday party. He is half-black and part Russian I believe. She never let him think they were anything but friends, but he's been after her for a long time, wanting to deepen their relationship, but she refuses. She is now getting puzzled and offended by his attitude. He sent her something a comedian wrote about men being full of semen. The guy is tired of being seen as a eunuch escort. Most of the time I've been on her side, thinking she doesn't owe him anything.

I told her she should put him out of his misery. It isn't like he is a stranger, he's a friend and they do things together. The reality of someone else in her life would go a long way in cooling his jets, and it would ease his mind when it comes to her ambiguous availability. There is nothing which can turn a man off like knowing a woman is with someone else (at least in my experience).

Two problems here:

(a) I think she likes to be ambiguous. There is a current of attention coming at her, and she doesn't want to alienate him by being too honest.

(b) She would tell him there is someone else if that someone was a man. However, the other person is a woman, and she doesn't want anyone to know she's sleeping with a woman, especially him, who she thinks would flip out. He's paranoid about the women he likes becoming lesbians. It has happened before, and it is not uncommon in this town. Also, he would tell everyone. "He has a big mouth."

For most of the affair I've been on her side, assuming she has the right to not tell anyone – even though her girlfriend wants it out in the open. B. thinks it's no one's business who she's sleeping with. Now I wonder if there's some duplicity in this arrangement, wanting to maintain a "straight" reputation while having an affair with a serious lesbian. She doesn't want to alienate a few men who are useful and/or socially diverting, but they're being misled.

B. showed me one of the letters from the bottle-thrower. There is no privacy when women are involved. If men were to pass around a woman's letters while discussing her body and sexual responses, including the size of her sex organ, it would still fall short of how women talk about men. There is less of it with men because they don't want to put a stripped-down image of their girlfriend in another guy's mind. Also, they have other things to think about. I didn't think his letter was so bad or offensive. It was the sentiments of a man in love who wants to get laid. We knocked it around for a while. I suggested some dishonesty on her part, but she wouldn't let up until I said what she wanted to hear – that she was doing the right thing.

8:00 p.m. I called Ming to see if she needed anything. She said, "Yogurt, pickles, carrot juice, a bottle of wine. How about some fish?" I walked to a store, bought a lot of stuff, and it was nearly nine when I got to her place. She was sitting spread-legged on the white floor in red jumper pajamas, her long black hair a mess, and her bosom looking heavier or sagging. Maybe it was how she was sitting, but I've heard her refer to it as Sag Harbor. She keeps telling me she's gaining weight, and if we go to the pool she might displace too much water. Ming was gratified with what I brought, but wasn't feeling well, like a grumpy lump of female problems. We were

sitting on the floor, having some wine, and she lightened up, but didn't want to hear about a 95-pound delivery girl.

10:30 pm. I went into the kitchen and started dinner, cooking rice and frying the red snapper with green onions, pepper, and lemon juice. Ming threw together a salad. At the kitchen table the conversation was holding up, with some dialectical standoffs. She was drinking lots of tea, and talking about how much she pees and how it's darker and that worries her. Her physical processes are as real a topic for conversation as anything else, so I heard that she's been having four-grain cereal in the morning and it makes her "poop." On a vegetarian diet she often went two or three days without "pooping," so this was roughage.

After midnight we were back in her room. I wasn't sure if I should spend the night if she was ill. On the other hand, I was getting comfortable, and she wanted someone around tomorrow if she called in sick. I was given some violet thermal tights to wear with an open shirt, and we went to sleep.

Wednesday, May 18, 1994

Woke up around 8 a.m. Ming said she had gotten up to pee last night "about ten times," and was stiff and sore and not going to work. She lay on the pillow looking at me and said in a quiet voice, "Would you give me a back rub?" I thought about it for a minute, but finally pulled the covers back and straddled her butt. I was wearing the violet long-johns and rocking slowly while I massaged her neck and shoulders. The situation was a little ambiguous since I had the usual morning hard-on (semi), which was pressing on her behind.

She didn't mind, and we pretended not to notice. She was gratified by the massage which sometimes hurt, from her shoulder blades to her tailbone, and I threw in arms and hands. When I

was done I slid off, with her saying how good it felt. She doesn't like anyone to touch her these days, meaning she almost never gets a massage, and is one of the more tense and stressed-out women I know.

We have concluded that she isn't frail or sensitive, or even vulnerable. She takes issue with that sometimes, and just what sort of bulldozer do I take her for? Sometimes her friends, including me, make her stressed out. That was news to me, but last night and this morning our rapport was in a more revealing vein. When someone is ill they tend to let their guard down, and she has a guard like the Great Wall of China. I said she often gives the impression of being cold and indifferent, but she said that isn't what is going on inside. Last night she said she didn't want me disappearing in the morning, so it would appear she worries about things (including me and my moods) more than she lets on.

There was an earlier discussion about her being contagious, which led to a double entendre when I wondered if I'm immune to her. One is inoculated with small amounts of poison until you build up an immunity – a little hair of the dog that bit you, that sort of thing - and she said, "I'M NOT POISON!" She repeated it again when there was no response.

Last night we got into some tough-love observations about each other. She thought I come up with comments which sound like a compliment, but end up feeling like an insult. At some point she said, "You think I'm evil, don't you?" That isn't necessarily bad, since she hates being treated in a patronizing manner, and relishes a give and take that corresponds to the pain of a good workout. When I talk like that, she knows I'm free of romantic delusions. We were lying close together and she was relaxed. It seemed like I was guarding her with my body, and she fell asleep. Eventually I rolled over and passed out for an hour.

We finally got up and went into the kitchen. She made breakfast – four-grain cereal, scrambled eggs, toast, and coffee. I was in those violet tights, which show the outline of the male organ when I'm standing. There was a back porch in the morning light full of plants and flowers. She pulled her skirts and blouses off the line, still in a red jumper with the rear flap hanging down. There are times, even at her most disheveled, when she is adorable. There was a sullen lack of interest in her own appearance. Back in her room the two of us were sitting on the bed. She struggled out of her jumper, showing a tan back and a heavy bosom swaying as she strapped on a black bra, put a sweatshirt on with dark jeans pulled over jockey briefs, and said, "Let's go." I put my suit back on with an open shirt and we left.

We went to a health food store in the Mission (Rainbow). She headed for the vitamins, B complex, something to do with stress. I said, "Why don't you take a valium like a normal person?" (quoting a drag queen on KUSF), then found some massage oil. It was called Venus Oil. I put some on her hand and she liked it.

After paying for the grains and cereals we left, and took a bus to the Civic Center. During the ride the bus pulled to a stop. We were sitting in the front section reserved for the old and infirm, and Ming said we should move, some old people were getting on. We got up, and a minute later two black women in their thirties took our seats, with a third in another reserved seat. That left several white people in their seventies walking towards the back. We got up and gave them our seats. It would have been interesting if I had gone up front and talked to the black women about giving up their seats, especially with the driver a black man. He didn't care, although when I was sitting there he saw me with a pastry from the store. He got out of his seat and told me that it wasn't allowed.

I just remembered the discussion last night, on the pros and cons of having too much self-esteem. I think it has a habit of eclipsing any substance, and I'm tired of a self-mythologizing egotism which is based on what people of the same race might have done thousands of years ago and 10,000 miles away (and which ancestors you share with a few hundred million others).[70] She is more tolerant of that sort of thing, but encounters like the women on the bus are making her think twice. There was an episode when she was sitting next to a black woman and may have sat on the strap of her bag (which was on Ming's seat). For a good while the woman was in a huff.

We got off the bus at City Hall and she had to sit down for a few minutes, feeling tired after standing on the bus. Then we walked to the farmers' market. If she can leave with several bags of fruit and vegetables for less than four bucks it makes her happy. We reverted to an ancient custom of a woman in the village market, with a man along to carry things. Later we were near the fountain in front of City Hall and watching some Chinese kids. Ming said she used to look like a doll.

It was just a few blocks to her place, where she changed into boxer shorts and a sleeveless T-shirt. It was warm out. A few clouds drifted by the curving windows on the third floor, with Sutro Tower pulsing in the distance. She was tuned into the plants and objects in her room, the little things on glass shelves. I said they were an externalization of her inner being, and if I moved them it would have an effect on her. She said, "Maybe." I touched a candlestick and she jerked. I moved a rock and she shivered. I picked up a vertebra and she stared. I put my finger in it momentarily – no response. Earlier we were talking about her hot flashes, and if they came from the friction of her contradictions rubbing together. She wasn't sure about that.

---

[70] There seems to be a fallacy that great amounts of self-esteem are necessary for success (which is putting the cart before the horse). When it comes to music or the military or Buddhist monks, the apprentice is informed that being full of himself is not a good idea. The ego is thought to be unwieldy and presumptuous. It gets in the way of learning, and is thrown out the window.

We were lounging on the bed, and I thought I should be leaving soon. The conversation drifted into a fine-tuned honest vein about our love lives, past and present. She asked how long I had gone without sex. “Too long,” I said, though it was partly my fault. I had burned out on the various problems one can have with women (or relationships in general), and I wasn’t making much of an effort. It was comfortable, not having to deal with the emotional fluctuation, and other things were absorbing, including what I hadn’t expected. I was being sustained by the love of a few women friends, including her. She liked the sound of that.

I don’t meet a lot of people when I’m caught up in a mental dimension of the writing, and I am used to full-blown operatic love affairs which go on for years. Something inside me won’t settle for less. Ming said, “You have high standards.” I said, “Sometimes.” She wished she did. She doesn’t want to slip into a half-assed situation which is merely convenient or provisional.

I said maybe when I’m older with a higher income I could utilize the services of call girls.[71] She didn’t like that, but said it isn’t very different from her old custom of sleeping with a man with no emotional involvement, just sex - and she didn’t have to pay for it. Ming said she has gone three months or more with no sex, and doesn’t see it happening in the near future. Furthermore, she would like to approach it differently, rather than being on the receiving end which tends to have more power and less risk. When it is coming at you, you can take it or leave it. She now wants to go out on a limb with someone. I doubted she would put herself through that, not having known much in the way of rejection, but she isn’t impressed with women who let a man take all the risks.

There was a love affair that fell apart when she was nineteen. It left her so upset she went without anyone for a year. That is hard to imagine, but it still surprises me when others sleep

[71] Flash forward in the flesh, many years later – it still hasn’t happened. Not the higher income or a hired fornicator. Something about it makes my blood run cold, but maybe I’m not old enough.

alone like I have been, especially when they're young and not bad looking, like Jon in St. Helena. For a year and a half – since he had a falling out with Ming - his physical encounters with women have been few and far between, and he went for six months with no one. That doesn't seem to be uncommon.

Another thing we touched on is if she is becoming womanly, for lack of a better word. She will be twenty-five this year, and thinks her motorcycle weekend wore her out. She finds herself panting when climbing the stairs, and is reading more often while becoming softer, so the thrasher tomboy pot-head and occasional sex fiend of the past is slowly fading. She even said that she is thinking more about considering the feelings of men.

I brought up something I thought of recently, what may have been a defining moment with her and my ex-girlfriend. It was when they left me at Black Point Battery with a hurt leg and continued on, wrapped up in their conversation. She was taken aback, saying it was masochistic to remember things like that. I said that didn't make it any less real. It's true they were only twenty or twenty-one, and taking a man for granted was as common as getting drunk**.** We dropped the subject and went on to something else, but half an hour later she said she would never leave me limping near a cliff again, just wanted me to know that.

3:00 p.m. I left, and dropped into the corner store for some cigarette papers. There was a television on the wall with one of those horrendous talk shows where an awkward situation is broadcast for the masses (that's entertainment). It pulls in viewers in the same way that people watch car wrecks or someone getting arrested.

I didn't stay long, but here is what I saw: a young black woman in a chair onstage, and a young black man was seated nearby. He was smiling like he didn't know what was coming. There was a line on the screen which said the woman was about to tell him their child wasn't his.

What an amusing premise. She was pretty relaxed, and started talking about the baby, saying she was with someone else back then and….

I walked out, kind of stunned. I went a couple of blocks to the Civic Center, and when I was standing on the corner someone drove by yelling my name. It was Tanya, an old friend of Ming.[72] She had lost a lot of weight (having been doing speed for a while). I went home, and didn't get to work until nearly five. There was a long and tedious Settlement Agreement and Release where the Attorney had to cover every loophole.

It was after seven when I left and walked to the pool. One mile, a good workout. I was standing in the shallow end and having shallow thoughts as a young Chinese woman walked by in a swimsuit cut high on the hip. It was perfection in motion and she probably knew it. It could have been the workout which cleared my head, but everything was magnified, or was it rarified? Your nervous system is renewed when you are at the gym.

On the way home I dropped into a hole-in-the-wall shop with antique odds and ends. There was a magazine in back about women who shave their pubic hair. As is often the case (at least in this town) with shops full of discarded vintage objects, from old clothes to ashtrays, the shop was operated by gay men. You would think there is something dusty or used about being a homosexual. I'm sure there isn't, but how to explain the secondhand roses who man those shops?

I found a black sleeveless T-shirt with a screaming eagle on it for my brother. There were military shoulder patches with lightning bolts. The shop had an odd combination of military artifacts and old lady stuff, like fragile glass cups. A dead president will get you a dead pheasant (ten bucks). I walked home - 2 ½ miles with a hill or two.

---

[72] A few years ago Ming was house-sitting for a woman with a stylish home in the Seacliff area. One night Tanya, Ming, Nora and I were sitting by the fire, smoking pot and drinking wine. Ming and I sometimes drew pictures, so Nora and Tanya decided to pose for us, and took off their shirts. We drew them for a while, and then the models thought that Ming should be topless too, and pulled her shirt up (she was a little drunk, but amused). It was an apparition of the Three Graces.

Thursday, May 19, 1994

NOTES

GIVE ME A BREAKER

(for the Bay to Breakers race in San Francisco)

There was a young man from the city
who ran with the Planning Committee
their plans were alright
but it took them all night
to decide how to run looking pretty

The runner was stoned to the gills
and higher than most of the hills
it isn't allowed
he got lost in a cloud
and no one replaced him, but I will

The runners who drink forty ounces
and stumble are being denounced
but maybe it's fuel
and running is cruel
the men with their testicles bouncing

There was a young woman who ran
from one end of town to the sand
and hearing her moan
from here to the moon
it sounds like she's under a man

They're footloose although they behave
when they run all the way to the waves
the public can witness
their physical fitness
for which they are working like slaves

They run from the east to the west
the women and men stay abreast
they're putting some distance
between their existence
and Oakland, it isn't the best

Give me an ocean to jump in,
a seven-mile race is quite somethin'
I'm all out of breath
and closer to death
but I'm here and the blood is still pumpin'

Typing for a few hours, and it was going over the falls. You would think the workout last night, with no coffee or alcohol, had something to do with it.

Went to work, but there was not much going on. The receptionist said she had been looking for submarines (there is a window behind her with a view of the bay). I wanted to say, "You're deep," but I refrained. I left after two hours and went home. I was not in the mood for going across town to the sound-room, and the Phantom wasn't there anyway. The wooden instrument had a mind of its own, and I got into some moody light-fingered stuff that wouldn't let up.

9:00 p.m. An English program (wrote problem) called *Prime Suspect* on Channel 9. You get the feeling that child molesting is as English as tea or the royal family (though both were imported). A city where the sordid is as much a fact of life as stop signs or bad plumbing. Oddly enough the program before it was *The Perfect English Village*. A man was looking for it as one might look for the perfect croissant. It was the omnipresent connoisseur approach of someone with an aristocratic perspective, however much we are supposed to believe the Public Broadcasting Station is on the side of the common man.

It ended on a curious and ambiguous note, and I wondered how English this is. The suspected child pornographer got off (not enough evidence). However, the dead male prostitute was treated with some depth, including photos of him as a boy, as if he had been a real person with a normal upbringing. That sort of theme if handled in this country would be much more

two-dimensional. The bad guy would be caught, and all you would know about the male prostitute is that he was a prostitute, like that is all he ever was.

10:00 p.m. I was sitting on the floor next to the phone when it rang. It was Ming. "What are you doing?" I was not expecting her to call, and I don't think she expected me to be there. The conversation took off for a good two hours. It seems I made a good impression, visiting the woman when she wasn't feeling well, bringing her pickles and carrot juice. She sounded interested in what I'm doing, asking what I did last night, and listened. Maybe it was just a way to get the conversation rolling while she started something on her end. I think she was stringing beads.

I was talking like I hardly knew what day it was, and said I exist in a realm of the eternal, having transcended a mundane distinction of the day-to-day, and so much for linear ambition or upward mobility. I was not entirely serious. We sometimes float a premise by each other to see if it is plausible, then call each other on it. She will portray herself as being alone and conscientious, kind of bookish, and not very physical, and I say, "Wait a minute."

As far as losing track of time, along with the narrow-minded distinctions of how old one is, I may have been affected by some powerful acid trips when I was eighteen or twenty. The result was not arrested development so much as getting off the beaten track of chronological concerns, and more into a realm of biological substance. You're alive and thinking and improving certain skills, but not so much in a pressurized linear mode. I don't know what it means to be forty-two, and how much one should earn by then, or what social adjustments one should have made. It is something I have resisted for a long time, the mainstream expectations of age. I remember thinking of my grandfather on my mother's side, a dignified and hardworking man. He was a CPA who cruised through the Depression while smoking a pipe. I couldn't

imagine him at sixty with a blues guitar like an older black man, but that may have been because he wasn't a musician.

Concerning when she took acid or mushrooms, Ming said there were times when it was so intense she wondered if she would make it back. I said, "Guess what, you didn't."

At some point she said, "You think about sex a lot." I said she's probably right, but it would only bother me if was unbalanced. Not only thinking vs. action, but if I didn't talk about other things. I may have gravitated to a Freudian view of life, where the poles of sex and death are hard to ignore.[73] I said I am reminded of those when I talk with her. "Excuse me?" We got on the subject of the women in my life. I think it disturbed her the other day when I was speculating about call girls. She doesn't want me to get cold-blooded, and wondered if she should set me up with someone. I wasn't interested, especially since she only has a few women friends. Ming tends to prefer the company of men.

There was some talk of men and women having innate qualities, like women having better communication skills from being more socialized. I thought that was a common trait, but she objected to it. Anything to do with innate attributes she doesn't like, feeling amorphous as a foreign-born androgynous tomboy who suspects that gender traits are arbitrary. I wouldn't necessarily argue with that, but how to explain the feminists who believe in the innate superiority of women - biologically, morally, and who knows what else? She said she doesn't think in those terms, then took a curious position – that people have beliefs which she doesn't question or analyze. It is just something they are compelled to believe which she can write off as a superstition, like saying "God is on our side."

[73] There is also our Darwinian psychology, with adaptation, camouflage, and some unnatural selection. We conform to the historical in all its frame-ups.

I mentioned the capacity of girls and women to be socialized, conforming at a more rapid rate than boys. They're good at imitating grown-ups. Imitation and the feminine are often hand in hand, from a talent for pretending to the hours in the artificial environment of a store. Maybe that is a behavioral modification from an inner biological condition which is like an antiseptic enclosure. The need for imitating is driven home at an early age if they're more vulnerable than boys. A sense of insecurity would drive them further into conforming as a form of camouflage, of fitting in for better or worse. Boys are known for having some rough edges, and not conforming very smoothly to the social norms. Sometimes they never get the hang of it, and that is why so many are in prison or the gutter.

She resisted some of this, the generalizing getting a little weak, and thought that I was over the top when it comes to imitation women. She said,

> "How long have you been so skeptical?"
> "How long have I known you?"
> "Very funny."

Oddly enough, she noted that I'm comforting to talk to, whether it was my voice or my advice, and said that other women have a similar impression or they wouldn't call me.

I said something about her having a reservoir of anger, and maybe that was part of - "Don't say charm" she interjected. "No, it's more like a magnetic substance, or a motor of anger." She said I have that too. We were giving each other back-handed compliments on how substantial we find each other. Earlier there was some speculation if I am floating in space or staring at the walls in my eternal detachment, but she doesn't buy that for a minute, my being detached.

We talked about the carnival next weekend. She has never gone, and I told her that I went last year. There was a Filipina contingent in grass skirts with coconut shells for bras. She said

there wouldn't be any that would fit her. During the conversation she was stringing beads. It sounds like what I'm doing with guitar strings when there is a progression of notes.

We got off the phone around midnight, with her saying she might go to Humboldt for the weekend with a woman friend, though doesn't want to, which doesn't mean she won't go. Ming has a mind like a stoplight, and some situations hit her from three angles: stop, caution, go. There are times when all the lights are blinking on and off. How much of her allure is conversational? She can sink into it like her mind and soul, and those of the other person, are the most significant things at the moment. It's a moment which could go on for hours. She has no interest in television, and is a virtuoso of two-way communication, the give and take of listening and dialogue, the quick response and free association into any subject - spit or spirit. It is all a worthy topic, and she doesn't shy away from anything. I think that everything in her domain is treated with respect, but she said that isn't true, unfortunately. I said it's like a head of lettuce and a man are given equal importance, and she had to think about that.

We talk a lot. From what I hear it is becoming a lost art (people let the TV do the talking). She has no time for vicarious diversions, and is not involved in a medium of expression, no music or theater, so she puts everything into a conversation.[74] All the more so when having some interest in what the other person is saying. It's her way of getting to know a man, for example, and learning something in the process (like what he brings out in her). It's better than spewing a neurotic monologue which can't afford to be interrupted.

Typing for an hour or so, then went to sleep.

---

[74] In ancient Greece there were female escorts who "dabbled in the art of intellectual stimulation." They were known as *hetairai.* "In contrast to *pornai,* who provided sex for numerous clients in brothels or on the street, *hetairai* were thought to have had only a few men as clients at any one time, to have had long-term relationships with them, and to have provided companionship and intellectual stimulation as well as sex." That sounds like Ming, who may have been *hetaira*-sexual. She compensated for a lack of sex with the first two attributes, along with an occasional erotic atmosphere – like when she's lounging in a bathtub. Like Faulkner said, "The past isn't dead. It's not even past."

Friday, May 20, 1994

Slow going in the morning. I may have a shadow of what she came down with a few days ago when I slept over. I was trying to shake it off, if such a thing is possible. I read the paper. The President was talking about using military force in Haiti because "It's in our back yard." A back yard implies it's your property. Haiti is not our property. We don't own it. Our back yard is more like Nevada. It would be good if the U.S. would keep out of everyone else's business and assume a sovereignty of borders, theirs and ours, while noting the sincerity of a message like, "Yankee go home."

Since when has the U.S. had a problem with military dictatorships? Often as not our allies and collaborators are exactly that. "Haiti has been used as a staging area for drug shipments…." So has this country, along with our old friends in Panama. How does Cuba or Mexico feel about the presumption of, "It's in our back yard"?

Corollary: What if black people in this country could vote on whether Haitian immigrants should come here? I think it would be close, and could amount to a refusal.

12:30 p.m. I picked up V. at the office and we walked to the Hunan place with her new wedding ring flashing in the sunlight. She will speak in terms of being devout and not materialistic, but there's a diamond which she feels is due and owing from a man. She has a multifaceted outlook. I was thinking of some women I have known and if their feelings would have been secured by the hardest material known to man.

It came up in the conversation last night with Ming. We were talking about my ex-girlfriend who hadn't shown much character when it came to breaking up. Ming had a hard time

believing that her friend had latched onto another older man (early forties, married) for a while, then moved to Lake Tahoe where she found a man (early forties) with the means to buy a house. The ex told Ming that her worst fear was becoming a poor old white woman. I didn't know that. Ming said Nora won't admit how much she wants material comfort. Ming might have used men in the past for other things, but not that. For one thing it hit too close to home. Her parents tried to marry her off to an older Chinese man with money, but she was not interested.

Meanwhile, I was with V. having sweet and sour rock cod, rice, and tea. She told me about the Miss Universe contest tonight in Manila, and thought I should watch it. She has no illusions about how friendly the women are, whatever impression they give to the contrary, or even how smart they are, like with Miss Philippines. She is a little scornful of the whole thing. We walked back to the office with her talking about her thighs, and slapping or grabbing her waist and hips. "I'm getting fat." She had a worried look, it's very real to her.

Working for a couple of hours. A Petition for Alien Relative (immigration), child custody (a Latina woman is an unfit mother), a hit and run (car versus bicycle, Latino vs. black). Our client was the accused who is denying it. Could be a scam. He could also be guilty. A lawyer representing a defendant forces the law to make a good case before anyone is convicted of something. That insures that people aren't put away on flimsy evidence or hearsay, using dubious witnesses, informers, and the like.

I had some messages at the front desk, and was talking with the receptionist. She told me how her nails were growing which makes it hard to type on a lap top, but is not about to cut her nails. On the desk was a paper covered with markings. She said she was bored. It was a sweeping vortex of little arrows, and reminded me of something. I said, "The sperm chasing the egg?" and she laughed. We had just been talking about hysterectomies, with her having referred to a

woman who used to work here and thought it was for men. I said, “No, that would be a vasectomy.” “Oh.” She said her aunt had her “tubes and stuff” removed.

Sometimes the small talk in the office is getting to me (sperm are pretty small, they’re microscopic). You find yourself slipping into inane conversations. Maybe it’s necessary for keeping the lines of communication open with someone, especially with disparate interests and cultural backgrounds. I don’t want to bring up something and get a blank look, or is the lightweight conversation meant to counteract the dry and technical burden of a law office?

Returning from a cigarette on the balcony and walking through the door I nearly knocked her fiancé on the floor, and she smiled.

5:00 p.m. I was passing through North Beach and stopped at City Lights. I had a look at *Art Forum*, a lousy painting by Ferlinghetti, and the diary of Tarkovsky, the Russian film director (I have seen a couple of his films).

Walking home, with a few blocks to go, I encountered a film crew with tons of equipment and metallic moving vans. A house was shrouded with black canvas. If you ever wondered why films cost so much, it was out in the open - a massive crew with most of them not doing much, along with the huge salary of one of the actors. I caught a glimpse of him walking into the house with a cigar and not looking larger than life, but like another human being. However, not many have been the Terminator or Mr. Universe.[75]

7:00 p.m. Sometimes my life is a spontaneous conceptual event. I was reading a literary review with the tube on (no sound), and women were competing for Miss Universe while the

[75] I had a momentary impression of how small my life is (and not because I have a small apartment). I have a part-time job for making ends meet, and a life as small as words on a page. It would seem that a prosaic cause and effect has become an anchor, if not a crutch. Other mental dimensions I inhabit are like a circus tent in high winds. I hold it down with mental force, and long lines pounded into the ground.

radio threw some universal chords into the room. I finally turned it off (the competition) - I couldn't stand the suspense.

In the poetry journal there was a review which was so glowing I thought the paper would catch fire. You would think that criticism is synonymous with being a philistine, and poets are as fragile as a dead dandelion. Feeling the breath of a bad review would cause them to disintegrate. And yet, "We have seen the best minds of our generation destroyed by boredom at poetry readings."[76] That is none other than Ferlinghetti speaking. He thinks that poetry is an art form which should be reviewed like any other art form – music, dance, theater, etc. However, he is wrong, at least in this geographical area. It is somewhere between group therapy and role-playing ("I'm a poet!"). How does one review the emotional problems being expressed by someone in front of an audience? And how does one review a poet when the poems are secondary to the role? They could literally be anything – a rant, a grocery list, the incoherent musing of a schizophrenic.[77]

Here's a line: "In his blackened room, the remnant stick of incense burns slowly, releases its perfume – there is only the sharp point of its glow." That would be a decent line in a story, except that it's the last part of a poem (I hope not the whole thing), and that sentence is divided into nine lines, with one or two words per line. That is how profound or weighty the words are. And the reviewer is in love with words.

> In this poem there is not only the literal glow, but also the glow of vowels and consonants; note how quietly the 'n', 'ck', and 'o' sounds orbit, so to speak, the 'point' of

[76] Lawrence Ferlinghetti, "Populist Manifesto #1" (1976)

[77] Flash forward twenty years: I interviewed the poet David Meltzer for City Lights and it went well, talking for a couple of hours. I was then asked to review a poet whose book was on their B-list. I went to her reading and wrote a review. It was for my column of literary reviews at Litseen.com, but the editor returned it more than once, wanting me to tone it down. When it was finally posted the woman didn't like it and complained so much that he took it down. City Lights did nothing to support me. I had the temerity to wonder how her poems came together as there was a fair amount of random disconnected lines and meaningless titles, along with references to smoking pot. However, the Chosen had spoken.

> the rhyme of room and perfume… After reading this poem and thinking about the glow which the final word in a lyric poem emits….[78]

Which came first, the effeteness of reviewers or of poets? At what point in its ineffable journey (which is subtle as the memory of a flame) will poetry distill itself into non-existence, becoming one with the void, which is to say the "silence of God."

Fortunately, there was something on Bukowski, although he had to die to get into this journal, thereby rendering himself more spiritual. "I still think the words should rip across the page in immaculate fire." "I still don't like the poetry scene…." What I often find in this poetry journal are premature immaculate attempts without a lot of fire, and nothing ripping except my patience. There was some mention of Bukowski writing about whatever was on his mind at the moment. I wonder if I'm polarized between Bukowski and Montaigne.

There was an article on open field poetics. I lay there for a while, riffing off a line from a Doors song, "break on through to the OTHER SIDE…"

> Break on through to the hot desire
> Break on through to the editor

Saturday, May 21, 1994

Woke up early. I fell asleep last night with no coffee, alcohol, or typography. One beer in three days. The morning light was coming through the windows in the front room and stretching across the floor. I was typing for hours, followed by a wooden instrument. Then I read the paper. It would seem that I'm addicted to it. Where else can you come across references like "transient global amnesia" and the frozen lakes on Mercury, a lingerie ad, and the latest homicide occurring in this town?

[78] *Poetry Flash* (May, 1994)

More local news: an old woman flipped over on the freeway in East Palo Alto and was unconscious, still strapped in her car. Two black men snuck out of the bushes, ran to her car, stole her purse and left.

Penile implants have been found to be defective. However, a device for identifying the location of a sniper has been developed.

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* about a man who demonstrates scientific principles to school kids. "He said, 'It isn't magic…if it seems like magic, it just means you missed something'."

The widow of John F. Kennedy died at sixty-four. Oddly enough, she will be buried next to him. For a few million more Onassis might have had her buried next to him. As it is she got away with $26,000,000 when he died, and whatever more she had negotiated as a condition for entering into holy matrimony with a wealthy shipping magnate. She went to the finest schools and had all the opportunities, well-funded from the day she was born, and was a role model for many women - they don't have to marry for money. That is a custom from the old days.

In the paper there was reference to her impact on this country, including when her husband died, and then when she did thirty years later. Not much went on in between as far as the public was concerned, with her leading a fairly private life, so how to explain this "tide of grief"? Much is made of when she was a grieving widow and the composure she showed, the "calm power." She was veiled in front of everyone with her kids. How else would she disport herself? She was an educated woman with self-control, and was not about to break down and throw a fit, sobbing on the casket. I mean, what do they expect, especially from a woman who was being paid by her husband's father to stay with him, keeping the semblance of a normal

marriage so as not to mess up his political career? She was put off by his womanizing. It is not implausible that she was already a veiled woman, being used to hiding her feelings, and went through the ceremonies for a man she planned to leave. I don't mean she wasn't under pressure, as well as being in shock, but the only way she could have pulled it off would be to not show any emotion. Some of her grief and sorrow may have had to do with leaving her home.

The article referred to her as being a "warm-blooded sensate human being…,"[79] who "carried off the role of presidential widow with courage, style and an abiding sense of historical propriety." "Style" is a curious choice of words, meaning what? Grieving in style? And what does historical propriety refer to? (I wrote property.) That she refrained from pouring champagne on the eternal flame on his grave? Or wasn't dancing on a table two weeks later? That she waited four or five years before selling herself to the highest bidder? Do such transactions have a refined air when the amounts of money are rarefied? (I read that she wanted protection, and given the history of assassination in this country, that is not unreasonable.).

What does Gore Vidal think about all of this? He knew her and thought she was an "adventuress." After taking millions from Onassis' estate, "…she turned to Tempelsman for investment advice." He was a diamond broker with whom she lived the last six years (who was separated from his wife of forty-one years, a marriage counselor), and he helped turn that amount into $200,000,000. The courage, style, and historical propriety of having a lot of money.

I'm not sure why I'm thinking in these terms. I don't have anything against her, and in fact I had a dream about her.[80] I think she arrived on a public stage by accident through her husband and made the best of it. Her manners and composure (with a well-developed sense of

[79] Sensate: "Preoccupied with or exclusively directed toward that which can be experienced through a sense modality: MATERIALISTIC."

[80] I was in the chic and comfortable living room of an apartment which could have been in Paris or Manhattan. It was the aftermath of a small gathering, perhaps a dinner party. I was having a relaxed conversation with the hostess, Jackie Onassis. We were friends, or getting there. The others had gone.

self-preservation) came off as precious and aristocratic in a country which is neither one. In keeping with the aristocratic mode, she was private and reserved with no particular allegiance to one country.

I'm more interested in the deconstruction of the Kennedy administration[81] than its deification. His integrity, however, is enormous when you know about his enemies (I mean the ones in Washington).

Late afternoon. It's clear and windy, and I'm doing the laundry. I miss the old place with its iron elevator and a washing machine in back. I have to carry my clothes down the block and around the corner (four loads). There was a notice in the laundromat from a man who does odd jobs. His name is Carlos Messerschmidt.

8:00 p.m. Having torn up the guitar for a while, which was responding like it hadn't earlier, and following an article on a legal case, I turned on the tube for a Kurosawa film, *Rashomon* (1951).

There was a call from B., who wants to see some fireworks on the waterfront. I let the mood decide, which was in the direction of staying home. She was on the phone for half an hour into the film. It has English subtitles, so I wasn't missing much and didn't have to say a lot since she was doing all of the talking. I had heard some of it before as she exploded and forgot about the fireworks, having some of her own. The other woman was getting on her nerves, and B. won't confront her with her anger, so I get all of it. They had a nice afternoon on a beach in Marin. She said she was sorry they hadn't brought me. That would have been something, lying

[81] My mother is related to John Kennedy's "closest adviser" and speechwriter, Ted Sorensen. He was an attorney, and Kennedy referred to him as his "intellectual blood bank." I met him at a family reunion in Nebraska in 1997, walking among the old gravestones in a field while someone looked up our ancestors with a laptop. I found him friendly and down to earth.

on a beach with two naked women who're having an affair which is emotionally unstable. Maybe my presence would have deflected or delayed the friction. However, it was bound to happen since it comes around like clockwork, having gone their limit of two or three weeks without an argument. You would think they ran out of things to talk about or currents to float the situation. Ilsa has a cutting analytical side, and B. was feeling hurt, confused, and pissed off. It had to do with Ilsa wanting her to gravitate into a full-blown lesbian mode and B. doesn't want to. Ilsa knows that, with condescending comments about her being in the closet. B. pointed out the other one had ten years of sleeping with women before she came out fully, while B. has only had nine months or so.

This made for a curious interlude, as the film was getting intense while B. was talking into my ear. She said if this is what it's like to have a girlfriend she commiserates with men and doesn't want any more to do with it. She won't tell that to the other woman, though, which is part of the problem. B. has a certain reserve that borders on duplicity, while her girlfriend wants everything out in the open (including her tits). B. doesn't function like that, and doesn't like to fight. On the top of that, the gay and lesbian world they frequent leaves her reeling with distaste. There is a gay superiority complex, and a tendency for waving the pink flag. The conversations tend to bottom out in something vulgar, and apparently they're not much better at relationships than straight people are. I notice her language has gotten more earthy, and she said she was slow to realize how different her girlfriend is, or doesn't want to admit it since they're trying to make it work. The first time they slept together Ilsa walked out saying, "Thanks for the piece," which left B. stunned.

She keeps saying that she never experienced this much friction or vulgarity with men. Unfortunately, she never had a close connection either, whether volatile or not. She went on for

half an hour, then dashed out for the fireworks – which she missed – and I watched the rest of the film. How to characterize the impact of a work of genius? Whatever your life has been like up to then is worthwhile if it has arranged for you to experience such a thing. It was transcendental and cathartic. I would say that it was thought-provoking, but that goes without saying, especially in my domain where almost anything is, from headlines to a broken toilet.

Typing for a couple of hours, then went to sleep around 1:30.

3:00 a.m. I was sitting up and groping for the phone before I realized what was going on, that the phone was ringing and I had been asleep and now I wasn't. I heard the Actress speaking in a soft voice, saying it was my fault for going to sleep early since she assumed I always stayed up late. Fortunately, I was operating with the slow reaction time of someone who is half-awake, since it turned out she was voicing some quiet anger at me. It took a minute to sink in, what she was talking about, and whether it was too absurd for words. She had talked to her ex-fiance who told her he had spoken with me recently, probably assuming it was no big deal, but you see what boring undramatic lives men lead when women see potential drama, conflict, and betrayal.

I had, in other words, done the unspeakable. I had remained friends with her ex-fiance, who was the worst man on earth and hurt her so much and how could I be her friend while being the friend of someone who was awful to her, etc. When I realized what she was talking about I said she told me months ago she knew that Michael and I were friends, she just didn't want to hear about it if we played tennis. I should have told her that tennis is a game where love means nothing. Even more bizarre, she has had some contacts with him, and he slept over one drunken night last month.

She asked how I would like it if she were friends with Nora who walked out several years ago, and now lives near Lake Tahoe. I wasn't sure how to respond to that since they are worlds

apart. She characterized the break-up with her fiance as having been harder than mine, like her ex was worse than my ex, but it didn't compute, and not because I was half asleep. Actually, I was now alert, and thinking later about the comparison. She was with him for a year. They only lived together for a few months, and she was instrumental in driving him away. In my case, Nora and I were together for five years, lived together for half of that time, and though I must have alienated her at some point there was no warning when she walked out. She had orchestrated things like she was changing horses from one day to the next and hardly breaking stride. Another man, in other words. We had gone to a nightclub the night before, and everything was fine (or so I thought).[82]

I got off the phone after less than half an hour, with the Actress having remained calm, more or less, but then I couldn't go back to sleep. I lay there for an hour, feeling a mixture of hunger and annoyance. The hardest to ignore while it was standing like a sentry at the gates of oblivion was an erection, but aroused by what?

Sunday, May 22, 1994

10 a.m. I woke up. I could have used more sleep, but half an hour later the phone was ringing. It was B., who said, "It's warm out, want to go to the beach?" It took her a while. I figured she was doing her usual phone rounds, so I had time to take a shower, shave, straighten up the place, have coffee, scribble a few lines, stare off into space, water the palm tree, etc.

[82] During the last year we were together her brother died in a drunken car wreck in Texas. He was an alcoholic who had been in and out of jail. She later admitted that it shook her up considerably, and may have caused a crack in our relationship (I never liked him). On a lighter note, I wasn't a baseball fan like her. There was a gathering of people at our place who were mostly her age. At some point she said she was excited about the upcoming baseball season, and I said, "I'm breathless with anticipation." It brought down the house, so to speak, but she was miffed.

12:30 p.m. She arrived in dark gym shorts, a T-shirt, straw hat, and sunglasses. As we were leaving through the iron gate downstairs there was a curious sequence. Walking to the corner with a bus pulling up, we ran into the woman who called last night. She was coming to see me, but B. gave a hasty explanation about the beach and having to catch the bus. I barely had time to give her a kiss and say something about having slept okay, and no, I wasn't disturbed by her call last night.

I got on the bus with B. who was congratulating herself for having gotten me out of the "clutches" of another woman who she doesn't trust. We missed the connecting bus, took a cab out to the bridge, and walked to some concrete bunkers from World War II. There was a high cliff and a steep trail going down. She had never been to the secluded coves a couple of hundred feet below. I held her hand for much of the way, with wildflowers shivering amongst the rocks. We made it to the sand with her holding her hand out like a princess for the last few steps, and walked along the beach to a cove. There were a lot of men at the foot of the cliff. We went to the other side and were blocked off from the rest of the beach by some rocks. There were enormous boulders sitting in a few feet of water, so their mussels and their skirts of kelp were showing.

We lay a couple of towels on the sand. There was a warm breeze which died down later on. The weather was a heat treatment, and the city was eclipsed by the cliff. It was just what the doctor ordered. I took off my clothes and lay back on a towel. B. took off her shirt and shorts, revealing a two-piece bathing suit. She removed the top and started rubbing lotion on her breasts which nearly gave me an erection.

We were there for four hours. The woman has a capacity for stretching out which I wasn't familiar with, since I usually see her when she's going in several directions at once. But underneath her socializing is a sensual current a mile wide. I'm beginning to think it offers little

resistance, but I'm getting ahead of myself. We lay on the sand for an hour or more, with some of the conversation about the other woman. The friction and the doubt continue, and she is beside herself with disenchantment. Doesn't Ilsa know the effect of her sharp tongue? Maybe not, if B. is telling me instead of her. She said they went to the beach yesterday, the headlands across the bridge, for what she thought would be a nice afternoon. However, Ilsa decided it was time to resume her psychoanalysis of B., her "lack of self-esteem," and even turned away from her, needing a minute to get her out of her mind. I said she probably wouldn't rest until B. was riding down Main Street on a motorcycle with her shirt off with the dykes. In fact, that isn't far from the truth. Her girlfriend wants her to be in the gay and lesbian parade next month.

At some point she was reading the paper and it was a little windy. They noticed a man behind a rock who, on second glance, was jerking off. They are used to fully-dressed Latinos staring at them on a city beach, but this was worse. The papers started blowing towards the man who was abusing himself behind the rock. It would have been nice if he was caught up in his own momentum when the paper was torn out of her hands and flew across the sand, wrapping all over him like the furies of the news.

The conversation slowed down as we lay there, soaking in the atmosphere, which I thought of as an "undulating electromagnetic field at rest" (how things are said to appear at the speed of light). There was a saltwater commotion and some birds, along with the stillness of the cliffs which weren't going anywhere. Some pelicans floated by, a couple of helicopters, seagulls, and an airliner in slow motion. There were sails on the horizon. After a couple of hours I wanted to try the water. I put on a swimsuit and she put on her shorts with a straw hat and walked topless along the water. She has a slender waist and the breasts of a Greek statue. We walked around a

rocky point to another beach which was longer and with hardly any rocks in the water. It was good for swimming, but she put one foot in the water and decided against it.

I got my feet wet and stood in the sand for a minute, thinking about it. Then I ran into the water and dove into a breaking wave. I walked out refreshed and a little numb, but was pulled back into the ocean by a riptide in my mind. I ran back and dove into another wave, which lasted a few minutes until I was getting numb. No one else was in the water, and she seemed to be the only woman on the beach. We walked back to the towels where I opened a German beer, had a cigarette, and was gradually coming back to life.

I was coming back to life even more when she asked if I would give her a back rub, having brought the massage oil. She pushed her swimsuit bottom down, and I sat naked on her pale bottom, dripping the almond-scented oil from her shoulders to her butt and rubbing it in. I had put a white shirt on, leaving it open, since my back was getting a lot of sun, and it concealed a hard-on which kept rising and relaxing. It was charming, her indifference to my genitals on her skin, or my hands on her behind. This is a woman I have known for years, who is the very picture of discretion. I wonder if the other woman has loosened her up.

She rolled over on her back and I continued to rub it in, guided once in a while by her fingers. Her hands were resting on my thighs while I massaged her breasts (the chest muscles, you know), which she seemed to enjoy. It would have been harder to pull off if we were surrounded by homosexual men, but the view was blocked by some large rocks. B. didn't mind if my cock was lying on her stomach or thighs, rocking slowly as I massaged her. When I was done I rolled off to the side with one leg straight and one straight organ lying on her leg. Some women take the male body as a given, and the exposure of it doesn't necessarily mean anything.

She offered to return the favor, so I lay on my stomach. She straddled me and seemed to take particular interest in it. I said there is a method where a woman will grease her body and lay on a man. B. was coming close to rubbing her tits on my back, and I was close to kissing her, especially when getting an emphatic butt massage, but it is hard to kiss a woman in that position. When I rolled over on my back she straddled me, almost sitting on a semi-erection. It couldn't make up its mind what to do. She was leaning over with her breasts hanging while she pulled at the back of my neck or shoulders with the sun behind her. I was blinded by the light a couple of times.

This was followed by an interlude where we were lying side by side, a T-shirt covering her head. Earlier I was sitting on her with my hands around her waist, admiring how narrow it was, and said as much. She was yielding as she guided my hand across her stomach to press down on it. I was reminded of a woman who allows herself to be seduced as long as one is slow and subtle and doesn't break the mood by saying anything about it, or is talking about something else the whole time, like it is a natural occurrence and she can abandon herself to some luxurious sensations, hiding her eyes, but with her legs wide open.

I think, in other words, my detachment with the situation was wearing thinner than a condom, and if she wasn't with a woman at the moment… which reminds me, she recoiled from her this afternoon, dreading another "talk," as if it meant negotiating with a viper. A few weeks ago we were in a desert shop full of cactus plants and she wanted to touch one. I said, "Don't do it." The white fibers look soft and fuzzy, but it would have been painful. Reminds me of her girlfriend.

5:30 p.m. The two of us put our clothes on and walked to the end of the beach (I was barefoot), then took a slow meandering trail through the undergrowth and wildflowers. The trail

went past an abandoned machine-gun nest to where a long suspension bridge was anchored to the land, and continued with a windy view through the trees. We walked on the road towards the bus stop, heard a bus coming, and started running. We rode back to the neighborhood with her expressing admiration for my running barefoot. It's odd how women like me for completely ordinary things (including my behind, which she admitted).

We arrived at my place and hung around for a while, having a sandwich, half a beer, and coffee. Both of us were lazy and tired from the beach and so much sun. It seems to be relaxing, but the sheer intensity of the heat and light can drain your senses, and intensity of any sort can wear you out.

7:30 p.m. B. had to leave, apologizing. I walked her to the bus stop, and when a bus pulled up there was a big hug and a kiss. I walked back thinking we're familiar with each other's bodies, what now? I worked out on a wooden instrument while watching something about the Serengeti Desert. That was followed by a documentary on veterans who're a ghost of their former self, and the diminishing returns of war.

Aloe vera on my skin, and typing for a while.

Monday, May 23, 1994

11:00 a.m. Phone call from the Professor in Los Angeles. He was calling from his office, during which call there was a knock on his door and the voice of a female student asking about her grade. A minute later I brought up the David Mamet play and we talked about it for a while. He avoids emotional connections with his students. For one thing, they will use it for their own ends, trying to "read" him – not for what he has to say about a subject, but as an authority figure.

He said a male student is failing the class. The student had turned in one out of five assigned essays and blown a test, but still reported him to the administration for being a lousy teacher. The Professor doesn't like the administration. He sees them as bureaucrats who want to maintain a business-like atmosphere and keep the faculty in line. The Professor is disillusioned with the university as a forum for the free exchange of ideas. There are politically correct restraints, and lower standards for admitting more minorities.

I told him about the recent incident at San Francisco State involving a mural of Malcolm X. It was controversial since the muralist included the Star of David with a dollar sign in it, along with a skull-and-crossbones. Jewish students didn't like it, and black students were quoted in the paper, saying, "It's just a symbol," or "I thought people had freedom of expression." "Now he has to take off the stars to be politically correct." The black muralist was paid $1500 for this mural in a public institution. "We don't owe white folks an explanation." That is priceless. Who paid for the mural? Who founded the school for that matter? Only black folks are allowed to be offended by an expression.

Oddly enough, a professor was caught defacing the mural. She covered the offending symbols with a spray-paint can. This was a black woman who thought a university is not the place for slander or intolerance. The Professor did not approve of the symbols or her either, and referred to Black Muslim rhetoric and antisemitism. There are speakers who get away with saying just about anything, like the "Jew paper," instead of the newspaper. That is not to mention the distortions of historical fact. It's like the attitude is everything, and credibility is secondary. That sounds familiar when it comes to politics (race-oriented or not). It's another reason I've been gravitating towards the factual as much as possible, and away from the emotional or

mythic. It evaporates like swamp gas, and is never held accountable because it lacks substance, but the consequences are real enough.

We talked for over an hour and a half, with some of it about women. He thinks that economics are a major force in the relations of men and women. Maybe he was speaking as an old Marxist, but I know the feeling. He gave an example when years ago, divorced from his wife, he dropped by with some extra money he had come by and she kissed him. That surprised him, and he figured it was only because he gave her money. As for his current girlfriend - she was brought up in the time-lapse of luxury in Manhattan Beach with an inheritance (her parents alcoholics, and her grandmother was a silent movie actress). She is known for being frigid and possessive, but if he had a lot of money she would go down on him every day. He has a professor's salary, which might explain her lack of passion, along with the insults.

I never wanted to see things in such cold terms, but the evidence is hard to ignore. Materialism makes the world go round. I brought up Jackie O., who seems to have been a well-mannered sell-out. He said when her husband was dying she was in New England and wouldn't leave because there was half a foot of snow on the ground. The conversation touched on other points, from "the idiocy of race" to the class struggle in the university.[83]

[83] There was another subject, but it's so distasteful I thought I should separate it from the main text: the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. Air Force One is there, but probably not **t**he cue cards which made it sound like he knew what he was talking about, an actor pretending to be the President. Someone went to the museum and said it's "like a propaganda film." "Really disappointing. I expected something of historical import and found fiction scripted by some Fox News hack writer." There is probably no record of the damage he (or rather the people behind him) did to this country. I remember a leaflet when he was the governor of California. I saw it in the home of a friend of mine when I was in high school. It showed him looking like a cowboy with guns drawn and saying, "Thanks for the votes, suckers." I wonder if there is anything about the assassination attempt by John Hinckley, Jr., whose family was closely connected to the Vice President. Hinckley's brother was planning to have dinner with George Bush's son, Neil Bush, the day after the assassination attempt. Even more suspicious is that such a story was ignored by the mainstream media.

When we got off the phone I went downstairs, having heard a collision while we were talking – there were brakes and the sound of crunching metal. Someone broadsided a Mercedes in the intersection. The other car was pulled over to the curb with its front end buckled. There was a man with a bandage on his head. The collisions right outside my window occur with an alarming frequency. I've seen an SUV lying upside-down, a tire rolling down the street, and lots of broken glass, not to mention the flashing lights of a police car.

2:00 p.m. Phone call from Ming at work. "Just called to say hello." It sounded like a polite approach-avoidance. There was a brief exchange about our weekends, with her having gone with a friend to Humboldt where she used to go to college. She met old friends and walked in the woods. A few minutes later she had to go, and said, "I'll call you later," sounding kind of airy. It felt like a reality check, with our being worlds - or rather a generation - apart. On the radio was "Reoccurring Dreams" by Husker Du.

I went to work, and was a little edgy for some reason. There are times, not only on a Monday, when the office hits me from an underwhelming angle. I'm not impressed with myself for being there, and wonder why I haven't figured out another way to pay the rent. It's something I should have done ten years ago, incurring a financial hustle via music or writing, and making one of those pay. I resisted it because it can adulterate the process, and I don't have any aptitude for it. I was not in the mood for the Attorney and his argumentative demeanor. I should know where a certain file is, though he throws them anywhere – I found it on a chair. He will ask for a file on so and so, a car wreck, he dictated a letter on it, then will back off, with both of us realizing he never got around to it or never showed it to me.

5:00 p.m. I took a break and walked V. to the station, asking her about Miss Universe and who won. She said, “Miss India,” which surprised me. V. said she was smart and Miss Philippines wasn’t, and shrugged. Apparently Miss Philippines had a dumb answer about wanting to be “a superwoman.” V. didn’t like her hair either. We were walking along when a black woman who used to work in the office came between us and started talking fast to V. All of a sudden it was her walking beside V. and talking for the last two blocks. I was thinking how men are rude the way they interrupt women.

I returned to the office and was there until seven (with a lot of work). I noticed some notes and materials on the desk of a young attorney. It was dry and technical stuff relating to property law, with lots of yellow and green highlighting. It looked like what a scientist would struggle with in terms of abstract complications. I have no desire to put my head into the vise of a law book. I would rather be Cole Porter or a loose reporter, even a poet if I didn’t know it is a point of view or way of living and not an occupation. It is less of a vocation than a vacation on location, where you tune in the locution or the other way around.

I walked home through North Beach, about two miles. A message on the phone machine: there was silence at first, followed by a girl laughing. It was Maya. Then her mother got on, apologizing for her daughter and asking me to call her. I called, Maya answered, and we talked for a few minutes. She had to get off because her mother wanted to talk. The Actress said she dropped out of a play she had begun rehearsals for and signed a contract to stick with for a few months. She thought her character would be fleshed out with more lines and it wasn’t. Now she is at odds with the woman director (a lesbian) who has left some threatening phone calls. The Actress didn’t think she was doing anything wrong.

I was reminded of how often my women friends – even in the office – are banging heads with other women. I always hear about someone falling out with someone else, not talking to her anymore, sick of her attitude, etc. I don't know if this is a contentious middle ground that women inhabit with their moody intrigues and mutually repelling force fields, but it doesn't usually lead to violence. We talked for a while, with her sounding conciliatory. When we were getting off the phone I heard her daughter in the background yelling "Goodbye!"

A wooden instrument was followed by a journal review, and then some typing.

Tuesday, May 24, 1994

NOTES

I have some facts to grind.

400,000 unnecessary C-sections last year.

Slaving (and behaving) over a hot typewriter.

I'm down home as a burglar.

An old torch song on the radio: "… life without you has been too lonely too long" ("One Night With You").

A lesbian comedienne in the paper with one of the worst jokes I've heard in a while, and it was about other lesbians. It often happens that the worst things you hear about a group of people come from a member of that group. I like women too much to repeat it.

Beerly de-loved… we are gathered here**.**

I never read the novel, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues,* where there are women-loving-women at the Rubber Rose Ranch. They're on the innuendo farm with a woman known as Bonanza Jellybean, which has some implications of comparative clit. It's now a movie.[84]

A woman loves with all her heart

[84] The film has Uma Thurman, who is all thumbs, John Hurt as The Countess, and other famous actors, but it bombed. Apparently, it's "… one of the most boring movies of all time, a ridiculous stew of mysticism, flat satire, and whimsy." (Rob Gonsalves)

and leaves with some of his.
So what if a man is torn apart,
for her it's more like show biz.

Imagine a woman named Ammonia Kreddit.

One of our clients was in the office yesterday. She has a restraining order on a man who allegedly abused her, a married man who she refers to as "a dumb Italian." They have been having an affair for years. She wanted domestic violence charges brought against him (he pushed her against a wall). This is the same guy she brought rape charges against a year or two before, and which she dropped when they got back together. Now she wants the restraining order dropped, and even wants his phone number. I was going to say, "Ask his wife."

In the office there's a woman in her thirties a couple of desks away. She works for another attorney, and says hello, but I haven't said much to her. One afternoon the Attorney I work for emerged from his room like an irascible dinosaur. We had one of our exchanges, and he went back to his room. She lifted her hand and made the motion of shooting a pistol at him, and I started to like her.

An article in *The New Yorker* called "Doubt" by a reporter who was on a jury for a criminal case. He was not sure if the young addict they found guilty really was. There were two girls testifying on his behalf, but the women on the jury didn't trust them.

> "Well it seems to me like these two girls are lying so their friend won't go to jail," said one woman… The women, in particular, chided me. "You don't understand what these girls will do… they say anything."
>
> Another tells him, "When their man is in trouble, they don't care… you don't know what they're like." Later his girlfriend says, "'You believe anything a good-looking female says. If it's a girly girl, you just can't imagine that she would really do anything wicked.' And it was true: I found it difficult to accept that they might simply be lying."[85]

Women lie, and other women are surprised when men don't know that. Some of them don't want to. They're reluctant to think a woman is pretending (unless they're with a prostitute). It is a classic male concern with women who pretend in bed, or pretend to love them (with ulterior motives), while pretending to be soft and feminine.

[85] There was something similar with one of our clients, the Latino truck driver who was getting a divorce. It was dragging on, and he was frustrated with the Attorney's gullibility when it came to our client's wife. She was a liar and a spit-fire according to our long-suffering client, and there was a police report to back it up. He couldn't believe his own Attorney would fall for her feminine smoke-screen. The Attorney is old-fashioned in that respect.

There is a legendary smokescreen of their looks which women operate behind, along with the assumption of being innocent until found guilty. Men are fooled by a woman's looks, but it is not uncommon to attribute some sort of virtue to a good-looking person (male or female). It's one of the more unfortunate non sequiturs.

Meanwhile, a woman has to protect herself, and it is her prerogative to bend the truth (lying while in politics or business is a male prerogative). She is supported by inhabiting the artificial and subjective. Her face is a mask, and there is clothing which can help her in conforming to a role.

It reminds me of a certain ice skater at the Olympics who was under suspicion, and later found guilty, of being involved in the assault on another woman skater. She was firm when it came to maintaining her innocence, like there was a close communion with her self-image. You wonder how it's done, but it is possible if someone has an inner oxygen tank of their subjective "truth," however contrived and mythological, from which they're breathing their identity on a daily basis. Some women are used to being an artificial construct, and it has a life of its own. It can last a long time in an artificial environment like a shopping mall. That sort of woman can withstand the public scrutiny.

It is interesting when you hear from other women about the duplicities of their gender. I have often heard from women friends that their respect for a man would diminish if they think he's gullible and too trusting of women. Even Ming has touched on that, who will sound surprised and say, "You believe everything I say?" A man should know how much of it is conjectural steam that she is letting off, or a provisional attitude she's trying on for size. It could be an example of the observer affecting the observed, so it is all the harder for a man to know a woman – especially when a woman's conversation is not so much about relaying information, but to generate amorphous atmospheres which postulate a common mood in which they wallow with a friend.

And now for a musical interlude: "What's Inside a Girl" (1986) by the Cramps.

In light of all of this, you wonder about the voyeurism of men, the urge to see a woman in her element when her guard is down. They want to see behind a female facade, suspecting that it is an act. Maybe there is some resentment for the assumption that a man is open territory, a known quantity, while a woman may be hidden, enigmatic, and "mysterious." That seems to be the main motivation for a voyeur, watching a woman in the privacy of her home, when chances are there isn't much of an erotic atmosphere. Not many women are posing naked in the window, and they may not be attractive. It doesn't warrant the curiosity of a man, unless he wants to get behind the façade of women. When things are ordinary and demystified it's like you see the creature in her lair, the beast at home. But what does it amount to from the compromised perspective of a voyeur - the silhouette of someone walking around? Maybe there's a glimpse of sagging breasts and messed up hair in the cold light of an open refrigerator.[86] That is not much different from living with a woman.

[86] In the mid-1970's I spent some time in Nice. My girlfriend's grandmother had an apartment on the Avenue des Anglais which overlooked the beach. Every day there was a man who stood on the boardwalk

Some of this is what the women's movement was promoting – an androgynous and unromantic view of women. It wanted to get them off a socially-contrived pedestal which limited their movements. They insist on being seen from the most ordinary angles, not as an alluring doll or artificial construct which never has to go to the bathroom. There has been an onslaught of realistic portrayals of women by writers and film directors who see themselves in a plain light and it rhymes with pain. Sometimes you wonder if they want to gross out men in the hopes that men will leave them alone.

I think it is the revenge of women for the endless (and invasive) curiosities of men. You want to see what a woman is like at home, well here it is in all its glory with some gory details. A little of that goes a long way.[87]

I thought of Ming who isn't into feminine subterfuge (as far as I know), and wants to come across as one of the boys. She is open and blunt, throwing her feminine hygiene packages on the floor (old joke: a macho woman is one who rolls her own tampons). Ming talks about her body all the time - bloating, sagging, and what her pee looked like this morning. She has an open-door policy when it comes to urinating, and sometimes doesn't bother with her hair or make up. She is calling the bluff of any man who likes her. He had better like her at her worst because she can't be bothered with constructing a façade, and if he can't handle it he isn't worth the trouble.

Someone who explored what lies behind the surface of a modern woman is Hitchcock. He takes a woman who is stylish, self-contained, somewhat aloof, and puts her through some elemental terrors – here come the birds - to see what it takes to cut through the façade (like a knife through a shower curtain). He wants to see what happens when a doll-like social construct is confronted with a situation where she has to rely on her animal instincts.

In *Psycho*, a hotel clerk is peering through a hole in the wall at a female guest (who is on the run with stolen funds). He is out of his mind and living with his dead mother.

Men used to cut up someone looking for their soul. That's pretty dumb when it's conveyed by someone's eyes or voice.[88]

---

with his back to the ocean and scanned the windows of the apartments lining the avenue. On the beach behind him were topless women lying on lounges or standing in the water, but he was more interested in what he could glimpse through a window. I'm not sure how long he had been doing this, but he had a crick in his neck.

[87] "The Lady's Dressing Room" (1732) by Jonathan Swift is not for the faint of heart. He's been accused of being a misogynist (however honest in his writing), but I think that men are being satirized as well. There is a pathetic disillusion on the part of a man who has to view a woman as an ethereal goddess, but he finds out otherwise. His two-dimensional libido is turned off by her messy dressing room, and the fact that "… Celia, Celia, Celia shits!" No shit.

[88] For further reference see *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1923), an installation by Marcel Duchamp.

Typing for hours, then I went to work. I revised the Last Will and Testament of a woman who was giving away everything from her VCR to a sculpture of *Praying Hands*. I wondered if it sat on top of the television, praying for a good program. When I first walked in the Attorney was taken aback. There was some question about the work yesterday, and he was working himself into an angry mood. I said, "No need to raise your voice," and went on to explain the situation, maintaining a civil tone. He seemed to be relieved at not having to argue.

5:30 p.m. I met Ming on the corner who was looking a little worn. We had planned to go to my place where I would cook fish for dinner. However, we ended up taking a bus to her place and phoning out for something, which was a compromise. On the way there she asked what I did over the weekend, then told me about her trip to Humboldt where she reconnected with a few friends from college.[89] One of them is a lesbian who repairs mountain trails in the summer, and invited her to a party for lesbians and their families. She was a little bored, and stuck with the female friend she drove up with, while resisting a woman who was interested in whatever she had to say. Ming is being asexual these days, with no idea where the next affair will come from, and said she's in no hurry. It could be months, and in the meantime finds it rather peaceful.

She said a friend of hers is engaged to a controlling woman, and she can't believe it. I replied that it's been known to happen, but she said she doesn't want to hear about men being victims. She has little or no patience for that sort of thing. I keep running into women who assume the power and autonomy of modern people, but act like there is no such thing as women

[89] Both of us went to San Francisco State for the last two years of college, and spent the first two years at a small state college (though a generation apart). With a smaller school you have more contact with the professors. I was in the homes of several professors in Los Angeles, and had an affair with yet another. All of them were Jewish, oddly enough. History, philosophy, and sociology: two men and two women. One of the women threw a party for professors in her home in Venice (she was married). I was the only student, and was talking with her in the shallow end of the pool and both of us were naked.

manipulating men. You would think that men are too aware to fall for that, and they are backed up by a male-dominated power structure. Whenever there's a problem with your wife or girlfriend you just contact the male-dominated power structure and they'll take care of it. One advantage a man might have is physical strength, but he might as well have one or both arms tied behind his back because he can't use it (or he's looking at some jail time). So it's not unlikely for a woman to have the advantage or the edge in a couple of fundamental aspects – sexually as well as psychologically. The former if he is dying to get laid, and she knows that she is in control of whether it happens or not, depending on her mood. And psychologically a woman is more rehearsed and well-versed than a man, having been practicing behavioral modification and emotional ploys, if not role-playing, since she was three years old, and chances are he hasn't. It's no surprise the man is moving to the other end of the state to accommodate his girlfriend.

Meanwhile, Ming and I got off the bus in Hayes Valley, picked up some wine, and walked past the Morphos Gallery. I wanted to go in, but she said in no uncertain terms she had to pee. I said I would meet her in the apartment. The gallery had some recent photos by Nina Glaser. It was the usual format of men and women wearing nothing, with shaved heads and covered with a pale dry mud (like ashes to ashes, dust to dust, with a little water mixed in). It reminded me of aborigines who're working out some Freudian psychodramas, including a woman who wants to fuck like a man. There were a few skulls, a woman pulling the guts out of a trout with her teeth, and other primordial situations. The civilized are framing the primordial and putting it on the wall. They hear an echo of their own condition, having bodies which are lost and found in mythic situations with other bodies which have been evolving for thousands of years. We're still working on the possibilities.

A couple of pictures I liked: a man bent over slightly and holding the leg of a woman who was slung upside down and trailing on the ground, the weight on her shoulders. Her other leg was bent forward at the knee which concealed her face. One breast was flopping towards her shoulder. It was one of those poses which fell into place as an original composition with a shaved head androgyny.

The woman at the Morphos was attentive and accommodating, and gave me a small catalogue and her card. I realized it might have been the suit and tie, like I was someone who would fork out $600 for a 16 x 20-inch photograph. I was told I could pay it off in monthly installments over a year, and she picked up a calculator to figure it out. I said, “Fifty dollars,” and she said, “I’m lousy at math.” I said I pay that every month for a DUI.

I walked to Ming’s place. She liked the photos and thought the woman was interested in me personally. She thinks a lot of women are interested, but I don’t know where she gets that idea. There was some reference to flirtatious smiles. I said women do that anyhow, it doesn’t mean a lot, they’re just rehearsing their effect and keeping the gears oiled, so to speak. Anyhow she wasn’t sending any real signals, like winking or running her fingers slowly down the front of her blouse… “AND HOLDING HER LEFT NIPPLE?!”

We were sitting in the kitchen. She had changed into loose blue cotton pants and a sweatshirt. There was a meal delivered to the door, and afterwards the conversation continued in the living room with its turn-of-the-century wooden walls and mirrors. We were on either end of a sofa with wine and coffee and cigarettes, touching on some points of interest in the news, like the mural of Malcolm X at San Francisco State. The controversy is a microcosm of how touchy things have become. The muralist (as quoted in the paper), “drew shouts of affirmation from his supporters, and angry jeers from critics when he said that Israeli tanks, bombs and planes bear

the Star of David and that 'I don't see anyone asking them to take it down'." You wonder about the shouts of affirmation for a dumb non sequitur which lacks any sense of proportion. It's like the speaker has formed a vacuum around himself according to the emptiness of his comments, and into that vacuum are pulled the "shouts of affirmation from his supporters," and in which vacuum his presence is magnified.

"He blamed the campus administration for permitting the Malcolm X mural to be vandalized…." Permitted how? By not putting armed guards there the minute it was painted? For not knowing he would alter the original format which had been submitted for approval, throwing in the antisemitic touches like an afterthought (and which he said apply to Israel, not Jews in general)?[90] "I hold contempt for this institution… they're teaching you lies." If he wouldn't know a non sequitur if it ran over him in the street, how would he know a lie? His contempt is for an institution in which there are many black students, and which funded his mural.

Speaking of free expression, when a news photographer tried to take his picture he "threatened to assault him and to take away his camera."

At the same time another incident involving vandalized symbols occurred. This was at Stanford, where a statue of gay and lesbian people was damaged by some drunken jocks. "What has happened here is not an act of vandalism… this was an attack on the people in this community." I think it was an act of vandalism. No one was knocked around by wooden benches or had black paint thrown on them. The incident is even less alarming when you consider how apologetic the sobered-up jocks were. If they really meant it as a statement they would stick by their actions. Instead, they expressed remorse and paid for the repairs.

[90] Over the years I came to understand how Zionism has an extremely toxic presence in the world, not to mention a firm grip on the Congress (the goyim were pretty dumb if not corrupt to let that happen). It is all the more reason to keep a discredited religious symbol off the portrait of a man of honor.

Ming and I knocked that around for a while. I didn't have much interest in the statue. It was boring and prosaic, although I doubt the jocks were making an aesthetic statement. Also, as was stated by a doctor of Japanese descent (class of '62), statues (and murals) which project the beliefs and values of a certain group have no place in a university setting where an atmosphere of neutrality should prevail. "A dilemma is created when the choice of avoidance is taken away," as far as someone pushing their "point of view," and it could be resented. I realize this could lead to non-historical abstract sculptures, so no one is offended.

There was a good point in another letter to the editor, saying if the muralist wanted to evoke the beliefs of Malcolm X at an earlier stage of his life (when he was anti-Jewish), then it's curious that he "chose not to render Malcolm's early appreciation of white women."[91]

What gets me is the black muralist could be saying anything to the crowd, like complete mumbo jumbo, but what they see and hear is a black man being defiant to an institution. That's all it takes, it doesn't matter what he says and if it makes any sense. The posture resonates with the mob. And what did the controversy amount to anyway? Like he is being oppressed and silenced when he was given $1500 to paint a portrait of a black leader which took a day or two, and then was asked to remove the adulterated Jewish symbols. Someone during the protest played a tape of Malcolm calling for bloody revolution. They really have a sense of proportion and historical timing, with Mr. X having made some reference to "African blood." They should have a look at Liberia or Rwanda, where more black people died at the hands of other blacks in two months than were brought to the North American continent over a span of two centuries.[92]

[91] That may have come from being over one-fourth white, although he hated it.
[92] The Rwandan genocide took approximately 100 days, from April 7 to July 15, 1994. From 500,000 to 662,000 died, mostly Tutsis.

Meanwhile, we were relaxing on the sofa with some jazz in the background, and were talking about other things, like my relations with women. I said something about going to the beach with B., and how she is getting more familiar and relaxed. I am beginning to wonder what she has in mind, which is absurd since she is having an affair with a woman, but I have never known her to be so casual (wrote causal) and uninhibited with me.

Suddenly Ming was concerned, like I should be careful. I don't need another woman "toying" with me, where I end up feeling misled. It bothers her that I have gravitated to a dark side of the moon when it comes to women. It bothers me too, and I said as much. Not that it isn't valid, but you end up counting the craters and mapping the terrain, gauging the depth of the shadows in a barren landscape, and after a while it could eclipse your view of women entirely. I'm not completely alienated or estranged from them, including her. There was some reference to the pessimism both of us are known for, but it's not like I am going to sit at home and put a needle in my arm. I couldn't handle all the cynicism if I didn't have a built-in optimism (or incurable naivete). One reason I'm compelled to write so much is that is when I catch up with a credulous awareness, waiting for the other shoe to drop. It does so with a typographic clatter.

Her being worried about my love life is odd. She repeated an offer to set me up with someone, which is not how I operate, but having gravitated to a neutral position where she is concerned it's not implausible. She asked for a neck rub, but I didn't respond.

At some point she had a whole plan worked out vis a vis my writing. I was surprised that she was showing so much interest. I have told her that she's in the journal, and I've been all over the map as far as how I look at her, but usually it's in a positive light. She doubted that, but said every Monday or Tuesday night she would come over. We would spend two hours reading an edited version of the journal, with her giving her opinions. That is not a bad idea, since I couldn't

get away with much with her as a reader. She has a short attention span for anything that's boring or redundant, and would let me know when any socio-political observations were on thin ice. I think she has heard most of this in our conversations, but maybe not. From nine to ten we would have dinner, and from ten to twelve we would work on her stuff, including her ideas about opening a café. Then we would go to sleep, having brought her travel bag, and she would go to work the next morning. It sounded okay to me, although I don't have much to offer when it comes to the café business.

She brought up an old friend of hers from high school, my ex-girlfriend. They often talked about masturbation, sexual experiences, each other's pussies, bodies, breasts, you name it, and saw each other naked a few times (including at the beach). One day Nora implied that she was interested in Ming as more than a friend (she has some quasi-lesbian curiosities). Ming had a curious response, feeling resentful or betrayed. Putting their relationship on a more physical track was disturbing to her. She has said that being friends is on one track, but the dynamic of being lovers is another, and she doesn't take it lightly. I said the person she is having sex with is expendable, or doesn't require much in the way of honesty. It is a twisted power trip and there is sexual competition. She said, "That's true… all of the above," a little bemused, and wished it wasn't so. I have wondered if she had a bad experience with men at a young age, but she says no.

When it comes to looking for someone's soul by having sex with them, she doesn't think in those terms. In fact, she might prefer it to be soulless or anonymous. I referred to what is revealed in the moments of an orgasm, but it turns out that she doesn't automatically associate sex with a climax - it's elusive for some women. I told her about a woman named Bonanza Jellybean. Ming read the book, although it never occurred to her there might be innuendos, and this is not a woman who is shy about her body.

11:30 p.m. or so, we went into her room. She took off her pants, wearing some white briefs, and removed her bra from under her sweatshirt and threw it on the floor. “Free at last.” She got comfortable in the covers and brought up this business of a neck rub. I kept my shirt on, took off my slacks, and put on one of her flannel pajama bottoms and sat on her butt. That led to a long and slow massage from her neck to her feet, with the usual groans of pleasure. There were comments which sounded like someone was making love. “That feels so good… oh god… that’s a little tight….” We were speculating if some of her sexual nerves are between her shoulder blades, but that would not explain why the sensations down in front are not all there. Her muscles, tendons, bones - I know them well by now. I was pressing on her lower back and her behind, which can be sore and tense (she doesn’t know why). That led to her knee joints and her feet, and I was squeezing her calves and thighs, which she worried are getting soft. It felt like warm sourdough bread, and I said, “You’re wholesome.”

We finally pulled the covers over us, and her with a sleepy gratitude. We went to sleep with a full moon obscured by clouds.

Wednesday, May 25, 1994

7:15 a.m. Woke up, rolled over, and rocked her gently. She opened her eyes, looking sleepy. She hasn’t gotten over her cold, or whatever it is. It’s been affecting her metabolism for a week.

She finally got up and hauled a blue dress with her to the shower while I went into the kitchen, made coffee, and returned to the bed. I was lying there when she walked in with a towel wrapped around her. She decided not to wear a dress, wanting to wear men’s slacks, men’s shoes, and a woman’s blouse. That led to a curious sequence. She stood in front of the closet

while talking to me, not turning her back or using the screen. I think she felt it was rude, or maybe is confirming a neutrality between us. Last night she wondered if naked massages with B. had further implications. I said that her and I had done those and they didn't, and she had to admit that was true. She is more discreet above the waist than below, but maybe it's a point of vanity. She put on a white bra of see-through lace over the towel, then dropped the towel and bent over, her black bush looking fuller than before, having washed and dried it, and stepped into some semi-transparent briefs. The black slacks followed.

She put on some dark lipstick, eye shadow, and I finally got up, put on the suit with an open shirt and went into the kitchen for some toast and oranges, coffee and a cigarette. She was in the bathroom with the door open while a torrent of urine escaped her. You would think the girl is under pressure. We went out and waited for the bus, with her cursing a woman driver who went by without stopping. We caught the next one, and I got out after a few blocks and went home. There was a plan to get together later.

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

When I arrived at the building there was a line of protesters along one block of Clay Street, with a police barricade giving them the sidewalk and a few feet of the street. The barricade was lined with small handmade signs, with many in Vietnamese, and others in English. Some of the people were in army fatigues, and there was a man with a megaphone who was yelling at someone in the window of an expensive hotel next to where I work.

It turned out to be an anti-communist demonstration by South Vietnamese. They were protesting the presence of the premiere of Vietnam who is staying in the hotel. According to the signs they don't want any normalized relations with Vietnam, or trade agreements of any kind

with communists and Viet Cong killers of 58,000 Americans. (The U.S. caused the deaths of approximately two million Vietnamese (military and civilian)). A few of the signs were a little off in their translation into English. I was trying to figure out what this meant: VIETNAME: A NEW MARKET OF SELF KILLING AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN.

The riot police were guarding the hotel lobby, but it was a thin line of protesters. Later there were more and they were louder. What was disconcerting, there was no mention of it in the *Chronicle* the next day, like it didn't happen. The premiere of Vietnam is in San Francisco, but it's a non-event? Too controversial? And yet it panders to the overblown occurrence of a vandalized mural with front page headlines. For that matter, there was important news like MINORS CAN BUY CIGARETS EASILY, and NEWARK BOTHERED BY GOLF BALLS.

In the office with the Attorney gone, working for a couple of hours.

5:00 p.m. I walked V. to the station, then went to Ming's office half a block away. I thought we were going to have a workout at the pool, having talked about it hours ago. I should have known there would be a few changes since then, and she was on a different track. When you're caught up in the slipstream of someone whose life is different from yours (like a twenty-four-year-old Chinese female), even the mundane stuff is seen in a different light. It gets me out of my usual routine, and the repartee-rapport is there no matter what we're doing.

I figured I would go to the pool later, so we took a Mission bus to a canned food outlet in the warehouse district. I was feeling remote and drifting, with not much interest in it, while she proceeded to examine every item in the aisles and think about whether she needed it - especially the hair products, body lotions, bath oils, etc. The woman is preoccupied with her physical existence, so it took a while before we got out of there. I bought some long candles, that was it. She was enthusiastic about how much she saved, and we took a bus to her neighborhood.

I relaxed on the bed while she got her laundry together and changed her clothes. Sitting on the edge of the bed she took off her blouse, removed her bra, and put on a sweatshirt with her back to me, maintaining a semblance of decorum. A few minutes later she wasn't satisfied with the sweatshirt and stood up, said "Excuse me," turned to the side and pulled it off, bending over and picking up another one. Her breasts are ample and they move when she does, but I don't think they're getting bigger. Maybe she doesn't want to be provocative, or she wants to hide her waistline. The white lace bra was nearly useless with no support, not to say "irritating."

We were there for about twenty minutes, with barely time to relax. When she had her laundry ready I helped her carry it to the laundromat. It was a block away on a tree-lined street, an old neighborhood with mostly black people. It is an area in transition, with galleries and shops. I got distracted with how she loads a washing machine. She turns it on with nothing in it, then slowly throws clothes in. There was a TV bolted to the wall with an awful talk show about a black woman who went on a date with a guy and how it went. He said she was "Low maintenance," and the audience groaned.

Later there was a program about strange happenings to ordinary people. Someone disappeared, and there were UFO sightings of a half man/half beast. It informed the atmosphere where clothes were drying. During this time I was in and out a couple of times, walking around the neighborhood, and picking up a couple of beers.

9:00 p.m. In the kitchen, she threw together a meal, and we each had a German beer. I read her things from a local periodical (the *SF Weekly*), and she wanted to hear about astrology and the personals. A woman was an "HIV+ cutie pie." Another was a "BABE." There were several AF's (Asian female), which surprised her. We thought some of them were put-ons, like:

> VOLUPTUOUS VIRGIN
> Seeking first time experience, 19 years old, redhead. 5'8" 120 lbs.

Bust. I already have a boyfriend, so no strings attached.

Others were more ordinary. “Looking for guys to hang out with.” Or “DROP DEAD GORGEOUS – Please be sincere, honest & ready to party.”

There was a guy advertising himself as a CALVIN K. UNDERWEAR AD (he looks like Kate Moss?). He “seeks girl who enjoys being slapped around….” That should narrow down the prospects.

There was an “exclusively oral… MUFF DIVER” (who was all talk), and someone into ENEMA THRILLS.

“Young woman, overeducated slacker….”

What got us were the ads for “Missed Connections.” How tenuous, not to say fleeting, trying to establish something through a personal ad on the basis of, “May 8 at 9:30 in Union Square, our eyes met.” Or, “Our eyes met, we didn’t.” I wondered how that would have worked the other way around – we met, our eyes didn’t. “Spoke all too briefly.” Or, “You asked for directions to post office. Your voice – wow.” “I caught your eye… I should have said hello.”

There were personal ads from women who have a hard time meeting someone, but not because they are shy or average looking. It’s the opposite, from the sounds of it. They are the most ravishing intelligent creatures that ever walked the earth. They might be goddesses, but they were forced to put an ad in the paper because they couldn’t tolerate the low caliber of men that one encounters in this country. There was an EXOTIC BRAIN-BEAUTY EURASIAN who is “intelligent, classy, sensual, attractive, busty, petite, loving…,” and another one who is not only DYNAMIC & CREATIVE, but “spiritually evolved and elegant….” Also “attractive, fit, adventuresome,” a woman who values “honesty, commitment and integrity above all else.” I wonder how relative the descriptions are. These women are dynamic and creative and evolved,

but compared to whom or what? Even worse, there was a woman looking for a "man who is a match for me," and "shares my interests" (with her being one of them). How could a mere mortal be the equal of a self-mythologizing goddess?

There was a woman looking for another woman to join her and a man in bed. Ming thought this is a common fantasy for men, to participate or watch. I said I wouldn't like the connotation of being a third wheel or an idle observer. When you're with a woman, bringing in a third person might complicate and compromise the situation.[93] We knocked that around for a while, and I said I've come close to it, having had a couple of girlfriends who had lesbian sympathies or tendencies. She wondered if I am "sexually conservative," and I had to think about it for a minute. Not intellectually, or when I have a girlfriend, but maybe in terms of social experimentation. I have had little to do with whips and chains and prostitutes and orgies. It was a sobering thought, and might explain a few things, like being careful when it comes to women. It's not like in my early twenties when I wasn't wound too tight, and drifted in and out of women's beds with not much difficulty or concern. I must have gotten more particular. Ming thought the same about herself.

We went to her room where she continued her productive evening, folding her laundry and putting it away. She was worn out, but contented, having clean flannel sheets. She can't rest if her room is a mess, but lay down finally and said that she is easily satisfied. I didn't say anything.

Not sure I would spend the night again, but no reason not to. It was getting late, I was

[93] There was a weekend when I was in bed with three women, but one at a time. It wasn't planned, just in keeping with the ebb and tide of women in my life. It was a high tide situation in 1992 when over the course of several days Nora dropped by, the Czech woman took me for a test drive, and the woman I was having an affair with spent the night (we only lasted a few months).

feeling lazy, and the conversation was holding up. We talked about the solidity of her life and how it comes with obstacles.[94] I have a comparatively airy mental existence, but I need to have my feet on the ground more often. It seems like we are reaching for each other's aptitudes. She doesn't like the dense clutter of her room, which doesn't bother me, and said she envies the space in my apartment. She included me in a description of "spacy and eccentric musicians," and that was hard to argue with. We were listening to a tape of early Velvet Underground. She went to the bathroom to wash her voice (I mean face). I was lying on the bed and looking out the window, the clouds going by as a full moon hovered, its hypnotic presence fading in and out.

Ming walked into the room and turned the lights out, except for a couple of candles. She sat down on the side of the bed near a candle, took her shirt off, put on a T-shirt and some boxer shorts, and was ready for bed. I ended up in her pajama bottoms again.

Thursday, May 26, 1994

Woke up early, before seven, and lay there for a while. I was conscious of how close she was, barely touching. Then she got up and took a shower, returning half an hour later with her hair in a towel. She went through a whole procedure of what to wear, and tried on a short tight skirt with her shapely legs, but decided against it - doesn't want attention. Did I think the dark green skirt with white tights and a white blouse was good? What about the clunky shoes? I found myself having a philosophical discussion with a woman who was struggling with her panty-hose.

In the kitchen I made coffee. There was not much for breakfast, so she heated up some pasta from last night which I thought was awful. It's curious how it feels so natural getting up in the morning with her. I suppose it feels good to her as well, or she wouldn't do it. Last night,

[94] She wants to own a farm that she will visit on the weekends, and even has names for the pigs: Henrietta, Igor, and Sebastian. It wouldn't hurt if I had a more tangible sense of the future, but it's hard to think in those terms because I'm usually thinking of something else.

before falling asleep, she was talking about transient global amnesia, plucking her eyebrows, and whether she is becoming more mature. I couldn't see plucking her eyebrows, and as for being mature I'll have to take her word for it. I'm not sure what transient global amnesia is, but thought it had something to do with good sex.

She also brought up the editing of my journal. I think she is restless and wants to set some bigger things in motion, not being satisfied with paying off bills and going to work. She has ambition and a short attention span. As far as my writing goes, I told her that I have a lot of old neo-poetic efforts lying around, gathering more dust than destiny. They were the manifestations of a spacy and eccentric mind. She said she could read them, but doesn't have much patience for poetry, like she doesn't get it. Ming asked if I know other writers or poets. I said I used to, but had drifted away from them over the years. Unless you know writers through their work, in which case I am in close contact with a few, but on a mental/disembodied level. I used to give readings around town, but that was in the early 1970's, and only a few times since then. I have a friend with a radio program on KPFA which is focused on poets, but we have a different approach (Jack Foley). He is more concerned with the physical delivery of words to an audience, like the tradition of Homeric breathing to bring it all back home. It didn't matter what was being said, which took a backseat to the sound itself and the communal occasion of a reading. It sounds like group therapy. He would orchestrate a reading with three people talking at once, just to scramble it up.

Meanwhile, I have written sonnets about the difficulty of understanding Michel Foucault, or a heavy metal band dying on stage, and there are forty pages of Byronic stanzas with the theme slipping away from me.

There was some reference to cost-benefit ratios when it comes to romance. I said it is one of her concepts I have taken to heart. She was skeptical, but likes it when I reflect her point of view, a rare occurrence in her opinion. I said I would write a poem about cost-benefit ratios. "What rhymes with benefit?" she asked. I thought for a moment and said, "Full of it." "A little tit," she replied. When she went to work I rode with her to the Civic Center and then walked to the library, dropping off some books for her. There were a couple of occupied sleeping bags in a doorway of the word. I took a bus to my neighborhood.

I forgot to mention the horoscope. Hers referred to absentmindedness and being thrown by "boring little challenges." She needs "heroic dares" and "big magical tasks." Mine was apropos:

> Welcome students. Close your books, break your pencils and forget everything you know. Your education is about to take a strange and wonderful turn. During the next 3 ½ weeks, you'll double your street smarts and find a whole new meaning for the term 'hands-on experience.' It's been way too long since you opened your doors of perception this wide, seeker. Glad you decided to go hunting for a fresh set of questions."[95]

I don't want to read too much into this, but I liked how it sounded. Hands-on experience might apply to recent massages, and the doors of perception to smoking pot or falling in love. "…[B]reak your pencils," – probably a reference to the journal, it's been going on long enough. It's like a black hole which devours time and concentration, while giving off a steady stream of typographic X-ray signals.

Typing for a few hours.

I went to work in the afternoon, and found the demonstration still in force along one side of the building where I work. They faced a hotel across the street where the visiting delegation

[95] I met a woman two days later at a party in Oakland. We were having a full-blown affair within a week or two, and it went on for years. Talk about a hands-on experience with a fresh set of questions.

from Vietnam was staying. They were vociferous and had some inhospitable signs like, SCRAM! GO BE GONE! COMMUNIST! Also: GET OUT OF HERE, and DEMOCRACY FOR VIETNAM. They don't want this country to have anything to do with their former homeland. It was all rather restrained however. Ten or twelve police vehicles lined a nearby street. The man in army fatigues with one of those bullhorns which mangle and reduce the voice more than projecting it, said "This is a peaceful demonstration…."

In the office with a lot of work. One of our clients was there, the Sikh man in his turban, who the Attorney refers to as a con-man and he's probably right, but they're on good terms. He is in his forties, good-humored, and something of a rake, bemoaning how much he spends on women. The last one cost him $16,000 for some reason. I said, "Was it worth it?" And he said, "Oh, I never learn." He is going out with a woman tonight. He has a tendency to hover around my desk while I work on his case with questions and comments which get on my nerves.

5:00 p.m. V. walked by my desk for the second time, wanting to know if I would walk her to the train station. The first time I said I was busy, having too much work. The second time I said okay, getting my priorities in order. Work is work, but a woman like her who requests your presence is a breath of pure oxygen. She chattered all the way to the station, mostly about how the nineteen-year-old went home for "emotional problems." Maria was in tears because the clunky twenty-four-year-old legal assistant she's been after for months said he couldn't do it. She had worn a succession of cute dresses in the office, what other women characterize as "fuck me" outfits, and primarily for him - though she sits next to me and is a little distracting at times. The woman is impatient, growling at the computer or talking to herself when she can't find something, and she makes quick judgements of people. Now she's going through emotional turmoil for a man. The bitter tears of a sex kitten.

I returned to the office and did some work, then walked to the pool and swam a mile. Floating in the vicinity there was an English girl with pale and buoyant tits, like two teacups.

Walking over Russian Hill on the way home I saw some revolving emerald streaks like laser beams in the sky. I thought it was acid flashbacks due to the strain of swimming and then walking a couple of miles. It reminded me of a hallucination from twenty years ago, where I saw molecular structures made of emerald light beams connected at the points with pale blue stars. It was late at night on the Yuba River, and someone had put a burning candle on the green moss of the river bank. I think that's what inspired the emerald light beams.[96]

Friday, May 27, 1994

NOTES

> Mechanical songs.
>
> A tall dark handsome stranger with a deep and penetrating glance which shook her to the depths of her trust fund.
>
> Ming related a dream where I was with a tall and slender blonde from Texas (with a southern accent) who said I was rambunctious.
>
> On the road to northern California:
>
> I was living in San Pedro in 1971, and went north with some friends who had a converted school bus. On the side of the bus was WINDFUCKER in black gothic letters, but the W looked more like an M. It was painted by Matt and I (a musician friend from high school). The driver was a long-haired fellow with a house in San Pedro, not far from the ocean cliffs. He had a shed in the back with an entire wall covered with kilos of marijuana. I wasn't clear on the scope of his drug dealing, but within a year or two I heard he was getting off a plane in Las Vegas and the FBI was waiting.
>
> The bus broke down near San Francisco. I took off with a friend and hitchhiked to Berkeley. We were sitting near Sather Gate on the university campus when a young man approached. He was good-looking with long blond hair, and asked if we needed a place

[96] There were hallucinatory interludes at other times, like zooming through a kaleidoscopic tunnel reminiscent of the paintings of Kandinsky (late stage), which were morphing by the second.

to stay. We went there with him, a secondhand shop which doubled as a crash pad for runaways in San Francisco. It was run by a black man in his forties, and there were bunks and bedding on the second floor in the back. When I went into the bathroom and turned on the switch a droning heat-lamp went on. The walls were covered with pornographic pictures from magazines. It turned out the man who ran the place would offer his services in a more physical sense, and white kids were his specialty. We politely declined his offer of a back rub, and the next morning were out on the sidewalk, adjusting our packs, and ready to leave. We were talking about what a strange place it was when he stuck his head out the door, having been listening, and had some angry words. He thought we might blow his cover, and didn't like that we were getting away without a back rub. We rendezvoused with the repaired bus, drove up to Eureka, and walked in a wet forest while smoking hash.

Normally on the trips up north we would head for the Sierra foothills in northern California. A friend of mine had a small ranch with a Quonset hut (which he inherited when his father died). It was a good staging area for doing acid, and was close to Rough and Ready, a small town near the Yuba River. There were longhairs skinny-dipping among the boulders in the river, and the occasional pickup truck with guns and a Confederate flag. I met a girl in the river who was on acid at the time, and it was hours before I saw her with clothes on. This was Dee-Dee, a small blonde from Detroit who had some connection to the White Panthers. She was staying at a ranch not far away which had a pond. There were other people there as well, and I don't know who it belonged to. There was a pretty woman who would meditate by the pond with no clothes on when the sun was going down.

Dee-Dee and I were sleeping together, and after several days we decided to hitchhike across northern California to the ocean. We got a ride with a man in his fifties who took us to Arcadia. We then continued down the coast to Mendocino, and walked across a field with wooden houses on the edge of the cliff. It was a warm summer evening and we had nowhere to stay, but were not too concerned. I took out a metal flute and started blowing a tune. Someone was sitting on their porch overlooking the ocean, heard the flute, and offered us a room for the night.

The next day we hitchhiked on Highway 1 to San Francisco, and headed for City Lights Bookstore in North Beach. In the basement was a flier for an event in Berkeley that night: Allen Ginsberg and the Cockettes. We showed up in a hall at UC Berkeley and ended up doing a snake dance with the crowd while Ginsberg chanted something from William Blake, "Merrily… merrily… we welcome in the spring," while using a harmonium. There was a man and woman standing behind Ginsberg in rabbit costumes with the rubber genitals of humans.

A few years later, around 1977, I returned from a year in Europe with Simone, and was back in San Francisco (she was in Los Angeles for a while). I was with Amy, a girl from Memphis who was eighteen, a student at the Art Institute, and good friends with the lead singer of the Avengers (who opened for the Sex Pistols in 1978). Her father died the same day Elvis did, and we didn't last long. One night we walked into a punk club on

> Broadway in North Beach (the bands didn't start until 11 p.m.), and one of the women standing against the wall called my name. It was Dee-Dee, (now Dee Detroit) who was later singing in a band, UXA, which got some attention. There was a shot of her wrapped in bandages like a mummy at the mic by Bruce Connor. I barely got acquainted with her poet boyfriend before he overdosed on heroin.[97]

12:30 p.m. In the office, talking to the receptionist who gave me an invitation to her wedding. There was an image of the elephant god, Ganesh, on the card. An elaborate Indian ceremony is planned, with 1000 or 1500 people invited, so it's being held in a convention center in the East Bay. We talked about it, with the banquet occurring before the ceremony, and other private rituals going on for a couple of days. The bride's family foots the bill, even while "losing" the bride to the husband's family, where she will be at the mercy of her mother-in-law. She said things have lightened up in recent times, and if a bride feels mistreated she can leave. Ami is delicate and rather traditional, at least in this sense, but she talks like a California girl, swearing freely and saying her sister should "get her ass out of there…."

I went to lunch with V., walking to the Hunan place with her in pants and a man's flannel shirt. Sweet and sour chicken, rice, and tea. She was leaning over the table with her confidential gossip about Maria who went home in tears. V. wondered why the guy doesn't want to continue. Maybe he was never with a woman, which got us on the subject of my girlfriends in high school. She was amused to hear that I was found in bed with a girl by her mother (it was her mother's

[97] Flash forward: there was a Bruce Conner retrospective at SFMOMA in 2016. Included in his photos were two of my ex-girlfriends – Amy and Dee-Dee. Amy returned to Memphis when she got out of art school, hung out with the photographer William Eggleston, and was lovers with the musician/writer Tav Falco. His band, Panther Burns, was hired to perform for a graduation party on a destroyer near New Orleans. It was around 1980, and the Louisiana woman who put on the party would be my future girlfriend. It caused so much damage that no more parties were allowed on destroyers. A few years later I met Tav Falco when he came to S.F. with his band. As for Dee-Dee, she moved to L.A. and found Jesus.

bed).[98] A month or so before that the girl kicked her little sister out of the sister's room so we could use her bed. It was the first time for both of us - a room with dolls and child-like drawings on the wall and lots of pink. The problem here, as is the case with most minors, we didn't have a place of our own for intimate occasions and had to improvise. That led to being rousted by the police at a scenic overlook in Los Angeles. The seats were down, the windows steamed up, and when the cop knocked on the window and said we had to leave I said, "Why?" He said if I stepped outside of the car he would explain. My girlfriend didn't like the sound of that, so we drove away. Another time we ended up on a wooden water tower in the country (she had a broken leg from a motorcycle accident, so it wasn't easy).

When I was nineteen I had an affair with the mother of one of the girls I went to high school with. I was skinny-dipping in her pool, and it gave her ideas – a woman with long straight hair who read Sylvia Plath and had a steady supply of wine. Her daughter had ideas of her own, and ran out of the house one afternoon and dove into the pool with no clothes on. I watched her from the shallow end. We were later sitting around inside the house like a nude encounter, along with her mother. The daughter was known for being quiet and bookish in school, but had a luscious figure. V. seems to relish these stories, maybe because her life has been more restrained. She is imbued with an erotic realism, and thinks I was "a bad boy or a gigolo." I said I was friendly, and told her about my second year in college. There was a woman around thirty who taught a class on China. She was a friend of the Professor and made an overture one night at his place. We had a short affair.[99]

---

[98] Her mother handled it well, she just turned around and left the room, shutting the door quietly. This was a dark-haired woman who resembled Judy Garland, had some Native American blood, and was distantly related to William Faulkner (enough to get residuals from his books now and then).

[99] She was Jewish and separated from her husband, a Chinese communist who turned into a businessman. That may have been where the Mercedes came from. I borrowed it one afternoon and took another student for a ride – a woman the Professor had been seeing, and who I slept with eventually (one time). She was

I was running some of this by Ming the other day, and she said it sounds like I have had my share of women. I'm not sure what that means, but would hate to think that one is allotted a certain number of affairs, like it is predetermined and when you reach your limit there's no more. If you haven't cultivated some long-term relationships, you're out of luck - you'll go on living, but alone. I'm used to stumbling onto women without much effort, but it's harder when they're twenty years younger.

I was talking with Ming about pessimism, and brought up the Catholic notion that despair is a sin. You're insulting the universe (and its creator) if you find it a hopeless bore. You don't know all there is to know about life, and so you're judging something on the basis of inadequate information.

V. and I returned to the office, walking close together with our arms touching. We have little in common, and can't assume that we could stand each other for days on end, but there is still this strange rapport, like her spirit engages mine from a nice angle. There was not much work, and I mailed off an essay on race to the Professor. On the return address I put "Fred Voltaire," my alter ego for the moment.

Over the last few days things have been warming up with the legal secretary who sits nearby. We've been commiserating and exchanging comments. The woman is a long-lost breath of the familiar. There is hardly anyone in the office I can talk with on a similar wavelength, politically and otherwise. She is in her late thirties and not a business district lifer, wearing a long skirt and black cowboy boots with long dark hair in a disheveled tangle, and silver

---

later living near the airport in a house which had absorbed a number of acid trips, and shared it with her long-haired boyfriend and a roommate who was an aficionado of hang-gliders (maybe under the influence of the airport). I moved to San Francisco and didn't see her for a few years, but looked her up on a return visit. Things were different. She had had a baby with the roommate and moved out.

bracelets. We had a discussion like I rarely have with anyone at work, going from the Vietnam war to the films of Catherine Deneuve, a woman with a ready comeback for whatever I have to say.

However, she won't stay much longer. She doesn't like the attorney she works for. The others don't either. He's around forty, slick and polished, and a little overbearing at times. He phoned in a last-minute problem for the others and she almost lost her temper. I wondered if she's so political that any authority figure would leave her recoiling. We get along, but one wrong comment from me and that could change. It is the sort of thing I have experienced before, and which I've come to dislike, the obtuse politicizing of every aspect of life.[100]

5:00 p.m. I left the office, picked up some writing pads, and dropped in on Socorro where she works in a stylish boutique. We talked for a while, and she said she is pregnant. Jon is not the father, since they're only married so she can stay in the country. I walked home thinking how graceful she is, and if avoiding the political has anything to do with that.

8:00 p.m. I was reading too much – the *Chronicle, Harpers*, and *The New Yorker* – when Ming called. She sounded worn-out. Last night and this morning we went off in different directions. I had a good workout and went to bed with no alcohol or coffee, got a lot of sleep, and was feeling as healthy and optimistic as I have any right to. She went to the I-Beam with some friends, including an ex-boyfriend who calls her "sweetcakes." She wants him to knock it off, since she feels romantic as a fire extinguisher these days. They were dancing to hip-hop and drinking beer and Cosmopolitans. She got home around three in the morning, feeling like a

[100] When you're with a woman you might think you have built up some proof of character, but one wrong move and you're condemned by someone who isn't grounded in the past. It is further evidence of women who live in the present, when those lesser moments are magnified (but so are flowers). The history of a man is relegated to the dust bin, and the woman fills the present with her voice.

wreck, and was hungover the next day with four hours sleep and in a bad mood. It was the usual thing where the morning after pays for the previous night, and all she wanted to do is go to sleep. But she said it was fun.

Oddly enough I'm usually more light-hearted, with her having a tendency for weighty depression and/or hectic problematic situations. The other day she admitted being discontented with her life, while assuming I found mine to be okay. I'm not going through the ceiling very often, but I'm not sinking through the floor either, or stumbling over things on the ground like she does.

Anyhow, the weekend is up in the air. We might get together tomorrow, but I have no idea what I'm doing. There are two parties, a Brazilian parade, and maybe a trip to the wine country. If she comes over it would almost balance those. She constitutes a missing chord around whom a man feels complete (or I do anyway). Ming is mystified at having that effect on men. I think that some of it comes from being a pagan Chinese woman. She was not exposed to Christianity, which has a habit of diluting (and diverting) our existence with its angels and its after-life concerns. She confronts life head on, although it gives her a headache, not to say tension in her neck, back, and shoulders.

I tore up the guitar for an hour in the kitchen, one of those occasions where you pick it up, not expecting much, and it surprises you. Then I wrote a letter to the criminal division of the Municipal Court concerning the final payment for my DUI in 1992. It was an exorbitant fine, over $1000. I paid it over the last twenty months, slowly draining my resources (there was a discrepancy about the amount). I thought of someone mailing his DUI payment in the middle of the night.

There was a call from Jon in St. Helena, a little drunk, though we talked about other things. Immigration, communism, and inflated threats to national security. We lingered on the subject of women. He has gone too long without and can't find any in the wine country, though he won't compromise his time or character in order to find a girlfriend, and doesn't want to jump through social hoops. It would seem the spacy and eccentric live alone as often as they're living like a libertine.[101]

Jon is worried about his marriage of convenience to Socorro. She has been here for ten years, but is now expecting a child. Jon thinks his absence from the birth certificate might be a problem.

Speaking of immigration problems - he has a Laotian friend who had a falling out with his girlfriend a couple of years ago (she is Laotian and Thai). Parting at the airport in Hawaii he lost his temper and made a bad move, lunging at her with a pocketknife and inflicting superficial wounds. Jon followed his trial, doing what he could. The man got a few years in prison and was out in less than two. Jon got him a job where he works in St. Helena. The man has been in this country since he was nine and has family here, along with permanent resident status, but never became a citizen. He was picked up by immigration officers at the job last week and taken to San Francisco and then Los Angeles. He could end up in Arizona, far from anyone he knows. Jon thinks someone informed on him, probably the family of the woman he hurt. They may have gotten wind of his whereabouts, and would prefer that he was dead or kicked out of the country. The question is if he can be deported, having been here for so many years. Jon is talking to lawyers.

[101] What happens when your expectations have become unreasonable, even though you base them on the precedented? The present is debased? I'm living in debasement with a cellar phone?

I got off the phone and was on the typewriter after midnight for a couple of hours. Then I went to bed, reading an article in *The New Yorker* by Louis Begley, a writer and attorney of such high-flown accomplishment (at sixty-one) I felt like less of a dharma than a dormant bum.

4:30 a.m. I was coming out of a long and vivid dream (which hasn't occurred in a while), in which my subconscious mind was trying to tell me something – that I had to take a leak. There was a sequence where I had an erection and was urinating a steady stream. When I woke up I had an erection, and had to pee like there is no tomorrow. I stood on the edge of the bathtub while producing an arc in the dark, an off-the-wall experience.

I went back to bed, turned on the light, and scribbled two or three pages about the dream. I wondered if I should drink more liquids before I go to sleep in order to remember more dreams (being woken in the middle of the REM phase). Two or three hours into your deepest sleep the need to urinate will pull you into consciousness, while trailing the ephemeral remnants of a vaguely remembered dream.

I turned off the light, but lines were floating to the surface in a tenuous mental state of semi-consciousness. There was something about an old-fashioned aura of women in a context of sexual abstinence. I wondered if people are unsure of themselves in a time of social upheaval, and if it messes up their love lives with blown connections. They are out of sync, not in the mood for taking chances, and will find an excuse to write somebody off, even for a single characteristic – like her tits aren't perfect or his politics are not a mirror of her own.

The last fading image (on the verge of falling asleep): I was making something edible on pita bread, and I put a rabbit skull on the lettuce. I have one in my room, but it was incongruous.

Saturday, May 28, 1994

NOTES

An article in the *SF Weekly* on the mural of Malcolm X at San Francisco State. It showed the mural, which is not a good likeness. The article quoted someone from the Pan African Student Union which adheres to the early beliefs (later refuted) of Malcolm X with respect to racial separatism. The weak or hypocritical aspect being, what are they doing at SF State, using the facilities of a public school as a stage for turning their backs? The group spokesman: "If you want to be a revolutionary, you have to have an internationalist mindset… and Israel's foreign policy destabilizes our homeland. Until Africa is free, we won't be free here. I'm not here to get my degree. I'm just here to organize, to create a revolutionary mindset."[102]

I thought the international conceit of revolution went out with "Workers of the world unite," when they didn't. The circumstances differ from country to country, with some not warranting or ready for a bloody revolt. Even worse is when a revolutionary mindset has its sights on a blurred horizon of other continents. It could lose a more direct focus on problems close to home.

You might wonder how his "homeland" is Africa (which is an entire continent, a rather broad territory) if his ancestors have been here for centuries. And how is the foreign policy of Israel destabilizing the continent of Africa? Can we be a little more specific? How can you have a revolution on such obtuse terms? Israel has had connections with South Africa, in transition at the moment, but what other countries have they been involved with and causing instability? There is some evidence that having a government run by blacks can be destabilizing, considering the results.

And what does it mean, "until Africa is free, we won't be free here"? How many countries on that vast continent are we talking about, and how many hundreds of millions of people? And free in what sense, if people have different definitions of the word and different ways of bringing it about, including many political factions? In what sense will someone not be free here, according to conditions of people thousands of miles away? I think they would find it useless and insulting (downright tasteless) for someone in this country to avail themselves of all this country has to offer, from freedom of movement and speech to a functional infrastructure of roads and highways, while pretending they're not free because of miserable conditions in an African country. They might as well walk around with ashes in their hair and beating themselves – which again would not help the Africans very much. It is an amazing statement when you think about it, like saying, no matter how much things improve in the U.S., it will never be enough if and when the living conditions in Africa aren't undergoing something similar. Is this what happens

[102] How compromised or mythical and constructed on sand is the revolutionary position when it is a mutant hybrid, taking something from Marxism, Islam, and racial chauvinism? In the process it manages to violate some of the basic precepts of all of those. Not only is the logic a little weak, the connections among those influences are tenuous, if not contradictory. For example, Marxism and Islam are supposed to be color blind, not racially exclusive, and racial chauvinism is an empty pose if they avail themselves of the institutions and inventions of other races.

when people have one foot in the old country? If they identify that closely with foreign people who're having problems, they might as well be poor or living in a refugee camp if those are the conditions of those people. But conveniently one isn't poor or living in a refugee camp, much less being wiped out. They can maintain the vicarious mantel (wrote mental) of noble suffering derived from a condition which is kept at a safe distance while availing themselves of the securities and amenities of a modern country founded by the white man. It's like saying as long as people are hungry in Africa, you're hungry too, while stuffing a hamburger in your mouth.

Meanwhile, the mural has been sand-blasted off the wall because the Student Union couldn't decide what to do, and the muralist wouldn't remove the dollar-signed Stars of David (talk about self-defeating). Those are not exactly a defining aspect of Malcolm X, as if he's seeing stars. The mural could have remained and now it's gone, at considerable expense. There were workmen and police attending to the mural at four in the morning.

An article in the *SF Weekly* about complaints at the Fillmore Center, an urban renewal complex where 20 percent of the units are below market rate. "African American residents charge unequal treatment." There was a meeting where "members raised a host of issues, from the low-quality cable system to apartment break-ins to unequal treatment of African Americans." You can't be more oppressed than having low-quality cable television, though it's hard to figure out the discriminatory aspect of it. Are there white occupants with better cable?

The apartment break-ins - what are the odds that most of them are by other African Americans, and the occupants want more protection from their own people? Are there no locks on the doors? Is it unequal treatment that a deposit of $1000 is required for a two-bedroom apartment? From the sounds of it, that is less than one month's rent. Normally a deposit is more than that. Nevertheless, the "tenants struggle." People of African descent around the world will never sleep easy until the tenants at the Fillmore Center are given high-quality cable television (a cultural artifact of white people, but that's another story).

"Zaire disintegrating into anarchy," and President Mobutu Sese Seko is "rarely seen."[103] He has robbed the country of approximately $5 billion. "About 85 percent of the 85,000 miles of roads that existed at independence in 1960 (who built those?) have reverted to bush." "The economy is in a shambles with external debt at over $10 billion." "Prices rise a hundredfold each year. There is virtually no investment." The army running rampant and police are under paid. One out of ten children is malnourished, and one out of forty is starving. AIDS is rife… "since a prevent program has been largely abandoned." There are no government services.

Mobutu has been there since a coup in 1965, "with the backing of the CIA." The U.S. as usual is in a compromised position, but is no longer supporting him. The U.S. Agency for

[103] John Darnton, "Zaire Drifting Into Anarchy As Authority Disintegrates," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1994

> International Development "which pumped some $900 million into Zaire beginning in 1965, has closed down its operation." Well, they tried, and whose money was that?
>
> It would seem that Richard Nixon wanted to be a Black Muslim. There are curious similarities in their beliefs, since he was "contemptuous of American Jews and 'the terrible problem arising from their total domination of the media'."[104] He could be a spokesman for the Black Muslims, at least on that subject. Jews are known for having an educated presence and effect, and have more reason to be contemptuous of Nixon-types. We don't need more paranoiac low-brows holding onto power, or politicians who collaborate with organized crime.[105]
>
> The defense for the black man who opened fire on people on a subway, killing six and wounding nineteen: "He thought he was a victim of racism." (Kunstler)

Typing for two or three hours, and an hour workout on a wooden instrument.

4:00 p.m. I walked to Black Point Battery which overlooks the bay. It was a nice afternoon with the sails leaning over the water, but I was being indecisive, having to choose between going out of town or a party in Oakland. I was sitting by the water and looking north past Alcatraz. When I walked home I realized that I was looking at boats around the time the last ferry left for Vallejo and the wine country. I called the Actress at the last minute. She said she would pick me up for the party in a warehouse where she works. It's in a rough neighborhood in West Oakland.

8:30 p.m. As we drove across the Bay Bridge she told me what happened to her boss the other night (a window installer). He is a white man in his thirties. A friend came by late at night who is known for scams, and said there was a crack dealer sitting in his car who wanted money. There was some reason to believe that both of them were in on it. The boss went outside with a loaded shotgun. It's an area where occasional gunshots are heard, and last month a bleeding body

[104] Rowland Nethaway, "'Haldeman Diaries' Counterbalances Eulogies," *Deseret News*, May 21, 1994
[105] What we have are politicians who collaborate with organized Zionists.

was found in a car across the street. He confronted the black drug dealer sitting in the car, but he wouldn't come out. The boss smashed the car windows and the dealer got out of the car. A few minutes later the police drove up and the boss was arrested. He spent the night in jail for brandishing a loaded weapon. Later the case was dropped, or no one wanted to press charges. He forked out one-tenth of $15,000 for bail.

Tonight he wore a black T-shirt and jeans, a tall Nordic man with blond hair who is on the friendly quiet side. I later learned he has a drinking problem.

The party turned into one of the more wacko off-the-wall events I've been to in a while. We stood around in the warehouse with its high ceilings and panes of glass leaning against the wall like windows without a home. There was a platform covered with carpet for cutting large panes of glass, and there were hooks and pulleys. I said, "They could make porno films in here," that having been the tone of the conversation for a while. I was in a backroom kitchen area with several women around a wooden table full of food, and having some wine. One or two of the women were on the subject of esoteric words they came across, like "inanition." I threw in "transient global amnesia," but then (as the Actress noted) the conversation went downhill with innuendos and sexual references. A woman said there should be other words for a female orifice, rather than pussy or cunt, but all she could think of was "love taco."

She turned out to be a writer who is on the verge of putting out a magazine called *Fat!So?* It's about women on the heavy side, her being well over two hundred pounds and short and tired of being categorized or judged because of it. She wore a tight body suit which was low cut with large breasts and hair in a buzz cut. She had come with a friend, an outspoken poet and writer in her late thirties who was thin and intelligent. She wore a purple miniskirt, black boots, and a black sweater: Daytona Beach from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, who would soon produce a

marijuana pipe and pass it around. I had a hit which floated and facilitated if not accelerated the evening, along with the wine.

Part of the dynamic of the party was that people would perform, a kind of salon. There was a corner upstairs in a loft which had a couple of microphones and a black backdrop, along with sofa, bed, and chairs. I sat on a chair with a wooden guitar and good amplification. It wasn't my idea to start off, but after a glass or two of wine, some marijuana, and a long workout that afternoon, it didn't bother me. I was feeling more expansive with two microphones, and went off on a semi-improvised instrumental with a small audience who stopped talking while I played. That was followed by a Frank Sinatra take-off (by request), "Fly Me to the Moon." I had changed the words. "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…." That went over well, and I gave up the stage to a woman who sang folk songs.

There was a guy who did a monologue from a Tennessee Williams play (*Night of the Iguana*). He turned into another person as he went into character, the way musicians delve into a song (and you can almost believe that Mick Jagger was a street-fighting man). There were other monologues by theater people, a woman folksinger with a nice voice, and the two women writers read their stuff. The performers were mostly in their thirties. There were also some guys in a grunge band who were around twenty years old and friends of someone who worked in the warehouse. They had set up their equipment downstairs, and were mingling with the rest of us, though one or two of them were so wasted they could barely play.

Afterwards, we went downstairs and hung around the band's equipment. They were not doing much, so the two women writers got up and delivered some lines. The woman with the magazine (Minnie) had a nice piece, finding other definitions of words which was well done. I

wondered what she must go through as a heavy-set woman with a delicate mind. She knows how bodies can be arbitrary as a burden or a shape, and how society views them.[106] The other writer was witty, vulgar, and direct as she read her poems. An eclectic and eccentric range of people listened to Daytona.

Things got a little chaotic and warped with the band. The long-haired drummer was too drunk to carry a beat more than half a minute. They made several attempts to get something going. The singer with short hair and a goatee was leaping around with his head cocked to the side, yelling into the mic which was held at an angle to his mouth like a contorted gnome. They finally gave up or got discouraged and two of the guys disappeared. The long-haired fellow who worked there was willing to keep going with anyone who wanted to pick up an instrument. I was on drums for a while (he wanted a Ramones beat, which is not too complicated). The Actress was on bass guitar, saying "I'll try anything." She could hardly play a note, but tried. It turned out that he wasn't much for jamming and couldn't stretch out, like he knew the grunge stuff but that was it. Eventually we cut loose, but I was on the guitar while he was on drums and it managed to sound like something. When I handed the guitar to someone the Actress said, "Good thing I'm not in love with you." I guess that means it sounded good. What got me was another long-haired guy asked if he could try it. He couldn't play very well, but that didn't stop him from filling the room with his lack of musicality.

It was twelve or one in the morning by then, and I drifted upstairs into the sleeping loft. I was in the company of a woman with pretty blonde hair which went nearly to her knees. She wore a long lacy dress and showed some interest as we found ourselves lounging on the bed and

[106] There was a black woman who worked at a small library near my apartment. She had a serious deformity that might have rivaled that of the Elephant Man. One day I heard her speaking and I couldn't see her (my back was turned after checking out some books), and I was struck by what a normal-sounding voice was coming out of that deformed body.

on the verge of getting closer. She said she wanted to “cuddle” or lay down with me. I thought I should get her phone number, but that was a reality check. She admitted she was “flirting”, and there was a willing mood with nothing to prevent us from lying in each other’s arms except for one small fact: she was the girlfriend of the man whose party it was, this being his place (and he has a shotgun).

I kept my distance, though we went on talking for a while. Then her boyfriend, along with the others, gravitated to the loft. People were reluctant to tear themselves away from the party. Every now and then the wasted drummer would stand up and announce something vulgar in Spanish, the only words he knew, and someone would lead him to the side and sit him down.

We left around three in the morning (I forgot my shoulder bag), and drove across a nearly deserted bridge to the city.

Sunday, May 28, 1994

I was a bit of a wreck in the morning with not enough sleep, and a little hungover. There was a phone call from B. She said they would pick me up in a convertible for the samba parade.

11:00 a.m. I was still in a daze when Ming called, and we told each other what we did yesterday. She had left me twisting in the wind while she was out with a friend, but said she was open for something this afternoon. I told her about the parade and she said to call her at noon. I said I’ll get her phone machine like yesterday. She said she would be there. That may have sent a message, since I had no intention of calling her back. She called an hour later and I got over the mood. I was semi-braindead for one thing, and there was a festive situation in the Mission.

B. and her girlfriend had arrived a few minutes before and were in the bathroom putting up a shower curtain. Ilsa was shown around the place and they were in a good mood, apparently

not fighting this weekend. She wore a T-shirt with the arms cut off. Her little tits were nearly revealed, but that was no concern to her. She is out there in ways that bother B., and was walking around topless at the gay/lesbian parade last year.

Eventually we went downstairs and I got into the backseat of a late model red convertible. We drove to Ming's neighborhood to pick her up. The two of them bickered about B. changing her shirt or getting some deodorant. Little things like that can turn into stumbling blocks between two women. It's the downside of a material view of things, it compromises moods and conversations and entire events – as happened with the parade. They would end up missing most of it because they were having drinks with two other women.

Meanwhile, feathered apparitions were on the street, from Mayan warriors with headdresses to neo-Rio de Janeiro showgirls in sequined G-strings. There was a Bolivian group in their folk costumes doing a choreographed forward motion in unison. Steel drums, samba, and an eclectic array of groups, including martial arts. I wondered if anyone could take part, as there were some eccentrics with contraptions like hallucinations, including a man on a surreal reconstructed bicycle. There were men and women on stilts with green feathers, and a loud samba truck with people in costumes gyrating in back. A woman was holding court on the roof of the truck in feathers and sequins, her heavy breasts swaying with blue tape over her nipples. One truck had four women wearing body paint and bits of cloth down front, having painted their breasts with camouflage so no one could see them.

A group of people pounded on drums, with others doing a rhythmic walk. A man was walking on a ball. There were large paper mache heads and other apparitions, including a few guys strapped into feathered radar dishes which were ten feet in diameter and radiating behind them like a male peacock. I thought of the film, *Black Orpheus*. Some people put less work into

their costumes, wearing anything that constituted a change of pace, or was in line with the extravagant displays that occur in nature, like tropical birds. Ming had never been to this and was enjoying it immensely.

3:30 p.m. or so, we walked down a side street and went into an exaggerated samba walk. We arrived in an area with booths, smoky fried foods, reggae and samba bands, and hung around in front of a stage. The crowd was dancing and so were we. One or two couples were lambada dry humping, with the man behind the woman. This was a block or two from Project Artaud, the converted factory full of art studios where I used to live in 1974. Another factory in the neighborhood was torn down, as if to make room for zombie samba celebrations. We eventually walked to Mission Street which was deserted and still blocked off, with litter lining the gutters and a few policemen standing around, protecting the quiet.

We went to her place where she changed into a running outfit. We had been on our feet for hours, but now I was going running. It was her idea. We took a bus to my place, where I changed into some shorts. We walked over to Fort Mason and ran along the waterfront about a mile or so to where the Presidio begins. I was surprised I went that far since I never run (except on a tennis court). She continued while I walked for a while, and then was running again. I caught up with her, who was sweating profusely.

On our way back I picked up some red snapper at a store, and we returned to the apartment with stolen flowers. Ming put them in a vase on the kitchen table amidst a profusion of green onions, pepper, fish, and rice. We sat in the kitchen while the rice was cooking and got into one of those discussions where I'm in a pointblank mood. I said I want to live somewhere that I'm not hated (as a straight white male). I wondered if my relations with women have been compromised or slowly choked off in this city which is colder and less friendly than you might

suppose. I have experienced other cities, including Los Angeles, though some do not believe me when I say it's warmer and I don't just mean the weather. Others commiserate and then corroborate a certain fragmentation in this town. It has its limits when you take into account the ethnic people who're exclusive, women who're elusive or they're into women, and those who're only here on a commuter or a tourist basis.

There was some question if I'm balanced by the music, considering how isolated and divisive writing is. I look at people from a distance, maybe with suspicion, while with music there's a common ground. When I play guitar the anger is channeled into the air. People tend to be a friend of music (it leaves them open and relaxed), but not so often of the intellect (especially in this country). I told her about the party in Oakland last night, and how I felt an old familiar sense of being grounded. Things are slower there, and residential, probably more heterosexual, and I was feeling right at home.

More to the point: I was hanging out with people I have something in common with, not only age but inclinations. I used to think that being around people who are different was a positive thing, but there are serious drawbacks when your history and your interests are irrelevant to those around you – who are younger, from another culture, business types, or who knows what? It's like going home again when you're around people on a similar wavelength - including writers, who I've kept at arms' length for a long time. It is like the ice is broken just by being who you are.

I've been drifting away from the familiar and the known, the people who're homogenized by hanging out with others of the same age, race, and income level. I may have gone off track when I was with a French-speaking divorcee who was nine years older, while being friends with one of my professors. But there were other stages of estrangement and removal, like when I left a

network of friends in Los Angeles and moved to San Francisco (I was twenty). It was useful when it came to writing, but as far as music goes it was a loss.

I grew up with a certain detachment, having lived in many places from coast to coast by the time I finished high school. It wasn't easy being a stranger all the time, but it can loosen the grip of a provincial mindset and its localized decorum. I was speaking in this vein with someone who spent most of her life in this town, (though born on another continent). That might account for her energetic presence, especially since she hasn't led her life as a recluse. She told me - though I have my doubts - that she can do things alone. "I don't mind being alone, I'm just not very often." I said, "That's like saying, 'I don't mind being poor, though I'm usually not'."

Meanwhile, the mood was not as serious as it may sound, and we were having dinner with a couple of candles on the round wooden table. There were some comments. "How does it feel to be non-linear?" I asked. She said it would explain her frequent discontent with jobs and men, if not herself. However, she is not fond of the nicknames which I come up with. "Hey, Cherry Pit." During the meal I went off on a tangent, telling her about a Kurosawa film. There was some talk about sitting on the roof or taking a bath. She was fine with talking while I took a bath, so I got the water running. A few minutes later we were headed for the bathroom. I took off my clothes and got into the tub while she lowered her body suit to her ankles, wearing a black lace bra, and sat on the toilet, releasing a quick stream. With her body suit pulled up she sat on the edge of the tub and put her feet in the water. This is someone who pees a lot. She said she has a small bladder.

Ming insisted on washing my hair. A certain male organ wasn't sure what to do. Depending on the mood it was relaxed or semi-erect, and then relaxed again and floating in the water. Then I was lying back and going limp according to her instructions, and my head fell back

as she held me around the neck and rinsed my hair. I was free associating, from *The Pieta* to *The Death of Marat*. I wouldn't say she's Charlotte Corday, but not the Virgin Mary either.

There was a candle on the back of the toilet. Around midnight, an hour later, we were in the front room. She was lounging on the sofa, and wondered why it fit her so well. I sat on the floor, keeping my distance, though there was a map of the city between us. We wondered where to walk and how many miles. Eventually, with her head hanging off the edge of the sofa, she said something about a sore neck. I took the hint and sat next to her, rubbing it a little. She was groaning, so I got some massage oil and lowered the straps off her shoulders. I massaged her neck and shoulders while she lay on her back, with her admiring how the oil facilitates the process. I was thinking that she has a point, she isn't getting any thinner. 140 pounds, she said, but there is nothing wrong with softness, and her skin is smooth.

Earlier we were talking about people with darker skin, and how it is a stigma in some Asian countries (including the Philippines, as a woman friend has noted). The assumption is that people with darker skin work in the fields, and people with lighter skin are more refined (like Europeans don't do manual labor). That doesn't mean those cultures don't look down on foreigners, however pale they are. In China and Korea I would be referred to as "a white ghost," and it's not a compliment.

1:00 a.m. Ming rolled over and I rubbed her back until she was nearly asleep. Eventually, with her assuming I couldn't do it, I picked her up and carried her into the next room. I stood there and considered how to deposit her on the bed. She preferred not to be thrown. She ended up under the covers in a T-shirt and briefs, with me in a black robe, though it was a warm night.

Monday, May 30, 1994

9:00 a.m. Woke up. There was the usual routine of coming to our senses, and she used my toothbrush.

11:00 a.m. Ming and I walked to the Presidio woods, about two miles, and found the courts. We had a workout that wouldn't quit, with the weather warm and muggy. It was the first time we played together, but she's been practicing, and running after her errant shots was a form of exercise. Some shots were returned with surprising force. She wore a baseball cap, shorts, a white shirt, and was enjoying this. Sometimes it threw her off when I put a spin on the ball which left her swinging at the air and asking what I'm smiling about.

It went on for nearly two hours, then we quit and walked into the woods and sat on the sandy ground. We had a grapefruit, water, and an apple. After a while she wanted to move, having been overheated but the shade was cool on her legs. We found a stump in the sunlight, but a minute later there were bugs crawling on her, so we sat near a playground of parental guidance, and in honor of Memorial Day we listened to a little girl crying. I wanted to dive into the ocean, but she thought it was out of the way, so we walked up a street with expensive homes overlooking the woods (the luxury of trees). Ming reverted to an earthy child-like state she gets into when she is tired. She pulled her shorts down and said I should feel her underwear to see how much she sweated. Mine was dry (she held onto my pants when walking up a hill).

We took the California bus, transferred, and arrived at her place around five. I hung out for a few hours, lounging on the bed and reading the paper. She nearly fell asleep for a while. She has a tendency to drift off without a second thought. When reading the paper she has an endearing pointblank reaction to the news. I had to explain what D-Day was about, a little unclear on the concept, and read the comics out loud. Later she was licking a popsicle. I said, "You want cold lips?" "Maybe."

8:00 p.m. I went home.

Tuesday, May 31, 1994

There were several phone calls in the morning. B. called with some comments about Memorial Day. Her girlfriend was born in Germany, has a Nazi pin, and there were war-related deaths in her family. I'm not sure if this is historically correct, but she thought their fathers might have been shooting at each other, and wondered what they would have thought if they knew their daughters were sleeping together. I said the latter is preferrable. She said, "Oh thank you."

The Actress called and said one of the women at the party "likes you," and I should call her. I called her friend Minnie to get the number and she was gracious on the phone, with a voice conveying a literate warmth. We talked about writing for a few minutes, and she referred to Nicholson Baker (*Fermata, Vox*) and John Updike, both of whom I've read.

There was a long phone call from my sister, the ex-sociology professor, who is aware of people who retool their fate while changing their careers in their thirties or forties. My brother in Los Angeles will start a two-year program to become an ultra-sound technician. That is not implausible as he had a technical approach when he was doing photography and film. Using sound-waves for a still life will be different – there is still life in the patient – but they're like the movies which can see through someone and reveal their inner child. My sister may expand her teaching credentials by learning Spanish. There has been a massive influx of Spanish-speaking people,[107] but not enough Latinos go to college, or the ones who do aren't interested in being teachers, having their sights on better-paying jobs.

[107] The Professor was doing some community service a few years ago, giving immigration advice to Latinos. An old Mexican man showed up one day wearing a baseball cap which said, GIVE ME HEAD UNTIL I'M DEAD. He didn't have much English, and the Professor figured someone in his family gave it to him as a joke.

Other subjects in the conversation: Hillary, *Oleanna*, and L.A.

Went to work in the afternoon. Ming said she had to mentally prepare herself for going back to work today. I don't do that. I just arrive and sit there at the desk, stunned and bored and ready to bolt. The Sikh man was there with his beard and turban. He is not without a sense of humor, but when he was leaving he insisted that I loan him $20. "Come on, fork it over. I'm in a hurry." I said his financial concerns were between him and the Attorney, so he finally went into the conference room (the door was closed) where the Attorney was talking to another client who objected to the interruption. "I'm paying for this time."

Earlier he gave the receptionist a hard time, and had some attitude on the phone when she couldn't put him through to the Attorney, so I talked to him. She called me back and was swearing a little. I spoke with her later at the front desk, and she said she was packing for the upcoming wedding. She will move into the home of her husband's parents, which is hard to imagine. She said she will miss her mother, and is used to having a messy room - she throws her clothes on the floor around the bed, but can't do that anymore.[108] I am impressed with her tradition from a comfortable distance, not being subject to it, and seeing how marriage can be pretty flimsy in this country. However, many women in her culture feel oppressed, and she doesn't know to what extent her mother-in-law will be a domineering presence.

[108] Ami noted that family bonds are important in her culture (mine too, I believe), while a sense of independence is not as important. I said it has its pros and cons. A lot of people end up living alone, and they're estranged from their families. Even worse, there are philosophical doubts as to whether anyone is truly independent, given how much we depend on society, each other, the four elements, etc. It seemed like a grounded life is possible in the tradition she was born into. One doesn't look for endless choices which can cut your life into sections which don't necessarily fit together and you're feeling jerked around by liberty. You may have short-lived love affairs and unfamiliar people in your life. You're neurotic without your feet on the ground of some tradition. There are children who are messed up by a broken home, a common occurrence in those high winds of relentless independence.

6:00 p.m. I took a crowded bus over Nob Hill to pick up some guitar picks. In the music store I went into the backroom and plugged in a black acoustic/electric for $1500, connected to a small Fender amp. It sounded good, and I couldn't tear myself away for twenty minutes or more. The sound projected from the amplifier is an additional dimension and it feeds back into what you're playing, which improves your finger work (although the quality of the instrument has a hand in that).[109] I was coming up with things I hadn't done before.

In the evening I read a long essay, "Autobiography in an Age of Narcissism," by William Gass. It segued to a death row in Texas, "Witness to Another Execution," with an inmate in a five by nine-foot cell. Some people work in a five by nine-foot cubical. But seriously, folks…. It wasn't even ten o'clock and I was planning to call Daytona, the woman at the party, but I lay down for a minute. The next thing I knew it was one in the morning. Coming to I thought about it and finally got up. Coffee, Guinness, typing until three in the morning - the lucid quiet one encounters in the middle of the night.

4:00 a.m. Went back to sleep.

Wednesday, June 1, 1994

NOTES

Begin the cuisine.

Another still-born sub-culture.

"Source amnesia" – an epistemological nightmare.

There are women whose minds are like the tangled roots of a plant in a pot that is too small.

[109] An amplifier generates a sonic force field in front of a musician which pulls him into it and which he explores.

I think some women are brainwashed by their tears. It has a physiological effect. The mind becomes sodden and memories are washed away, along with tension or resentments. A capacity for crying makes them more buoyant as they're bouncing back, as if they're floating on those tears. What else is washed away by aqueous tear ducts? Entire unwritten novels, or the stored-up motivation that produces a book, or gets it started. I wonder if women who become writers are less prone to tears, like they're sublimated into black ink.

What got me thinking of this, the other day Maria was in tears of emotional distress. The guy she was after in the office said he couldn't do it. She had been wearing sexy outfits and strategizing for months, but the next day she bounced back, seemingly composed. It wasn't long before she had some other guy on the phone. The resilience of the young.

Ming is surprised that she has gotten over the ex-boyfriend who took a hike. There were a lot of tears, but those were washing him away. They got him out of her system.

Ming was perfume testing on the way to a tennis court the other day, looking for her scent. She tried on many, looking for a musky odor, like trees or plants in heat. She put some on me. She did that one morning when she was getting ready for work, putting some of her scent on my neck. I went home, but for the rest of the morning her scent was in the air. I almost turned around to say something to her, but she wasn't there. I told her that later, and she liked the idea.

When I was leaving the party the other night the woman with hair below her waist walked over and gave me a full embrace. It left the imprint of her body contour on the soft sand of my senses, and was slow in fading.

I dropped in on a Chinese novelty shop in North Beach the other day. I was on the way to work, and looking for something for my brother. A cigarette lighter squirting water, "Thunder Balls," etc. A young Chinese woman walked over, soft spoken with a slight accent. I hadn't asked for help, but she ran through the items with no hesitation or self-consciousness. There was an item which would "pinch your butt," or squirt water when you sit on the toilet, and she smiled sweetly.

An article on bad writing. It quoted a woman (Pat Booth) who is bent on proving that a woman can write like a man in the worst sense. Time and again I come across scenes or jokes which land with a dull thud of the dumb and vulgar, and were done by women. She wrote an overheated sex scene where the woman went into a striptease while the man "watched her breast as if it were an executioner." The reviewer pointed out how far removed that is from a *bon mot*.

There is a dubious conceit that men are threatened by women's bodies, and that includes large-breasted ones, which would be news to most men. Some women relish the thought

> of wielding their tits like weapons while the men fall back in awe. It has the credibility of an old bra ad with a woman riding on a firetruck: "I dreamed I went to the fire in my Maidenform bra."

Typing in the morning, then I called Daytona in the office where she works (as an executive secretary). I got a pleasant and professional voice on the phone. The last time we spoke we were in a warehouse in Oakland and a little stoned. We weathered this adjustment or reality check, and I asked if she would like to have a drink after work. She said she would love to, but was having a root canal. How about tomorrow?

Phone call from Ming at work. She said she had an awful day at work yesterday, and doesn't like it. We talked about career options, and if she wants to go back to school. She feels like she is treading water. Ming has big ambitions and the energy to follow through, but finds it hard to focus. She asked me what a notary public does, and likes the idea of getting paid to sign a piece of paper, or to verify someone's identity. I said there is more to it. She told me about a fellow who has some direction in his life. He is her age, and said he wants to go into urban planning. It turned out he isn't sure what that is, he just likes the sound of it, the "urban" part.

Meanwhile, would I like to rendezvous at the farmers' market?

1:30 p.m. I showed up on the way to work. The girders of the new library are now in place and framing space. Ming arrived with a skirt below her knees, very demure. She loves to stroll amongst the potted plants, the dead fish and the oranges, not to say the bargains. After half an hour we took a bus downtown to her office. She was ambiguous about tonight.

I walked to a gallery for some paintings by Eric Fischl. I used to like his work. There is a sense of middle-class domains with a torque of the perverse. An uncertain tangibility is arrived at through the Freudian. The scenes have a rancid psychology which counters the "unbearable

lightness of being."[110] It is a last resort for those who are defined and refined by their bank account. They're caught between the cleaning fluid and a dirty innuendo, all those twisted occupants with home insurance.

Anyhow, he seems to have lost that dimension of suburban foreboding. The current show is informed by the ordinary eroticism of the woman he lives with. There are casual moments when a ray of light touches the object of his love (who is bathing or getting undressed). That affords a further opportunity to see her in motion, slightly blurred, in a flurry of love and light, the privacies of their completion. Now the public can admire the thighs and stomach of his wife.

Holly Roberts (at the Koch) – I like her work, oil on silver print. The most disjointed and disturbing figures with an underlying photo of a real person showing through a smeared likeness. It was blurred and twisted, like a combination of fiction and non-fiction, or the monstrous and a documentary. A woman with so much anger she becomes spider-like.

Sophie Calle (at the Fraenkel). Her photos were blow-ups leaning against the wall with small written paragraphs – a narrative concerning a man she met, eventually married, traveled with, then felt betrayed and they divorced – all within a couple of years. There were ironies and ambiguities, a French woman who is rather detached. Was that arrived at through the production of these distillations on the wall? Maybe it never happened, and is simply a conceptual device to hang some photos on. It led to a perfect moment with a few strangers. There was a large photo of a man from his shoulder to his knees (objectified? decapitated?). He was clothed and urinating with the help of a woman's hand which reached around from behind him, the rest of her hidden. There was a narrative about her having fantasies of being a man, and this was something he could do for her to get the feel of what it's like, unzipping him from behind, pulling it out, and

[110] Milan Kundera

holding it while he releases a stream. A thick dick, unless she has thin hands, and she admitted they had broken up by then. It was an excuse for her to hold it one more time.

I was looking at the photograph with two young women who stood close to it, not blinking an eye. A man who worked there shook hands with one of the women, so there was a momentary juxtaposition of the four of us, along with the couple in the photo (with the woman demonstrating her sleight of hand). It reminded me of Ming who likes to think she has a phantom penis. She is matter of fact about her regular need to urinate. The other day she wondered what would happen if she peed on my foot, and would she have the nerve. I said it would burn a hole through my skin, and referred to a scene in *Alien* where they cut into a small dead alien and some fluid leaked out which ate through the metal floor of the spaceship. She wasn't sure what to think of that.[111]

I walked to work, and found a message from the State Bar with more inquiries. I have a cold-blooded patience with the Attorney, but it's hard to ignore the problems when an angry client wants their file so they can find another lawyer. Now and then he has to attend a hearing, for example to refute allegations of the mismanagement of an old woman's funds. After a while I'm thinking where there's smoke there's fire.

7:00 p.m. I walked home through North Beach. While lounging in the comfort of my home I read about an execution by injection, and fell asleep at some godly hour. I was tired from last night, but it wasn't what I wanted to do.

The phone rang around midnight. It was B., who had a lot to talk about, and we were on the phone for an hour. There were references to people who wallow in emotional states, even though it's tense and makes you dumb. People gravitate to that because they have a sense of

[111] I should have mentioned *Generation of Vipers* (1943) by Philip Wylie. He was disillusioned with the sanctimonious aura of older women in this country, and said their urine would etch metal.

being engaged with something real, a "subjective experience of depth." It's like they are inhabiting a drama, one of those "primary things that give meaning and purpose to life." It holds your attention and you are diverted from the void. And if you're using someone to practice your emotions on (which many do in order to feel human), it is easier to cut them loose if it isn't working out.

I was thinking the other day about the psychological coordinates that people touch on once in a while – anger, worry, tension, insecurity – no matter how arbitrary or contrived the circumstances. It's like they're exercising or reverberating those feelings, and what triggers them could be relatively minor things. There are men who wonder about the arbitrary arguments a woman starts, not realizing she needs to flex a few emotional extremes and keep them well-oiled, while testing her reflexes (and his).[112] He will then do something similar, but with a ball game on television, where he's tense and yelling at the tube. Through the course of a game he touches on some basic coordinates of sorrow, anger, relief, or even happiness if his team prevails.

It reminds me of an article on Hillary Clinton in *The New Yorker*. Apparently she has a busy schedule and needs to find the time to laugh. It's like eating vegetables or doing push-ups. She has to schedule a time to laugh. Whatever causes her to laugh is beside the point.[113] There are methods of staying in touch with certain feelings (if not your own humanity). After a while it makes people sound like mechanical constructs who laugh, get angry, sad, or bored - not because there are real things instigating those states, but because they have a need to laugh, get angry,

---

[112] My mother couldn't get a fight out of my father, who has no use for drama (not from real life or the movies). However, he has other qualities which made him tolerable in the long run. For example, he doesn't drink or swear or have affairs with women. I had to learn those things on my own.

[113] Flash forward to 2011 when she was amused at the murder of the leader of a country in North Africa (Gaddafi in Libya). "We came, we saw, he died…" (joking with a reporter). As Secretary of State she pushed for the destruction and looting of Libya under the guise of a "humanitarian intervention," along with two other women: Susan Rice (the first black U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.), and Samantha Power (National Security Council). Obama later admitted that intervening in Libya was his worst mistake.

sad, or bored at regular intervals – as if those psychological work-outs are good for digestion or one's self-esteem.

Some manage this by going to the movies where they are immersed in an emotional jacuzzi, but hardly feel it an hour later. It's like you're on a cinematic treadmill of calculated emotional responses. Even worse, there is a predetermined resolution which makes you think that conflicts are resolved and there is closure. It may be comforting, but when adults believe in fairy tales it is a little disconcerting. How many had to die (by simulated means) in order for people to be entertained by an illusion of justice?

What if there's a psychological need to control something and order it around, especially for girls and women? It could be an animal,[114] a child, or a man. With the latter they might settle for someone who is halfway civilized and ambulatory, with whom they can run through a gamut of emotions until the whole thing collapses. If women are more in touch with their feelings, the men are at a disadvantage. Women are more likely to file for a divorce, and men more likely to kill themselves as a result.

4:00 a.m. Went to sleep after typing for hours.

Thursday, June 2, 1994

Woke up this morning from a couple of dreams. I was on the typewriter for a long time, and then went to work.

5:00 p.m. I met Daytona on the corner as arranged, but had to return to the office with her to redo a page the Attorney messed up. Then we walked to Enrico's on Broadway. Each of us had two glasses of wine inside the renovated club, with a saxophone in the background. We were

[114] Animals are attractive since they won't talk back, and they get the love current going. The Professor was shocked (as the father of three daughters) when a girl said she loved her cat more than her father.

there for a couple of hours which went by without much effort. It would seem that both of us can talk and listen. After a while I didn't know what to think. She wasn't readily defined, which says a lot for her.

She seems to have a current running through her of sultry evenings in the deep south where she's from. She referred to the humid "decadence" of it, a writer with a half-finished novel who talks rather bluntly at times. She can be sardonic with a patronizing tone of voice, cultivated as a defense, but now and then the veils are parting and a deeper person is staring at me. The subject got around to San Diego, and I told her that my father is a minister who organizes the building of houses in the slums of Tijuana. It seemed like her jadedness or disillusionment was softened momentarily. She told me – later in another bar – that her father was the press secretary for the governor of Louisiana, and had a long involvement in politics. When we got on the subject, "Don't get me started," it released a stream of withering opinions and analysis, and at this point she feels like voting with a joint.

I described where I used to live in the Tenderloin, and how my friends wanted me out of there, though I had grown to like it. She looked surprised. It turns out she lives a block from where I used to live, and moved there around the time I was moving out. Before then she was half a mile away near Polk Street. She's on the 15th floor of a building full of balconies. I know the building, and like it. The woman has some salt.

I was a little mixed up as to how I felt about her. I am used to the company of younger women, but intelligence goes a long way in my interest in someone, holding my attention. And it is an alluring aspect of a woman if she likes me, I mean it helps. Who needs a pinup model who wouldn't give you the time of day, or can't tell time? There were some eerie parallels with the woman I was with for the better part of 1992. Both of them are from the south (Louisiana and

Virginia), about my age (Daytona is thirty-eight), slender, uninhibited, with full-time jobs, and they have a slightly bitter streak. One is a photographer (inhabiting a dark room of the soul), the other a writer.

We talked about our writing. She admitted it is hard for her, and tends to have more focus on the product end of it. I am just about the reverse, having a pathological obsession with writing itself, like thinking or breathing. It is not too difficult in that respect, but not necessarily good, and I couldn't bring the product end of it into focus to save my life. She said she has no aptitude for music, but worships those who do, or the music itself, and thought it was miraculous when two strangers take off on an audio collaboration, as I did with someone at the party. It didn't sound as good to me as it did to her. There was some mention of the Church of St. John, as in Coltrane, which she has been to a couple of times.

Daytona doesn't like Louisiana very much, or rather the good points are outweighed by the conservative provincial stuff. She thinks New Orleans is over-rated, and has gotten nowhere with her poetry in that town.

I related an anecdote from when I used to do readings around town in the early 70's, when I first arrived from Los Angeles. I read a piece at Minnie's Can-Do Bar in the Fillmore one night, a light satire of Carol Doda who I was taken to see by a woman friend when I turned twenty-one.[115] The woman presiding over the readings was the Beat poet, ruth weiss. She knew Carol, and thought I should give it to her. A few nights later, after a reading in North Beach, I walked to the Condor Club with a few friends and handed my poem to the doorman. He was skeptical, but returned a minute later and said I could have a free show, but not my friends. I

[115] When I walked into the Condor Club I was on the edge of a stage about a foot high. There was a woman moving slowly to the music in high heels and nothing else, and I was eye-level with her dark bush. The performers were within arm's reach, but the drinks were watered down. I would have gone more often (only twice) if they had stuck to their original format along the lines of jazz and Lenny Bruce.

walked through the curtain and found a burlesque show in progress. After singing a few songs, she ended up writhing on a piano with no clothes on while the piano rose slowly (the high note of the show) and she disappeared through the ceiling,[116] taking her enhanced if not enchanted boobs with her.

Daytona said she had some encounters with her as well, along with other luminaries of the local demimonde. There was someone named Dog who has a public access interview show on TV, and Daytona was the cohost for a while. Jello Biafra (the singer with the Dead Kennedys) was a guest on the show, and so were Ginger Coyote (the singer with White Trash Debutantes), who was drinking, and Debora Iyall (the singer with Romeo Void).

It was nearly eight when we left, walking on Columbus to the waterfront. Some friends of hers were involved with a local cable TV station which was broadcasting live from its studio in the Cannery. When we arrived we found a room with a wall of monitors and sound equipment, and another room where a moderator with a well-modulated voice stood against the wall holding a big mic. He was facing a camera and waiting to start. There were a couple of chairs on a small stage, and a few people milling about.

That reminds me, some people don't look like their voice, if that makes any sense. I first realized that when I was a kid in a small town in the San Joaquin Valley. I visited the local radio station (KONG), and the DJ had a mellifluous and professional voice, but an ordinary appearance. Daytona's voice has a relaxed almost professional tone to it, in keeping with my theory that the voice – more than the eyes – is the mirror of the soul.

[116] I met her on another occasion, but it was anti-climactic. She was in Enrico's with a man in a suit. When she left for a few minutes he said she is a nice person who takes care of her mother.

A group of people arrived, including her friend Dog, who she characterized as a classic 60's nerd. The others seemed to be neurotic media victims who need to project but can't find a venue. The program had begun, they were selling advertising for the station, and a tacky-looking guy was being interviewed. He stood next to a sex doll. There were a couple of interviews which seemed like filler, then the moderator commented on this being a live broadcast from their studio at the Cannery. It was a party and he invited us into the room, so we walked in, with me following Daytona and another woman. Three of us ended up against the wall and on camera. I wondered what I had gotten myself into, although I figured no one would be watching. It's not exactly CBS.

The other woman was a young actress who seemed to have been rehearsing for most of her life for this sort of thing, the way she responded to questions and then sang a verse from a strange song. She was followed by Daytona, who was speaking off the cuff and shooting from the hip for a few minutes. Then it was my turn. I was suddenly alone as the others walked off to the side. I wore a suit with a loosened tie, and realized there could have been a nice exchange with the three of us without the moderator. With him the chemistry was not exactly there. I said I was there by accident, having come with Daytona, and went off on a tangent, suggesting they have more interviews with writers and musicians. It might help the station. At that point he wanted to move on to something else.

I went outside with her and a few others, including the woman who spoke before Daytona. She was glib, neurotic, wired, and Jewish. The two of them were winging it, having only met twice. The younger one (Leah) spoke with a matter-of-fact tone, saying she slept with some guy recently. Daytona interjected, "Did you come?" She eluded the question. The man was sort of dumb, or non-intellectual, which meant in her opinion good in bed. It only lasted one

night, so maybe he wasn't good out of bed. She thought I was "suave" (I think it was the suit), and asked me to hold her cigarette. I started to smoke it.

The two of us left, with Daytona having had enough of them, and we walked to a cocktail lounge with a view of the bay at night. There was another glass of wine, French onion soup, and fried zucchini. We talked politics, and I hit a deep chord in her when I said I read *All the King's Men* in high school. "We're soul mates!" she exclaimed. For that matter, we have a high regard for Carson McCullers, and a low regard for Kathy Acker. I told her about some of the cases in the office, including the loud-mouth psychoanalyst versus *The New Yorker*.

11 p.m. We walked along the curving esplanade with a cold wind in June. Given the socio-political fragmentation and the cold wind, any summer of love in this city becomes more like a summons to leave. We went to my place for a while, a few blocks away. I showed her the poem I wrote for the poet Bob Kaufman after he died. It was published in a small anthology,[117] and she read it out loud.

---

[117] *Would You Wear My Eyes? A tribute to Bob Kaufman* (1989), edited by Jack Hirschman. "… & then with Corso as an intermediary / one hot morning, I bought him a drink / it was the least I could do / for someone who makes you think… / like brothers in a paralyzing vodka of the paranormal." We had a reading at City Lights, but then the book disappeared. Oddly enough, the book was autographed by Michael McClure (on the front cover), and Allen Ginsberg (at the bottom of my poem, and dated 10/14/89). I went to their reading in San Francisco with my twenty-year-old tomboy girlfriend. We were late and missed McClure. I felt bad about that, so I got his autograph later (which made no sense). All I had to sign was the anthology for Kaufman. He looked at it and said, "I don't think I have anything in this book." I said, "You don't, but I do." He smiled, and signed the cover. I had a conversation with Ginsberg during the intermission, some of which had to do with breathing. He ignored my girlfriend who was standing next to me. (Corso was supposed to be there, but got a better offer at the last minute and flew to Italy. Someone said McClure would have paid the airfare just to get rid of him.)

Flash forward twenty years: One of my poems was given an Honorable Mention in the 2010 Jack Kerouac Poetry Contest, and later read at the Fourth Annual Davis Jazz Artists Festival: Beyond the Beat Generation. The judge was Michael McClure. This is an example of my approach-avoidance of the poetry community, and its ephemeral transitory intermittent interest in my work. I only had a few encounters with him over the years, even though the radio poet (Jack Foley) was a friend of his.

When I called a cab at her request she got a little more serious and wanted to clear the air, not about her seeing no potential in this relationship, but the opposite. I had given her my phone number since I had hers, and she said, "I hope you realize that I'll be calling you." I walked her downstairs when the cab arrived, and she turned and stuck her hand out as if to shake hands, but I kissed her on the lips. That was followed by a hug, and she said she would definitely be calling, "and that's a threat."

Friday, June 3, 1994

NOTES

The unfortunate contortionist.

Bozo filter – a term from computers for blocking someone.

A homosexual version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

The guitar is lying in its coffin,
though it's resurrected rather often,
you could even say it walks through walls,
the way I play occasionally it calls up
something higher, going through the ceiling
it is like a fire and a feeling
is reverberating in a hollow
body made of wood. I am a fellow
traveler of a wired and spontaneous
sound, the ordinary is extraneous
when you're tuning in a private force field
and it's going public, with a hold
on your attention like another dimension.
It is coming with an honorable tension.

Two recent dreams:

I'm in a rocky terrain near a crater lake. Stunning sunlight. I have a briefcase which an associate just handed me. We have a rendezvous with someone. I open the brief case and find an array of hypodermics and serious drug paraphernalia. It is top of the line

equipment in compartments. There is one needle for delicate skin. I have the impression it is for a wealthy Asian woman. There is a smaller hypodermic for children, with a label: Adopt (or adapt) a child. The needles are for someone who lives around here, but I don't see a house and I'm feeling rather new at this.

I'm in the lobby of a hotel with chandeliers and conversation areas. There is an illegal gambling operation near Conversation Area No. 6, and people in formal attire are descending through the floor near the fountain. I walk over and wonder if I look formal enough, but looking down I see I'm in a suit. I walk down the stairs with a young woman behind me (the ex in real life). She works behind a counter where there is a baby picture.

[Nora lives near Reno, and it wouldn't surprise me if she works in a casino.]

An article on the "ersatz security" of an externalized psychology according to the surrogate or prophylactic satisfactions provided by hi-tech. There is a network of contrived connections and unnatural selections, not to say political corrections and virtual erections. You could turn into a Freudian confection with a lack of direction, which is hard to come by when you're in a virtual reality with artificial directions fanning out and things are so platonic if it wasn't for the sonic you'd be reaching for a gin and tonic every night. No phony constellations in the void.

When you keep a daily journal it reveals the repetition in the world around you, not to mention in your life, the conversations of your friends, the worries and concerns that are repeated through the weeks and months, a chronologic echo of complaints. Much of it is forgotten from one day to the next, maybe wiped out when you're in a coma every night, but when you describe what happens every day the evidence of repeating patterns is hard to ignore. But how to convey the repetitious structure of our lives – including a sense of going around in circles – without sounding repetitious? It's a journal of repetition as the world turns, and the linear is something of an illusion. You're habitual and touching on the same coordinates every day – home, work, etc. You don't step in the same river twice, but it's a river and you're stepping. It's a journal of disorganized repetition.

I thought of Andy Warhol making his identical portraits of Marilyn Monroe, but each one with a different color scheme. You would think he read a book called *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology* by the Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard (repetition in Danish is *gentagelsen*, or "to take again"). However, given the pop art shallowness of how he viewed the world, I don't think he knew how to read.[118]

An article in *Harpers* about refusing a computerized ontology:[119]

[118] "Repetition is a key concept for Kierkegaard, and he often uses it to depict a (generally vain) attempt to recapture a previous experience, typically one of aesthetic transcendence." Chris Sunami, "What does Kierkegaard mean by recollection, repetition, and remembrance?" philosophy.stackexchange.com, 2017
[119] Sven Birkerts, "Refuse It", *Harpers* (May, 1994)

> In our technological obsession we may be forgetting that circuited interconnectedness and individualism are, at a primary level, inimical notions, warring terms. Being 'on line' and having the subjective experience of depth, of existential coherence, are mutually exclusive situations. Electricity and inwardness are fundamentally discordant. Electricity is, implicitly, of the moment – now. Depth, meaning, and the narrative structuring of the subjectivity – these are not now; they flourish only in that order of time Henri Bergson called 'duration.' Duration is deep time, time experienced without the awareness of time passing.
>
> We have destroyed that duration. We have created invisible elsewheres that are as immediate as our actual surroundings. We have fractured the flow of time, layered it into competing simultaneities.
>
> … the price of adaptation is habit, and that habit – habit of perception as well as behavior – distances the self from the primary things that give meaning & purpose to life.
>
> My fear… that we are, as a culture, as a species, becoming shallower; that we have turned from depth – from the Judeo-Christian premise of unfathomable mystery[120] and are adapting ourselves to the ersatz security of a vast lateral connectedness… a faith in the web.
>
> Somewhere we have gotten hold of the idea that the more all-embracing we can make our communications networks, the closer we will be to that connection that we long for deep down… we seem to believe that our instruments can get us there, but they can't. Their great power is all in the service of division and acceleration. They work in – and create – an unreal time that has nothing to do with the deep time in which we thrive: the time of history, tradition, ritual, art, and true communion [not to mention nature].

The rebuttal to this line of thought is found in a book called *Out of Control: The Rise of Neo-Biological Civilization* (1994) by Kevin Kelly (who co-founded *Wired* magazine). He says that "out of networked parts – whether of insects, neurons or chips – come learning, evolution, and life. Out of a planet-wide swarm of silicon calculators comes an emergent self-governing intelligence: the Net."[121] It provides a wide-angle view of others with their off-the-cuff opinions, but it reminds me of a Fellini film where a man's hand is chopped off and replaced with a metal glove.

---

[120] I'm not sure I like associating unfathomable mystery with a Judeo-Christian guilt-edged drama, like other religions or philosophies wouldn't have it, or for that matter, science and some pagans in the woods. There is the mystery of why anyone would fall for the derivative propaganda in the Old Testament, but he has a point. If there is a leveling process of homogenized computer webs, which are artificial with a false sense of power, I wouldn't want to spend much time there. Do you want a brave new world of interconnected replicas?

[121] Flash forward twenty years and see if people regard the internet as a "self-governing intelligence."

12:30 p.m. Went to lunch with a woman from the office in her late thirties. She is not too shy when it comes to swearing, and said she used to work at the Great American Music Hall. I said, "Is that when it was a bordello?" Actually, I'm not that careless, but it was an elegant bordello in the early 1900's (before her time). I've been there many times.[122]

Socially speaking I am branching out. I tend to continue with things as they are (hypnotized by the perpetual motion of the earth), until the rut I've made is like the Colorado River when its continuity becomes a canyon. I need to know some others if I want to test my pessimism. I was talking with Ming about it, and said I was going to write IMPOSSIBLE on the walls in black paint.[123] She said I was making her upset. I said, "You get upset anyway."

2:00 p.m. V. wanted me to go with her to City Hall to file a complaint. It was an effortless diversion in her company. We took the underground monorail a couple of stops, and walked past a fountain of fresh water. Our conversations remind me of the pool in front of City Hall, occurring as they do in the vicinity of legal concerns, and with a certain transparency and sparkle, but not very deep. We got on the subject of bridal showers for some reason. I wasn't supposed to know what women talk about in those gatherings, but she made it sound mundane. She went to one where there was a cake with a penis on top, lying in the frosting. She was being

[122] The Reverend Horton Heat, Junior Brown, Stephane Grappelli, The Violent Femmes, and other lesser known musicians.

[123] In 1977 I was staying with Simone in Redondo Beach. It was temporary, and by early 1978 we had found an apartment in San Francisco – the one I would live in for the next forty years (with rent control). I was nearly twenty-six and had moved around for most of my life, including a year in Europe, so I needed a place with a heavy old typewriter as an anchor. It had a hold on me, being near the water, and in a city with a radical fringe. Before we moved up north I wrote CONTEMPT on the wall in black paint. I'm not sure what I meant by that, unless I thought my life was like a movie by Godard, or I was tired of L.A. Unfortunately, we missed the Sex Pistols by a few weeks.

vague and stretching her hand out, trying to show how big it was, but her hand is small. It was sticking up with “two little round things,” cupping her hand to demonstrate, and smiling.

V. filed the papers and we left. She still wants to hear about my love life. Having been with one man for so long (now technically married), the stories of what other people go through are of interest to her. We returned to the office and I did some work. The Attorney is broke, so I won’t be getting paid.

5:00 p.m. I left with V. and walked to Union square. On the way I heard someone call my name. It was B. I introduced the two of them, but she was on her way somewhere. We went to the Brazilian woman’s shop with its expensive women’s clothes, then I dropped her off at the transit station and walked to the pool. There was a mile of water, followed by a long walk home over Russian Hill – the refreshing strain of a workout.

11:00 p.m. I was typing when the phone rang. It was B., having some notion of our crashing the Harlequin Ball that evening, but I wasn’t in the mood, so we talked. There were the usual stomach-turning doubts and tensions with the other woman who is “PMS-ing” at the moment. I thought that might have something to do with it, but B. said it never affects her like that. Her girlfriend generates a lot of analytic friction. Tomorrow she is going to the beach alone, and B. is dreading what will happen if they get together in the evening. Ilsa will have all afternoon to prepare an argumentative “brief.”

I told her I went out with Daytona last night. After a few minutes B. forgot her problems with that woman, and concentrated on this one. She was rather blunt, saying she is willing to share me with Ming, who she might have to talk to, but that’s it. She doesn’t trust other women, and thought if I got involved with someone I would disappear. That is not an unreasonable assumption, since I tend to get wrapped up in an affair (I wrote warped). I had to use some tact

when pointing out I couldn't go on like this. I can't make love to my guitar. It was nice of her to offer the services of her and Ming as bodyguards when we went out. They would stand on either side of me while fending off the overtures of other women. However, that would still leave me sleeping alone.

It sounds like she's unclear on the concept of a sex-drive, but knows that her position here is compromised. She wishes she could do something, but is seeing someone else. We were on the phone for over an hour. She ran into Ming the following evening at the gym, which I heard about when Ming called on Sunday night. She thought it was a bit much, a woman wanting a man to live alone so he is more available as a friend and confidante (if not potential lover down the road), even when it would entail his going without. Ming said that I would have less time for her if I was with someone else, but didn't think that she should interfere with that. She doesn't like the thought of my leaving town, however, an idea I brought up the other night.

At any rate, she was impressed with B.'s concern, and said, "I love him too." I thought of them in the locker room, going on and on about a friend and his relations with other women. I am familiar with their bodies and their ambiguities, and we're communicating all the time. The conversation on Sunday night went on for two hours, and had an atmosphere of mutual love, though tempered with satirical comments. She said I have a tendency to float an insult inside a velvet glove.

I was back on the typewriter after midnight.

Saturday, June 4, 1994

10:30 a.m. I walked to Pier 41 for the ferry to Vallejo with a shoulder bag containing a pair of air-conditioned jeans in case it got hot. There was a long line of people, most of them

going to an empty prison on an island. I asked a woman who worked there what to do and she escorted me to the ticket window.

11:30 a.m. I was on the top deck and looking at some lazy sea lions on the boat slips as we pulled away from the city. It was a clear day, but with a thick creamy current of fog moving in from the bridge and engulfing the empty prison island. A few minutes later the city dissolved into grey molecules and disappeared. I couldn't see anything for a while, then gradually there were the faint outlines of hills when I was looking north. Those became more defined by the minute until I was looking at Angel Island and the hills beyond. It was subtle how the fog was slowly dissipating, until it cleared and everything looked three-dimensional in the sunlight.

It's curious how this mode of transportation is an alternative to driving on a concrete road, and it is so relaxing. The world is going by and you are out of town. There were a lot of ferries in the 1930's before the automotive took over.

I walked down to the lower deck and took a window seat and read the paper. A building blew up in the Tenderloin, three blocks from where I used to live. There was nothing left but rubble, and they don't know what caused it, like it was a spontaneous combustion. There was some concern (three dead, four hurt), as people find it disconcerting when apartment buildings blow up for no reason. I know that corner, and read how the transvestites or the sex-change hookers who work that corner were having conflicts (they were "conflictual") with the old woman who owned the place. She is eighty-two, and they beat up her brother (seventy-three).

I went up on deck as we floated past Mare Island in Vallejo, moving past the mechanical cranes. They seemed to be at a loss for words, or even work, and so much for the lost language of cranes. Jon couldn't pick me up, so it made for a boring trek. I waited for an hour for a local bus. It took two hours to get to St. Helena (a 45-minute drive). The bus was divagating whenever

it could, so I saw a lot of the countryside and neighborhoods I wouldn't have otherwise, including a veterans' home where several older guys got off. The warm air and the terrain had a tranquilizing effect.

4:00 p.m. I walked into Jon's house and found him lounging with his roommate, Elmo. I had some momentum from the city, while they looked stunned by the heat and quiet of a country setting. Elmo is shorter with a distinctive profile, but for some reason he shaved his head and had what looked like a one-inch stab wound in the middle of his forehead. It turned out he walked into a sign post.[124] (I want to say it was a sign, but of what?) Jon's hair is thinning so he cut it, leaving the top front of his head shaved with no more wispy strands of hair. He is good looking, but the two of them seem to be regressing to a state of adolescent boys when it comes to women, which are hard to come by in that area. Jon has gone without for many months. Elmo has a girlfriend who lives there, but she was in Connecticut for a couple of weeks (where she's from).

We walked to downtown St. Helena, about half a mile, and picked up some beer and fermented cider. They saw a young woman in tight shorts with a good figure, but couldn't bring themselves to approach her. It's like she was an impossible dream. I'm not a dreamer in that respect, and offered to do it on their behalf, but they are set in their ways.

6:30 p.m. There was some light left. I could see the vineyards in the distance with their leafy profusion. We drifted into Elmo's room with his recording equipment. It was a large set up with a sound board, synthesizer, tape players, microphone, electric guitar, a few acoustics, conga drum, and several other drums. That pretty much absorbed the evening. I was on the electric

[124] I spent some time in Nice with Simone in the 1970's. You have to be careful when you're in a foreign country because it is different – which is one reason people travel. They are more alert when their surroundings aren't what they're used to, and the change of pace can be invigorating. I was walking on a sidewalk and staring at a few young hookers across the street. They were leaning against the wall of a store, looking perfectly normal. I hadn't seen that before and was exercising my powers of observation when I walked into a pole. I rebounded and continued on my way.

guitar, a Fender, for hours, as we kept moving from one syncopated force field to the next. Elmo had a drum machine which could provide a beat, while throwing in sound effects or machine noises from the synthesizer, and he taped a lot of it.

At one point I was on the microphone with some vocals. It followed a hit off Jon's marijuana pipe and some fermented cider. We were stretching out, delving into audio moods and atmospheres. I realized how Elmo differs from the Phantom of the sound-room. He seems to have more respect for the music. The Phantom often stumbles around and is distracted, if not a wreck when trying to record, but they're old friends (who met in a sound engineering class in North Dakota). One reason Jon and Elmo were lethargic is they stayed up late the night before with Aquavit.[125]

There were intervals of Jon with his video camera. He hasn't been taping lately, but is getting back into it. It's very odd to talk and play music, and then review the evening later, looking at yourself on tape. There was way too much of me. I was on the flute for a while, blowing some long plaintive notes in the background of a foggy drone piece – like someone lost in a snowstorm.

Some portion of an off-the-wall conversation on the porch was not recorded, but it was a lovely setting with roses spilling over the railing. We were having a hi-tech audio evening in a rural surrounding, with some constellations in the quiet. The doors were open on a warm night. The living room has an array of Jon's things – a cow skull, weapons, an upright piano, strange album covers, Navajo rugs, etc. We have a high regard for organic things, and objects divorced from their function. He is more capable when it comes to repairing machines or equipment, and

[125] An 80-proof "neutral spirit" from Scandinavia.

will build a hot tub or take apart a television the way that I will tear apart a paragraph and put it back together.

We took a break and sat on the wooden porch (which is good for pissing off the side). There was an odd conversation with Jon (not entirely serious) as to whether the ozone is being depleted, and consequently people are losing their memories and their sense of history. We also discussed if I could disappear in a puff of smoke with cigarette in hand. I tried it, but it didn't work. We figured we could arrange the effect by editing the tape.

Back in Elmo's room, I played a flute thing[126] for a while until I was hyperventilating. I finally had enough of it and switched to the conga drum, bringing the mic down over my hands with an echoing effect. It magnified every nuance of the drum. Jon found a small hand drum and we played along with a slow throbbing piece. Elmo likes Tibetan monk chants with a low droning sound and he tapes it. I don't think he used the drums very much, or kept them in the background. He also left the flute sounding pretty remote on the tape, fading in and out of a heavy fog. He is serious about music being mixed and arranged after the fact, and likes to have a layered sound.

During the two days I was there we found ourselves in varying combinations, where one was on his own while the others concentrated on something. For a long time it was me and Elmo, with Jon on the periphery. Or me and Jon, with Elmo somewhere else. Later that night it was Jon and Elmo, while I was in the front room with the remote control. I had it on a scrambled station because it resembled a psychotic flux. I said as much when they walked in, but Jon said it looked normal to him, it must be me.

[126] Unfortunately, not the tune by the Blues Project (1966)

3 a.m. I went to sleep on some bedding in the front room, next to the wooden piano with a silent screaming lizard on it.

Sunday, June 5, 1994

Woke up around ten and lay there for a while, reading a book that Jon just bought. There were speculations on alternative species which were halfway plausible, involving evolution on another planet. It kept to the rules of evolution here, which lean on paranoia and delirious adaptation. The creatures on this planet are downright hallucinatory in their look, especially underwater or the insect world. It seems that truth is stranger than science fiction, and real life more than anything you could make up (hence my interest in the journal mode). We are lulled into an illusion of normality when we are used to our surroundings. If you magnify the flies, however, you would have an alien-looking world.

Meet the black fly:

> Its design is so advanced that it has remained essentially unchanged for 150 million years. Compact, snub-nosed, humpbacked, it has feelers to help it home in on a host, wings that beat several hundred times per second, and razor-sharp mandibles that can snip skin like scissors.

That's a quote from a magazine article about ordinary bugs. When they're magnified by an electron microscope it gives you a better idea about life on earth. I don't want to lose sight of its essential strangeness, and will put a photo of a black fly on the refrigerator, as if to say this is the norm of life on earth (and not refrigerators).

From that perspective, the variations of human psychology are predictable, rather than surprising deviations from a refrigerator norm. The morning started off on the right foot of delirious evolution and transitory establishments. The old diner a few blocks from here, which was run by old ladies, is no longer there. It was an easy breakfast within walking distance. We

drove to a diner in Yountville and waited half an hour for a table. By the time we got back it was nearly one. I had to leave around 5:30 for the ferry in Vallejo, and the weather was not cooperating. A storm front was moving in, and it was cloudy and windy. Jon said it was 90 degrees last weekend, but it doesn't look like we'll be floating down the Russian River. It was an inconsequential quiet afternoon, with Elmo mixing some of the stuff from last night and putting it on a tape for me. He left out the more spontaneous jams.

Jon and I walked a mile or two through the lush vineyards nearby, with sunlight breaking through for an illuminated moment. I was sitting under an oak tree with a soft breeze moving through the leaves. It was rarified by the infrequency of its occurrence in my life. We drove to the woods nears Calistoga and walked around. Then we drove back and hung out in the backyard with a cup of coffee, staring off into the hills. In a distracted state I picked up my coffee cup and found a dead fly floating in it.

5:30 p.m. We drove to the ferry in Vallejo, talking about everything from Negativland[127] to North Dakota. There was an *Embarkation for Cythera*[128] (I mean the city) an hour later. I floated all the way to San Francisco, and spent much of the time on the windy upper deck.

9:00 p.m. I called Ming who left a message to call her. She said she was rearranging her room, and is turning over a new leaf. "A banana leaf, or something smaller?" Not sure. She is constantly revising her situation, establishing some order, and turning over a new life. I had a relaxed gravity from a weekend in the country, and there was her talk with B. in the locker room,

[127] I saw them at the I-Beam on Haight Street in 1985. They opened for Foetus.
[128] An 18th century painting by Watteau. I like the concept more than the composition. It refers to when "the elite would venture to the countryside in order to indulge in flirtatious behavior and party in an atmosphere of lust and luxury." We're commoners, but otherwise the similarity holds. From the Yuba River to the ocean, northern California is inspired by the goddess of love (I'm speaking from experience), and the wine country is luxurious.

"almost entirely about you," so we had one of those epic conversations where the repartee is in tune and we were giving compliments which had insulting connotations.

"The nice thing about me, I never try your patience."
"Whatever gave you that idea?"
"I don't."
"Yes you do."

She went off at some point about Alaska, having connections from last year who want her back. She's considering it, so I calculated the hours and wages to see if it was worth it. She said, "How come you're so practical about my life, but not your own?" Good question. She also wondered why I didn't sound so positive about it. I said it was two-thirds looking at the circumstances, and maybe one-third how I felt about her being away. She sounded surprised, so I said, "Okay, one-half personal." She said no, she thought it would have been less. Ming thinks that I don't care that much about her.

There was something about a pathological need to keep her options open. I said it's due to her having multiple personalities, along with a woman's wariness at being trapped in a domestic situation. I said she leaves me up in the air sometimes when she is planning an evening, like she doesn't know what mood she will be in, or is waiting for a better offer on the phone. That hit her where she felt it, and she said, "You think I'm rude and crude." "I didn't say you're crude…."

We discussed the opposing forces in her, and how she is hyper-sensitive and yet oblivious. "Excuse me? We never discussed my being oblivious." We got off the phone around 11:30 when she gave up trying to clean her room. It was a complete mess. "Come over and help me." I said I would tomorrow night. She had two alternate plans for Monday evening, but this one seemed to be more useful. There was some question if we have each other's best interests at

heart, her being willing to set me up with someone so I'm "getting laid" once in a while.[129] She has gravitated to an apathetic detachment, and is operating at a numb remove from love affairs. Oddly enough, that coincides with an increasing interest in becoming a business woman.

We have our disparities, which makes it all the more unlikely our being soul mates. On the following night there was a discussion in the kitchen with reheated chili and Chilean wine. I said maybe it's an illusion to think that we communicate, spending hours on the phone without getting bored. Maybe it's just vocal responses to a person on the other end of the line. She didn't like the sound of that, and was concerned about my seeing things in a negative light, according to the negative condition of living alone. She brought up something I spoke of last week which had sunk in and disturbed her. It was a generalization about living in a city where so many of the women are neurotic, lesbians, or commuters. She said, "What about me?" I looked her in the eye, wondering what she meant by that, and said she is a little neurotic.

Meanwhile, it was pushing midnight. I went over to the typewriter and found I was approximately brain dead. Nothing happened. I wondered if I was tired, or if spending hours with the anti-intellectual sound equipment had dissolved some mental constructs which would take a while to be reconstituted.

Monday, June 6, 1994

[129] The odds of that were pretty remote, since she has few women friends. However, a few years later she came over with two pretty Japanese girls, having been teaching English in Japan for six months. I met them earlier, but had to be in the office. One of them said, "It's a shame you have to go to work," giving the impression that she wanted to spend more time together. The three of them spent the night, and we got along rather well. Ming suggested I lift up one of them to see how light she was, but like a fool I didn't do it. When they were getting sleepy the other one implied that her back was sore, but I didn't touch her. I don't know why I was so constrained (I mean besides having a girlfriend). It may have been the fact that Ming was there. That is not to mention the lack of privacy in a small apartment. The worst thing though was when they slipped out in the early morning before I woke up.

Typing in the morning, then I went to work in the afternoon where I put in a hard and concentrated couple of hours (no complaints). The Attorney had a few hundred in his hand, forking over my pay.

5:00 p.m. I walked to Ming's office and found her waiting outside in a short skirt and tights. We took the bus with her talking about the Festival at the Lake in Oakland yesterday. She went there with her sister and brother-in-law who she doesn't like – a Chinese man who was generalizing about blacks in Oakland being associated with gangs or thugs (he lives in Oakland). She objected, but then wondered if he had a point since a riot occurred after they left. There were 1500 people involved and they were drunk, throwing rocks and bottles, and fighting with the police. Maybe it wasn't gangs, but a local custom which is subsidized by the general public.

Her room was a mess, caught in the act of being rearranged. I helped her move things around – the bed here, the black cabinet there… or there, the glass shelves up against the wall. There was loving attention to her plants and the room itself, like an extension of herself. It had a different look – being orderly with more space. She is disturbed when it is cluttered. I asked if she is externally oriented, but she thought that implies a lack of internal stability. At some point Leonora was in the doorway and talking about Ming's lottery ticket. I said she had as much chance of winning as being hit by lightning while asleep. The two of them reacted like I said the wrong thing, as if 1) it wasn't true, and 2) merely by saying this I hurt her chances of winning.

Finally, the room was done, a wooden white floor with the bed against the wall. Last night she said it was leaning against the other wall but it didn't feel right. I said it might work better if it was horizontal. The curving windows have a southern exposure with a view of a pulsing tower on a hill. We listened to a couple of tapes I brought from the sound room, and something Elmo mixed. It was more him, or his interpretation of our session, than anything else.

10:00 p.m. We were in the kitchen, throwing together something.[130] There was a discussion as to the nerve ends in her mouth or lips, and whether she is sensitive or not, given her propensity for hot spices. Earlier she was eating an apple. I pulled a half-chewed piece out of her mouth and put it in mine. We have a sense of oral common denominators, and she doesn't hesitate to use my toothbrush. There was cinnamon tea following the meal. I'm not much of a tea drinker, but had some after a while. We were lounging on the sofa in the old living room with lots of wood. I had lowered the contents of my cup barely half an inch, while she gulped down the entire contents of hers like it was nothing. The discussion gravitated to my love life, with her showing some concern. It had the effect of when you're feeling fine, then someone talks about a problem in your life and it's depressing, like they conjured up a dark cloud over your head.

We went to bed after midnight, lying close together. "Tell me a story." She was asleep before I was halfway through, but didn't miss much.

Tuesday, June 7, 1994

8:00 a.m. We were coming around and she sat up in the bed, exclaiming that we overslept, it's late. I was suddenly alert and sat behind her, giving her a back rub. That was followed by a gradual maneuver where I put my arms under hers and lifted her back over me, except she went limp and slid the other way, so we ended up rolling off the bed. I was on the floor with her on top of me and facing the ceiling. I lifted her up in the air with my hands and knees, her head and arms flung back, and she said it felt good for her back. If nothing else it gets her going in the morning, being gently thrown or dragged out of bed. (The other night I said that

[130] We had a bottle of wine, but she is worried that she uses it too often to relax.

I would carry her from one room to the next like a sack of potatoes. It was not a positive image, in her opinion.)

There was no time for cereal or a shower, and she stood in front of the closet wondering what to wear. She pulled out a skirt, put it on over her thermals, and took off her sweat shirt, which revealed a bare back and a full breast swaying from the side. A flower bra was strapped on, a white blouse pulled over her head, and the thermals were removed from under her skirt. She put on some white tights and brushed her hair. I was back in what I wore last night, and we went out. I don't know why it feels right for us to get up in the morning together, but we've been doing it for a long time.

Last night I stood in the doorway of her room, surveying the layout. It was nearly finished. She walked over and leaned her head on my arm, her body against mine, then bit my arm through my shirt. I said I didn't know she liked white shirts so much. This is someone who will lay against my leg, or throw an arm over me, or push her behind against mine when we are on the bed, probably missing a sense of touch. We have these physical reference points for each other.

For someone who's been having affairs with women, it might seem like there are fifty-seven varieties of love – especially if you've gotten close to fifty-seven women (not there yet). "Close" in this respect is a multi-faceted concept (and a many splendored thing). It goes from one extreme to the other, from sex and no love to love and no sex, with all the stages in between. Making it more complicated or ambiguous is the presence of a sexual current running through most people, whether or not it's actually happening. And maybe there's a certain amount of love/support from unexpected angles (or angels). I can't say I have gone without the presence of women for the last few months, and Ming is a good example. If fifty percent of love is a highly

responsive force field, whether or not you're screwing, it would apply here. When it comes to fornication, women can be very matter-of-fact, like it's on the level of peeing and gymnastics (not at the same time), and not without relief, but what they really value is a psychological rapport. It's precious, transformational, and capable of floating a connection for years.

Returning home I found a message from Daytona, having left her one yesterday, confirming she would like to have dinner this week.

One thing I told Ming last night: I'm learning a lot from women when it comes to getting different things from different people. That is often her method, though she isn't impressed with it. I thought that I should give up trying to locate everything in one woman. Not just a fortunate conjunction of intellect, libido, and an off-the-wall spirit, or maybe some athleticism, but another factor which makes all the difference in the world: whether or not we get along. I would say that it's a turn-off when we don't (and go our separate ways with some relief).[131]

I lay around reading the paper, a little sleepy. All the D-Day news, half a century later. I like to read the accounts of men who were there, whose illusions about war were shot away in the process. "The shock of each moment of still being alive,"[132] or not. The military is preoccupied with order, not surprising when its main concern is battlefields which have a tendency to be disorderly, with D-Day no exception. Over 15,000 men were dropped from planes the night before. They drifted down behind the German lines along the coast of Normandy into occupied territory and not with an American Express card. Some of the planes missed their drops

[131] Some of the things I've learned from Ming: life is hard, romantic love is weak, and sex is meaningless.
[132] Tennessee Williams, *Boom!* (1968)

by miles, with men landing all over the place - in trees, on buildings, and within easy range of German soldiers, who were using them for target practice.[133]

The alleged calm of the 1950's was a time of healing from the war (leaving aside the Korean War for the moment), with the emphasis on home and family. The prosperity was kick-started by the war machine, which executed a massive pivot out of the Depression and into the 1950's, but I'm over-reaching here.

2:00 p.m. I met B. on a court on top of a hill with views which went for miles. It was a warm afternoon, no wind. We had an intensive workout, and I broke a string on my racket. I thought I was tired or sleepy but apparently not, slamming the ball all over the court. There were low hard shots which she in turn returned, sometimes with a squeal. B. has a tendency to keep a running conversation on the court, and there were questions about the Louisiana woman. She is worried that I might get trapped by feminine wiles, and knows what it is like when you exchange one form of tension (no sex) for another (psychological warfare).

In fact, she was warned by a woman friend in her forties who is into shamanism and spiritual concerns. B. introduced her to her girlfriend, and the woman left her a message later, expressing some doubts about Ilsa - not so much that B. would have an affair with a woman, but this particular woman, a manipulating harpy with a hard edge, and B. should be careful.

We knocked the ball around for over an hour, working up a sweat, then stopped. I got a kiss and some guava juice for my efforts, and B. showed me a bruise on her thigh. "You think my legs are okay?" We were not sure if we should go back to my place, or if I should go to work, it being after three. She had a dinner engagement at six and needed time to vote, but didn't know

[133] They were lost in a foreign country which was occupied by homicidal men who hadn't been laid in months, so they were not in a good mood. And what's more disconcerting, being wounded out of the blue, or someone next to you is hit while you're unhurt?

who or what to vote for. She was pumping me with questions, and I said, "Don't vote Republican."

We ended up walking to a flower shop on Fillmore Street. She had been to see her old friend in Marin, the neurotic actress, Phoebe, and noticed a lot of dead bouquets around the house (a glass and wood home in the hills which she bought when her parents died). Phoebe let the flowers die and left them there.[134] B. has no reticence when it comes to interfering with someone's life style, and thought those should go. She wanted to get her some fresh cut bouquets, thinking that would go over well. We nearly missed the bus while she was fussing with her ATM, but I finally made it to the office around four.

There was a lot of work. The Attorney, who is sixty-five, was talking with his old buddy Charles Morgan, who is over seventy, far more accomplished, and runs the office.[135] The Attorney was too young to be in the war, but he idolizes the soldiers who were overseas, with the older attorney having been a navigator on a B-24 bomber.[136]

7:00 p.m. I left and walked home through North Beach.

9:30 p.m. After reading for a while I called Daytona. She said she had a few women over. We talked for a few minutes and she asked if she could call me back. Following an interlude on

---

[134] I was thinking of Miss Havisham, who was something of a dead flower herself. "I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes." (Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*.) Oddly enough, her and Phoebe were both in their thirties and lived alone. There is something called the Miss Havisham effect, where "pining for lost love can turn into a physically addictive pleasure…." (Keith Perry, "Pining for lost love can be physically addictive," Telegraph.co.uk (June 28, 2008)). Pining for lost love is at the heart of some Bob Dylan songs, so it's possible he suffers from the Miss Havisham effect. At any rate, "Long term grief activates neurons in the brain's reward centers…."

[135] I watched him in action during the libel trial of *Masson v. New Yorker Magazine*. He represented Jeffrey Masson, the oversexed psychoanalyst who was often in the office. Morgan's practice is separate from that of the Attorney I work for (who is behind on the rent), so I don't talk with him very often. One afternoon he told me about his early days as a lawyer when he would return home at night and dive into his pool "buck-naked."

[136] The B-24 Liberator was a "flying coffin" according to its crews. Morgan flew 63 missions and received awards, including the Distinguished Flying Cross when the bomber he was on returned home with 220 holes from antiaircraft fire.

the guitar she called and said she kicked them out. One or two were from her women's writing group, and one had spent a day with Mother Teresa.[137] How many people does one know who have done that? She also went to Eritrea and made a film.

We were on the phone for over an hour, just in case I didn't know that we can talk rather well. Every time the conversation reached a momentary pause it would go off on another tangent, like we're free associating. She told me about a private club in a back room at the DNA Lounge run by a friend of hers named Tornado. There was some mention of *Notes from Underground* by Dostoevsky, and libel and privacy laws when you write about people you know.

Neither one of us has time for specialized groups or cliques, with people who hang out with their own kind. The party where we met was pretty eclectic with an assortment of men and women from their twenties to their forties: sober, drunk, stoned, theatrical, untalented, employed, seductive, educated, wasted, broke, alone, involved, arrested in the city, double breasted, tested by the fates, non-fat, incalcitrant, and sentient. We talked about our respective weekends, which were edifying for both of us. She said she likes to go to hot tubs with some pot and champagne. The woman has a sensual current running through her, including her voice. On the other hand, she seems to be on the fragile or the careful side, and would no sooner dive into the ocean than jump off a cliff.

Later in the conversation I told her that I wrote a poem in the voice of T.S. Eliot (where his wife has left him tied up in a chair), and how it was analyzed by the Radio Poet some years ago. He took it apart and found profundities I never knew existed, like I had invented language. If I thought in those terms it might be hard to write. It turns out she wrote a poem recently. I

[137] "MT was not a friend of the poor. She was a friend of poverty. She said that suffering was a gift from God. She spent her life opposing the only known cure for poverty, which is the empowerment of women and the emancipation of them from a livestock version of compulsory reproduction." Christopher Hitchens, "Mommie Dearest – The pope beatifies Mother Teresa, a fanatic, a fundamentalist, and a fraud" (Oct. 20, 2003) Slate.com

asked if she wanted to read it over the phone. She could, but it is sort of erotic. I said I wouldn't mind, I've read erotic poems before. "Well, it's about you."

We got off the phone after a while, having verified that she would come here for dinner. She thought it was brave of me to cook for her, though Cajun catfish is common where she's from. The conversation ended with an atmosphere of little resistance to things becoming more familiar, and she said she tends to be well-behaved, like a straitjacket which she gets tired of. I said I'm less well-behaved in that respect, with fewer constraints, and she seemed to warm to the notion.

10:30 p.m. Typing for a while, and thinking how there was a progression of women extending from the morning to the night. I woke up with one, tennis with another in the afternoon, walked with a colleague after work, and then at night a conversation with a woman who wasn't physically present, but with the connotation of a coming close encounter. It felt like a warm current of the Gulf stream was moving through my apartment in a foggy stratified commuter town where people have been known to vote against the planting of palm trees (which are redolent of Mexico). I went into the bathroom with a sliding window and a screen which lessens the view of Russian Hill, and took the screen off.

Wednesday, June 8, 1994

NOTES

> In the office I came across a phrase from a doctor which could be a subtitle for the journal: "combination modalities & procedures."

> The ordinary with its momentary
> side-effects evoking the erotic,
> the constituents are kind of hairy,
> the mechanical are enigmatic

in their privacy
& there's a nightgown
in the kitchen with a fluctuating
shadow on the floor, the fucktuating
which is going on all over town.
Is there an aura of the unrequited
coming through the ordinary, or
the distant echoes washing up on shore
of everything you've done? I'm undecided
if the erotic is a character issue
or as common as a well-worn shoe.

The other night I was telling Ming about a dream where I had a suitcase full of hypodermics in the desert and was waiting for a wealthy Chinese woman. She started interpreting and wouldn't quit. The Chinese reference got her going, saying it could be her at a later stage, and had a matter-of-fact interpretation of the desert: a Chinese woman is a dry terrain.

She got on the subject of my love life, attributing more pathos than I felt. I wondered what a psychoanalyst would think of my dreams and she smiled, assuming that was her. I wondered if people who have gone to a professional for confession or advice are getting more than they bargained for. I think there is a professional tendency to amplify the connotations of a dream, as if you don't know how messed up or neurotic you are until you have an expert informing you of the fact, thus requiring more of their services (and probably medication).

This segued into the wider subject of professions that exaggerate the significance of whatever comes across their desk, so to speak. They build themselves up in the process (which then requires higher pay). For example, reporters have a tendency to blow things out of proportion (knowing that the urgent drama and the tension of a story sell more newspapers). That also works with politicians and the military – the urgent drama and the tension of the latest threat (however overblown or manufactured) sells more votes and higher budgets. And then there are attorneys who adjudicate a case by using the equivalent of a nuclear reactor to boil water.

Whatever you come across in your work is magnified by the lens of the occupation, and that applies to everyone from teachers, dentists, and plumbers to poets and artists – who are legendary for exaggerating the significance of what they do (let's count the brushstrokes on a canvas which is twenty feet high in order to accommodate the magnitude of its inspiration). Some poets think they're speaking to a world which leans on poems, and "men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there."[138] That strikes me as an occupational conceit. People die in far greater numbers from a lack of other things, like housing or doctors.

[138] William Carlos Williams

There are political factions which succumb to the foreshortening which leads to an inflated self-importance. Their cause is looming in the foreground of a limited perspective. It's like you hold your thumb up to Mt. Rushmore from a distance and assume you're rubbing out Lincoln or Washington with it, amounting to a false perspective (which is to say, a false consciousness).[139]

Corollary: things blown out of proportion = profits. For example, the products being advertised like they were handed down to us by Moses (who never existed, being a mythic story co-opted from another culture).

A long article on a young woman who is half-white and half-black. She has been in a few movies, including a big Hollywood blockbuster. "Flintstones' star confronts racism on rise to top." Maybe she did and maybe she didn't, but it didn't amount to much if at twenty-six she is getting well-paid roles, and is married to a professional ballplayer for that matter. Eight movies in three years. How racist can you get? She is overworked, her wonderful status as a human being is being exploited. There was reference to "the candor" with which she speaks of racism in Hollywood, but there is hardly any evidence of it in the article itself, except for there being not enough roles for black women. (How many roles for black women would there be if white people hadn't invented movies in the first place?) It's a curious point since it would seem her own recent history (eight movies in three years) might be a refutation of that, and there are not enough roles for the thousands of actresses of any race who want to be in the movies. And rather than having to audition for a $45 million film, "I had to hear about it. They didn't ask to see me." How racist can you get, they didn't send a limo to pick her up for her screen test?

The problems she had growing up, a black father who abandoned the family, or being called an "Oreo" by black kids, involved other blacks. And yet there is the assumption that "maybe people don't want to see us as a race succeed." Even though she is succeeding in the allegedly racist context of this country in general and Hollywood in particular – which is to say, benefiting greatly from the efforts of white people (the elephant in the room when it comes to this type of victimology). She was two times class president in high school, first runner-up to Miss USA in 1986, and "has been on a roll since she auditioned for a Charlie's Angel 88 pilot." I mean, what's wrong with this picture? She met Aaron Spelling who "encouraged her to pursue acting," what a racist son of a bitch. She was "majoring in broadcast journalism" at a college, then started getting roles in TV and movies. Broadcast journalism is another form of oppression because it didn't originate in sub-Saharan Africa.

The duplicities are rampant. She was successful from high school on and yet assumes the conceit of racist oppression (which if it had any substance would have resulted in her going nowhere in the movies – oddly enough like 99 percent of those who audition). There is an odd phenomenon when black people find whatever walls are holding back

[139] Flash forward to a politically correct cancel culture which is manifesting a subjective and obtuse rule of thumb.

their race are the height of a street curb, and they go to universities or appear in movies. It undermines the pose of being victimized by a worthless white culture to such an extent it gives them vertigo. They have to resist the reality of their good fortune, so they pretend they're suffering and whites are awful.[140] They can't give white people any credit, because that would open the floodgates of how much black people have benefitted from (and appropriated) the cultural artifacts of people of European descent.

The pose of racist oppression makes anything she has done all the more courageous and heroic, and for that alone the conceit is kept up. The self-dramatizing aura of someone who is crashing through open doors which were invented by someone else.[141] She is half white, but speaks in terms of "us as a race," meaning black. It was the black side of her family which called her names, deserted her, and had little to do with inventing and developing the medium in which she makes a pretty good living – enough to someday "buy a house on a Caribbean island." Good riddance.

Another article: HOSPITAL ACCUSED OF ALLOWING RACISM. Two columns in the *Chronicle* running half a page in length, and the whole controversy involves a one-time incident where one word or phrase was uttered by a white woman psychiatrist at a meeting. That's it. And yet, "A coalition of San Francisco labor and ethnic groups yesterday accused officials at St. Mary's Hospital and Medical Center of tolerating racism…." And what was the phrase that caused the black psychiatric technician to storm out of the meeting? "She said that once a patient enters the emergency unit 'he becomes our tar baby'," meaning they can't turn the person away. "It would have been better if she had used the word 'flypaper'."

So that's it, a momentary indiscretion which doesn't even make sense if you assume the worst. A patient in the emergency unit "becomes our black person." What? A patient is being attended to and healed, and black people shouldn't be subjected to that? At most it would warrant a memo to the speaker expressing some concern with the ambiguities of language and an integrated workforce, but no. He calls a news conference and appearing "in support" of him were representatives of a coalition of black trade unionists, Instituto Laboral de la Raza, and SF Board of Education member Tom Ammiano. The coalition said it also had the support of the SF Chapter of the NAACP and Chinese for Affirmative Action. I imagine it will be up for review at the United Nations when they get around to it, having nothing else to do.

---

[140] Or the suffering is real, but on a level so effete and narcissistic their ancestors would be rolling in their graves. Where previous generations were confronted with firehoses and police dogs, the current example is more like: a white woman reaches out her hand and says "I love your hair" to a black woman who recoils from the onslaught of racist objectification by a white person whose entire country was built by black people while the whites were sipping mint juleps on the veranda.

[141] Reminds me of an old saying about black people in this country: "We have to be twice as good as them [whites] to get half of what they have." Whether or not it was true half a century ago, it is extremely dated now. It's far more common to have quotas and affirmative action in jobs and universities. That has less to do with merit, and more to do with the color of your skin.

I was typing in the morning when Ming called. “What are you doing… what did you do last night?” She seems to be taking more of an interest in my affairs. We made plans to meet at the pool this evening. There was an hour on an iron typewriter, and an hour workout on a wooden instrument. It took a while to warm up, but there were finer notes and chord progressions going by. You have to cut your way through the weeds before you break into a clearing with some rarified flora.

3:00 p.m. Went to work. After a couple of hours I took a break and walked V. to the station. I said the Louisiana woman is coming over for dinner. She said, ‘You’ll go to bed with her.”

6:30 p.m. I arrived in the lobby of the old hotel with the pool in back. I had just sat down, waiting for Ming, when a woman walked over. It was Leah, who I met at the TV station last week, the one who reminds me of a quick-talking actress. We talked for a while. She said she sold a painting for $2500. I thought she was an artist, but it turns out she works in a gallery and it was “a titty painting.” I learned that she is juggling two men at the moment. One of them is “a beautiful man” in his fifties (she is in her twenties and Jewish). She was pretty blunt last week about a one-night stand with some guy. He is not a person she wants to have around socially.

Ming arrived in a sweatshirt and gym shorts, and the two of them didn’t exactly hit it off. After a few minutes we were talking about a generic abstract expressionist painting on the wall (like something found on vinyl seat covers) and Ming bolted, heading for the gym. A few minutes later the two of us were on a machine or doing crunches on the floor. Then I headed for the pool. One mile, with hardly anyone there, though Leah showed up in a black one-piece

swimsuit. I had found her nervous or aggressive, but she did a slow and graceful crawl, and didn't last long.

I had a good workout, then returned to the weight room. Ming was on a stair machine, sweating like a waterfall. She wanted to do some stretching, and in a minute had me on the floor and holding hands. One person bends and the other sits there, legs spread wide. I'm supposed to put my legs out, feet touching hers, but instead I put them against her stomach. There was a maneuver with her on her back with her legs up and I stood over her and pushed them down. They came back up. Then we did it with me on the floor, getting a serious stomach muscle workout, though I said in this position I would be staring between her legs. She said, "Don't look," but under her shorts were two bathing suits, "to hold my stuff together."

When we left the hotel it was after nine and there was the usual indecision about where to go for dinner. We finally opted for a Vietnamese place near my old neighborhood and took the Geary bus to Hyde, then walked to the corner where the building blew up a few days ago. There was nothing there, like it blew a perfect rectangle out of the ground, while the windows on nearby buildings were boarded up. Standing in front of the hole was a transvestite hooker. "Love for sale…." We walked to my old place on Hyde and Ellis, checking the construction on both sides of the street. Two vacant lots were now filled in, and there were no more addicts with a vacant stare.

At the Vietnamese restaurant we had fish soup and a fish fillet with ginger, green onions, and tea. Both of us were tuned up from the workout, and the mood was relaxed. She got on the subject of the Louisiana woman. I said she wrote an erotic poem and her eyes got wide. "You're so nonchalant." She went on to say this constitutes a green light, and "You're going to get laid." Ming was happy for me, though she got a little distracted, "spacing out" for a minute, and

wondered why I wasn't more excited. I said this is as excited as I get, which wasn't exactly true, but what are you supposed to do before the fact? It's like going on vacation, it doesn't hit me until I'm on the plane.

I said it threw me a little, her being thin, although she has some curves. Ming said, "Don't worry, women are tough." I said, "Women are hard as fingernails, and tough as leather, cold as ice, and good in any weather." She wasn't sure if that poetic interlude was worth much.

One of her old friends from high school is in town. They had been inseparable as friends, a slender blonde tomboy (sounds like Nora). They would spend the night together, and there was some sexual experimentation, which she told me about before. The woman went on to become a full-time lesbian, but that didn't do much for Ming. She sees herself as mainly heterosexual. They still are friends, however, and will see something at the gay/lesbian film festival. She said it is a culture that she isn't familiar with. Ming doesn't leave out the possibility, however remote, of being with a woman, since she has been drifting for three or four months in a sexually dormant state and is indifferent to such things, especially with men.

After the meal we walked through the Tenderloin. I had forgotten how rundown and semi-threatening it was, and recognized a few of the male and female regulars across the street from my old apartment. There was a man who had weathered some surgical changes, tall with short blonde hair in a tight white dress which was low cut with a push-up bra. As we walked past him I said,

"You could do it better."
"I know."
"I didn't say what."
"I know what you meant… the push-up…."

We walked to her place, which was her idea. It was eight or ten blocks, and part of the way she had her hand on my shoulder. She said she was on her period, which had arrived on time, and a few minutes later asked if I wanted to spend the night. I hadn't planned on it.

11:30 p.m. We were lying on her bed. She was in her underwear and a loose sweatshirt, getting sleepy, and wanted me to tell her a story. I said I told her a story the last time but she fell asleep and I don't think she heard much of it. She expressed some surprise, what was it about? I told her and she said no, she hadn't heard a word. Could I tell her another one? No. Then she asked if I would give her a back rub since I seemed so awake, it being a bit early for me. She rolled over on her stomach and pulled her top off. I sat on her butt, wearing some thermals with an open shirt, and dripped the lotion on her back by the light of a candle. Ming was moaning as I rubbed it in. The red light of a tower was pulsing in the distance, and it was a clear night with a star in the window. The workout in the pool had cleared my optic nerve as well as my head. When I got down to her tailbone she passed out for a few minutes.

Thursday, June 9, 1994

7:00 a.m. We woke up, more or less in unison, and lay there for half an hour. I was caught up in the "languid sensuality" that she inhabits like the air itself. Last night she was lying on her back with her legs up and rubbing a white lotion on her arms and legs. She said it made her skin softer. This morning she was feeling stiff from the workout and if I wouldn't mind, could I give her another back rub? I sat on Ming and massaged from her neck to her bottom which was firm with white briefs. After a few minutes she was up and trying to figure out what to wear. She put on a dress and walked around. Didn't like it, took it off, put on a sweater with a wrap-around long skirt.

We went to a café nearby for coffee, an apple turnover, and the morning paper, which she likes to read out loud. At some point she reached over and adjusted my shirt. Now and then I feel like a boyfriend substitute, but that is limiting the situation. We love each other, and there is a constant reference to the physical presence of each other, but that's as far as it goes. We have a rarified rapport in her opinion, as if sex with men is common or predictable and often problematic, so we're better off like this. The detachment is a breath of fresh air. I don't know why I keep reminding myself of this.

I went home and was typing for hours.

Took a bus to the office, and went home after a few hours.

7:30 p.m. Daytona arrived with a bottle of champagne, a bottle of merlot, and a rose. We talked for a couple of hours. The woman is a character and has a lot of it, and knows a few, beginning with her father who worked with the governor of Louisiana. Her older sister is a psychologist who works with the criminally insane in Los Angeles. Her younger sister was a nymphomaniac, but settled down with a rigid conservative who doesn't know about her past. They grew up with a maternal grandmother in the home (so did I for a while). There were stories of life in Baton Rouge where she became a "disillusioned Catholic" (with a French and Irish background).

At some point I was about to say, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, in relation to something and she said it two seconds ahead of me. It's something which occurs now and then, being on a similar wavelength culturally and otherwise. She likes living on the 15th floor in the Tenderloin (not that she is looking down on it), and it is one or two blocks from where I used to live. The black guys don't give her any trouble, and call her "Slim."

9:00 p.m. We went up on the roof deck after some champagne. I was having the merlot. She had most of the champagne on a warm night with no wind, having been one of the hottest days of the year, 88 degrees I think (which was breaking records). The horizon was orange, and there were a few stars. She looked for Orion which means something to her, and I thought that all this conversation was fine and good, but we are going to have to shift gears pretty soon. I mentioned the poem she wrote, who was too shy to read it, then said that I was dying to kiss her. In no time we were pressed together and kissing. She had no resistance, using her whole body for pressing the point home. We finally tore ourselves away from that, having seen where we stood and the likelihood of being horizontal, so we went downstairs and I made dinner.

Cajun catfish, green onions, peppers, lemon juice, and rice. We were in the front room at the round wooden table with a couple of candles. The radio station, KPOO, had gone from reggae and hip hop which she likes to doo wop from the 1950's – which was not a bad atmosphere for what transpired. We moved over to the soft black sofa around 10:30.

It was not long before both of us had our shirts off. Eventually we moved to the other room, succumbing to a slow magnetic field of touches, and she said, "I can tell you like women." I figured it wasn't the time to argue that point, and she was probably right. It's not hard to do. A man is encouraged by a woman's moans. Who knows what sort of positive reinforcement she is using, and if an erect phallus in her hand is really so precious? Earlier she said she appreciated that I made the first move, but having done so, she thought it would be okay to be more forward. There were things she had been thinking about. It was a reversal of how it's been with various women for a while, like I'm the one who is being pursued. It hit me from a nice angle, and it used to occur more often. It seems that I had gotten stuck in recent months in a different mode.

There was a mouth-to-organ interlude which I would remember. Half an hour later, maybe less, we were still in close contact and I was getting hard again, having gone down on her.[142] I slipped a condom on, and was being careful like I was going to hurt her, but it was a delusion on my part. Before long she was biting her hand and saying to herself, "Don't scream."

We lay around in the aftermath, with me as a reclining male nude because she seemed to like it. It nearly led to a third act when we were sitting up. I held her from behind and was getting hard, but it was 1:30 in the morning and she had to go. A cab was called and I kissed her at the door. I was on the black sheet for nearly an hour, a little dazed. It wasn't my whole life passing before my eyes, more like my love life. There was nothing else I could think of at the moment, except women I have known and similar close encounters. They were overlapping in my mind, not taking anything away from this one, and it seemed like a return to normal. I wondered why I went so long without it. I had some ice cream – macadamia nut with cherries - and thought of when we were making love. The radio was playing, and there was a seminal surge during "Moon River."[143] I wondered if I was back on track, having slept with a woman.

Friday, June 10, 1994

NOTES

AN IMAGINARY MONOLOGUE BY T.S. ELIOT

"Ash on an old man's sleeve…." (T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*)

Ashes to ashes, man to man,
and nothing up my sleeve,
the passion leaves you in the dust,
I'm dying I believe.

---

[142] A few years ago I knew a Jewish woman in her thirties who worked in a financial institution. She had an Australian travel poster over her bed which said, "GONE DOWN LATELY?"

[143] I had an affair with an art student from Memphis in the 1970's. A black and white portable in the room was showing *River of No Return* (a scene with rushing water) while she went down on me.

And yet a cigarette is a smoke,
I lay it on my arm
and write a poem off-the-cuff.
My coat is growing warm.

When all is said and done I would
prefer I was untied,
my wife has left me in a chair.
Have I already died?

A woman who in living here
was often bored to death.
When I recited she would say,
“Goodnight,” and “Save your breath.”

It left me with a sinking feeling
though it makes you think,
and so I’m often looking down
and I could use a drink.

I say old man are you alive,
I’m talking to the mirror.
I think therefore I used to be,
am I a modern error?

There’s nothing like a wooden chair,
the legs a poor quartet,
and it would seem I’m losing my hair.
You ain’t seen nothing yet.

I feel the ropes, I see a peach
and I can’t even reach it.
England is the sort of place
where they would rather leach it.

That is neither here nor there,
I wonder if Mr. Beckett
knows we have a lot in common,
he would rather wreck it.

My life a literary device,
I don’t know what I’m doin’,
looking back and playing dead,
a connoisseur of ruin.

Something which I may have learned
from staring at the cross,
you see how Christianity
can leave you at a loss,

and limp as any Pieta.
The women may complain,
who think they know, they come and go,
I'm talking through my brain.

And yet it won't untie the ropes
of this "to be" or knot.
I never had that many hopes,
and some I have forgot.

I've been restrained, it's cutting off
my very circulation,
I'm fainting and that's all he wrote.
Should I address the nation?

I'm feeling like a patient on a
table given ether,
I don't want an either-or,
I'm too ethereal.

I have to say that Kierkegaard
is not my cup of tea,
though maybe I will meet his atoms
in eternity.

They know not what they do and so
they're doing it again.
It is finished, I'm forgiven
by a fountain pen.

And yet… and yet… a cigarette
unlocking the ascension,
a metaphor of language when it
swirls into dimension.

Or is smoke a mockery
of our paralysis?
You follow it around the clock,
a numb analysis.

And now the pen has fallen, I am

here without a sound,
an inadvertent Buddha, I am
here without a Pound.

10:30 a.m. Phone call from the Professor in Los Angeles, having sent him the stuff on the Mamet play and "the idiocy of race." We had a long talk about D-Day and the historical background, including his recollections as a kid (he was born in 1935). The Soviet army bore the brunt of the Nazi military (while sustaining a huge number of casualties). Stalin (and the Russian winter) turned the tide and neutralized hundreds of thousands of German soldiers. The Allies waited for the Soviets to weaken the Germans, and the landing in Normandy was made possible by their efforts, although they weren't invited to the ceremonies half a century later. That is not surprising, but he didn't like the limited viewpoints coming through the media which made it sound like the Allies did it all on their own. Considering the Soviet effort, it was bad reporting for *Time* magazine to have a cover story of Eisenhower as THE MAN WHO BEAT HITLER.

There was some reference to the ruinous struggle of attacking the German troops in Italy, which was a "brutal, protracted, and costly slog" (as one account put it), and how a war involves so much in the way of chaos and supplies. An army has to keep its supply lines open, and a failure to do that sunk the German effort in the Soviet Union. You can neutralize or capture entire divisions when their supplies run out (fuel, food, and ammunition), a war won by trucks. The German air force was not much of a factor. The planes were not up to speed, compared to those of the British, and the production lines were bombed. The Nazis were more focused on rockets, and had submarines off the coast of the eastern United States which had partial black-outs as a precaution.

I called V. in the office, verifying lunch, and she said, “Leave now.” I went out on another hot afternoon. There were no buses, so I ended up walking downtown, and arrived in the office sweating. We walked to the Hunan place. She took about a minute before asking how it went last night with the woman. She thought I would go to bed with her, and though I was being circumspect about the evening, she was rather blunt in her speculations and concerns. “Did you have clean sheets?”

2:00 p.m. Back in the office, she wanted me to go with her to file something at City Hall. I wasn’t busy, so we left and took the underground monorail. I noticed how warm and candid she was being. It’s like we were communing in a common carnal knowledge, and not to get too mystical about it, but when you’re sleeping with a woman it seems like other women are warming to you more than if you’re not. I don’t know if they can sense your “veneration of the yoni,” or you’re more relaxed and they can feel it. We returned to the office, with her talking about how hot it is and she needs to lose five pounds. I was going to suggest she lighten her purse.

4:00 p.m. There was not much work, and I walked home.

On the phone with B., who on hearing about last night confirmed her worst suspicion, that the woman is after me and I am in her clutches. They have their secret plans for holding onto a man and taking him out of circulation, and it means that I will have less time for B. I said that I was feeling amorous, for what it’s worth.

She went off on a tangent (or was this an earlier conversation), talking about the complexities of her life and wanting some advice. I’m tired of the subject, and was zoning out for a while. Then I approached it from a blunt impatient angle. Her problem: how to go out with a man who’s been pursuing her while she is having an affair with a woman who he doesn’t know

about since he doesn't want women turning into lesbians. She doesn't want to tell her girlfriend that she might go out with him. Since she doesn't want to be honest with either one of them, I said she probably should not go out with him, which is what she ended up doing.

9:30 p.m. D. arrived for a party, and said she will be going as "Mondrian at the drag races." It was at the flat of a woman she knows, but isn't sure what the woman does for a living – some kind of media scamming mistress of ceremonies and/or casting agent for a show on MTV with connections everywhere. The Broun Fellinis[144] hang out at her place, along with other band fragments, and she manages to never pay for anything. I was thinking of people who gravitate to social connections the way I gravitate to writers or books. They have a black book with as many names as mine would have if I listed everyone I read, including those from foreign countries.

We went downstairs and got into a cab. The driver was a young woman, and D. can talk to strangers with a warm-up period of about ten seconds. We hadn't gone three blocks before the two of them were commiserating about their periods and PMS and what the driver could do about it. I didn't have a lot to say, thinking it cost us $3.00 to go three blocks. The driver had given up coffee, and D. recommended a codeine-related substance. I said something about acupuncture which was well received.

Eventually we were climbing the stairs of an old Victorian building from the late 1800's, and walking down a hallway to the back which opened on a high-ceiling room with a loft, a large kitchen area, and a nook with a window overlooking the city. It was a knock-out flat, especially with the upstairs floor, a converted attic about forty feet long and nearly bare, with a low bed on one end, a few plants and candles, and the odd picture or object. There was a drop-dead aesthetic operating here. D.'s friend was a blonde from Florida in her thirties who financed the place with

[144] *Aphrokubist Improvisations Vol. 9* came out in 1995 (with "Soulogik Syntax"). It is a form of jazzed-up hip-hop and they're good musicians, with a steady stream of words being thrown at the crowd.

two or three roommates, including a Nina Hagen-like creature who emerged in a tight black dress, heavy lipstick, and long dark hair. The other roommate might have been a heroin addict. We stood around having some white wine – it was bring-your-own for some reason. I was feeling rather neutral. I didn't know anyone, the music was okay, but less than half had come in costume - an eclectic bunch with some grunge types, a few artists, etc.

I sat with D. near the window, impressed at the range of people she knows - a literary woman in her late thirties with black glasses (when she feels like wearing them), talking with a couple of tall flaming homosexual rock musicians. One of them said he played at CBGB's "thirteen years ago."

There was a drunken Frenchman in his late thirties who operates a gallery in town (Show and Tell), and he shows some of his own work. He sat down and talked with us. I thought he was on cocaine, which D. later confirmed. She had never seen him so coherent, being known for his drinking. He told us about a performance piece where he was strapped onto an inclined plane upside-down and naked with wires attached to his body and in front of an audience. On that particular night he had forgotten to take a leak, so he found himself strapped in and eventually his urine was running down him. Even worse, it hit the wires and short-circuited with his head on fire, but someone walked up and put it out. I said something about being electrocuted by his bodily fluids. He said there is an event at his gallery space tomorrow night near the Zuni Café and a cactus store.

We met a young woman with dark hair and a dreamy approach-avoidance who would end up driving us home. She lives in Berkeley and composes her own music, makes drawings, and works with all-women shows. D. and I went upstairs to the long white empty room, and were soon followed by half the crowd downstairs. There was music and a few people dancing. The

situation was a little subdued, as if the people were used to drugs or copious amounts of alcohol and there wasn't much of either so they were making do.

1:30 a.m. We were dropped off near D.'s place on Eddy Street in the Tenderloin. The usual shady characters were out and about, but even if they have a police record they're not necessarily looking for trouble. You walk on by, mind your own business, and so do they. We went into her building with a security guard. A cold metal elevator to the 15th floor, down a grey corridor to her door, and into an apartment with a stunning view. There was a wide balcony facing north with a view of the downtown skyline. I was looking down at my old apartment a block away.

The living room and bedroom share the balcony with sliding glass doors, and she never shuts the curtains. There was a red and black theme to the furniture, and a definite style in here, with a curving coffee table, a red sofa from the 1950's, and a small desk which she painted black with red handles.[145] The artwork was eccentric and modest in size. She buys it when she can afford it, as a frustrated writer who reveres the efforts of artists and musicians (the good ones). They inhabit dimensions which she feels are beyond her scope. She is burdened with a mundane logic which holds her back for better or worse, and some pictures mystify the hell out of her.

I had some coffee and a little wine, and was thinking of how you meet someone and get to know them. Maybe it's clicking like the next big thing with an expanded social direction. There are hybrid characteristics of women you have known before, and what you have been looking for. That's not to say she sprang fully formed out of my subconscious, or me from hers for that matter. It is eerie how the characteristics are in tune, but from an angle I wouldn't have

[145] I wanted to ask her if she ever read *Le Rouge et le Noir* by Stendhal.

expected. I don't know that we would have given each other a second glance when passing on the street.

And yet, the woman is a conjunction of dimensions which are close to my soul, a Southern writer who venerates art, not to say music, and going by her comments and a poem or two is dying to get laid. It's a nice change of pace, being on the receiving end of a woman's sex drive. Your physical condition is not ignored, it is regenerated (I wrote re-genderated). Which brings up a curious point: the physical chemistry between two people. I won't say it doesn't exist between myself and a few women friends, but not enough to leave us in the throes of passion. There have been half-naked massages, and sleeping in the same bed, but hardly any sex. Human sexual response is highly variable. One of the side-effects of testing the waters with various women is when you stumble onto chemistries that don't go well with your own. It's no one's fault, and it keeps us from falling in love with someone different every week.

I was thinking of the short-lived affair last fall with a woman in her late twenties who I met at one of Tony Serra's parties (the radical attorney who smokes pot). Looking back I see that something was a little off, including the night we slept together. I hadn't expected it to happen and was tired, it was late, and she handed me a joint which didn't help.[146] We never had a second chance, which was partly my fault when I found out her ex-boyfriend was still around. That was a turn-off, for some reason. The woman was attractive, we were getting along, but the chemistry wasn't enough, and my erectile function could have been better. Whereas D. has only to brush against my leg or cross my mind and I'm getting hard.

Eventually we were in her bedroom with a view of the city at night and the fog rolling in from the west. She said something about wanting to ride me. If I had any doubts about her being

[146] I read that smoking pot occasionally can generate a "higher cerebral blood flow," but you want it going in the other direction if you're having sex. If you're a chronic user, the blood flow to the brain is reduced, causing cognitive and memory problems. It is like you are inhaling an amnesia stick.

delicate they were soon waylaid. With her on top I realized how a woman with a firm grip on a man's organ can make a difference. We kept the position following the first climax, and I remained inside her, slowly working our way into another go-round. It was more emphatic than the first, and having been semi-erect it was back to full strength and going on at length, resulting in a climax which coincided with a breakthrough of her own.

Afterward, returning from the other room, I remained half-erect. It made me wonder about the vagaries of sexual attraction. It often comes out of left field and involves the compatibilities of spirit and intelligence and who knows what else?[147] It goes into effect rather quickly. A few weeks ago I didn't know she existed, and now we're fucking like there's no tomorrow. You wonder if people are beating a dead horse when things aren't working out with someone. There are subtle incompatibilities which your body is aware of, even if you're not.

We went to sleep around 3 or 4 a.m. on some beautiful sheets in the Tenderloin.

Saturday, June 11, 1994

10:00 a.m. Woke up on a cloudy morning after six hours sleep. She was lying close to me and wondered if it was okay, like she doesn't want to smother me but can barely restrain herself. I said, "I went to Louisiana last night." Holding a naked woman in the cool sheets I had a hard-on in no time, and that got her attention.

11:30 a.m. We walked to a place on Geary for breakfast. I had scrambled eggs, hash browns, sausage, and toast. She had French toast, about six slices, of which she may have eaten

[147] Adding to the complications of human sexual response, or symbolizing that complexity, is astrological stuff. I'm an Aries (moon in Libra), and looking back from 2022 there is a pattern. Most of the relationships (from 1 to 12+ years) are air signs (Libra and Gemini), with a few fire signs thrown in (Aries and Sagittarius). As for earth signs, there are a few Capricorns (like D.), and a curious consistency with sensual Taurus women: there are half a dozen, all of whom I went to bed with, but the affairs did not last long (like the woman last fall). There are only one or two Scorpios, probably for good reason.

two, and left the rest. I ended up having two more, while thinking, “No wonder she is thin.” Her breasts are a handful though, and her hair is thick and long.

I walked her back to her building, then walked home. It was about two miles, and I passed a headline on a newspaper rack: “7 KILLED IN GRUESOME CRASH.” I had barely arrived when the phone rang. It was Ming. I had been through a transformation since the last time we spoke a few days ago. She asked how it went with D.

“I just got home from last night.”
“You got laid.”
“Thursday night, Friday night, and this morning.”

We didn’t talk very long. I had left her a message last night about the party. At the moment she was on her way out with her high school friend who was in town. They were going to a lesbian film. I felt a fading regret that what was happening with D. had not been possible with Ming, who I’m so close to. And yet we’re out of sync with something as fundamental as sex. There is a difference in our ages, but I was with a friend of hers for nearly five years, and we fornicated from a rundown hostel near Times Square to rock formations in the desert.

In the afternoon I read an article in *The New Yorker* called “Return of the Fugitive.” “The surrender of the antiwar radical Katherine Ann Power was expected to close a painful chapter in American history….” What chapter is that, the Vietnam War? How would it be closed? Does that mean forgiven and forgotten? How would the circumstances of one woman be enough closure for an entire historical period? At any rate, they weren’t.

I fell asleep, and was out for a couple of hours. I am getting too relaxed (wrote realized) with D. I went out around eight and took a bus to Eddy Street, and walked to her place. I had to show my passport to the security guard behind the counter (a Russian immigrant). He wrote

down the number and I signed in. People are security conscious in the Tenderloin, you'd think it was a foreign country. (There are people in this town who've spent more time in Mexico or Europe than this neighborhood).

We were on the street a few minutes later, with her in a long black dress, boots, and a dark coat. She said it was made in a boys' reformatory. We walked to the Zuni Café and met a couple of people and were crowded around a small table. I had a Red Hook beer, and her a glass of champagne. We were there for a benefit at the Show & Tell Gallery across the alley. There was a silent auction for the stuff on the walls. Some of it was worth it, and some not. The gallery was like a warehouse and there was more upstairs. I think it used to be a club, and we were not sure how they paid the rent - $2500 a month.

We missed some girls who tap dance in tights, a hula hoop burlesque, but nothing too risqué. There was a studio in back with brick walls, a cluttered mess, and a man showing his work. Semi-primitive figures, and heads painted on boards. D. liked some of it (I liked it less), and considered forking out a couple of hundred for a female butt done in red paint. We were talking with the artist the night before when he wore a long woman's gown and funny glasses. He is sort of a "ditz" according to her. He may have been exposed to toxic fumes, since he paid the rent by painting cars.

The Actress was there, and not looking too impressed. She wanted me to buy her a beer, and when she left an hour later she sounded a little impatient that I haven't been in touch. "Call me you fucker, if you're not too busy."

I walked by a video screen and stopped. It was some video *verite*, the camera held by a man who pointed it down to where his cock was sticking out of his pants. There was a smile drawn on it, and he made it move. That was about it. A young Latina woman was standing there

with a faint smile. I asked her about the video. She said the guy was in the next room, and there was a five-second delay as he videotaped his lower appendage. The suspense comes in wondering when it will get interesting, since you run the risk as an observer that it never will.

I went upstairs with D. to a warehouse loft with a DJ providing a heavy beat. It seemed to be turning into a rave, but she isn't into techno-beat or house music. I was relaxed and having a beer. Having noticed a blocked-off "room" in the corner with a glowing entrance we went in and found a transformed space, like going from a warehouse to a spaced-out lounge. We sat on the sofa and I said, "It's a late twentieth century version of an opium den." She liked that. There was a mattress with a soft fur on it, a screen with some hallucinatory computer videos, a glowing earth on top of a candelabra, and a fan revolving like a propellor.

We were there for a while, during which time a tall girl who asked me for a cigarette earlier went spinning around the room. She flopped down on the mattress, lying on her back and stared at the ceiling. We wondered if she was on Ecstasy, and if the others were. The Frenchman who operated the gallery was in a drunken altered state in which all things are possible and one can act on any impulse. Unfortunately, those impulses were compromised by the alcoholic means of arriving in a spontaneous state. He walked into our dreamy room, took one look at us, bent over and kissed me, then walked out. It was an underwhelming experience, but so was when he dropped his pants for everyone later on.

We hung out for a while, went downstairs, and realized most of our friends and acquaintances had gone. I was looking at some bad Marcel Duchamp derivatives on the wall. We left and walked to her place after midnight, passing an auto repair shop: COLLISION SPECIALIST. She wants a sign she saw in Chinatown, MAGNETIC HEALTH & GINSENG. Also, KUNG FU AND WATCH REPAIR. What time is it? Time to kick it.

We sat around for an hour. It was a clear night, with the city looming in the distance. I was reading one of her stories, "Love is Strange," which was published in a collection of stories. A woman in her mid-thirties finds herself (against her better judgment) attracted to a friend's son who is fourteen.[148] There was some mention of the aching "vacuum" between her legs. D. has a facility for language, and appreciates a well-turned phrase. Her respect for writers does not extend to the likes of Kathy Acker, who was also in the collection, and who she met at a reading. I brought up her name the other night, and it was something what a withering look was coming across the table before I said anything. She dislikes her even more than I do, having met her. I thought her writing was a letdown, considering its pretension or potential, and usually found it dead in the water. It was nearly unreadable (in compensation for which she lifts whole pages from other writers). It's like a dead frog's leg which is hit with electric shocks, making for a knee-jerk vulgarity, but it doesn't help.

We talked about writers who gather up scraps and fragments on the floor, put them together between two covers, put a title on it, and let the reader try to figure it out. If it seems disjointed, fragmentary, and confusing, then it constitutes a remarkable grasp of the current zeitgeist.

Oddly enough, she thinks I'm a "real writer," since I have a pathological routine of doing it all the time, whereas she doesn't. Having a full-time job doesn't help (and neither does her perfectionism), so it doesn't come easily for her. I said I might encounter the kind of scorn that Truman Capote had for Kerouac when he said, "This isn't writing, this is typing." On an earlier occasion we talked about the blurring of fiction and non-fiction. According to some theories all

[148] Flash forward many years – I knew a woman in her late thirties who was attracted to a friend's son who was fourteen. The boy was a friend of her kids, and miserable at home. I think her love for him was more caring and platonic than physical, but she interfered with his parent-child arrangement enough to warrant a stretch in prison (which is what the boy's mother demanded).

writing is a synthesis of those opposing realms (which have quite a bit of overlap). The perceptual limitations of a person can amount to a subjective bias, and our psychological state is known for putting blinders on the cognitive.[149] Language has been said to be a social construct, and we are (highly evolved) monkeys who're pretending to be human, if not immortal.

So where does that leave questions of libel and privacy laws, or a journal which is shot through with informed and deformed sketches of real people? There is everything from realistic observation to surreal conversation. I'm shooting from the hip or off the top of my head according to my memories of someone or something.

She talked about her women's writing group, and showed me a couple of small publications. There were poems and stories and photos, with some of it flung in the direction of a greater notion and some not. One of the writers is the singer for Romeo Void (Debora Iyall), and D. has one of her lithographs on the wall.

We were listening to a quiet tape of chanting women. Last night we were in the bedroom and she put in a tape of Serge Gainsbourg, the famously perverted French Jew who talked his way into the music world.[150] He was speaking over a weak disco beat with redundant backup singers, and was getting by on the sound of his voice. It was harmless in the background, but "Love on the Beat" was kind of strange. The guy was a trendy opportunist with a drinking problem, and thought he could get a hit tune from the subject of hitting women (with someone

[149] That doesn't mean we should abandon the concept of objective reality, and wallow in our subjectivity like introverted failures who can only agree on what is real if there is an emotional mirror close at hand. "Living well is the best revenge," but so is living in a fiction when it comes to getting your revenge on a fact-based universe. And yet we lean on facts like the melting point of steel and medical reports, and an authoritarian government is off the hook if no one can agree what time it is or what it did.

[150] He also had some words on a French talk show in 1986. A young Whitney Houston was sitting next to him (who was drunk and nearly sixty). At some point he blurted out, "I want to fuck you," but she was not impressed.

doing fake moans). He also had a song with his eighteen-year-old daughter and her breathy kitten voice called “Lemon Incest.”

It turns out that D. prefers him to Elvis, which hardly registered in my frame of reference, but I wasn’t in the mood to argue. I said, “You have any Nino Rota? Edith Piaf?”

We went into the bedroom, with her alluding to erotic situations she had planned or would like to try. She was wearing a soft black dress and left it on, pushed up to her waist and lying on her back. Some veneration of the yoni ensued, beginning with a certain finesse that is a sign of my respect for women (according to her). Eventually we shifted gears until it was more of a hard-driving piston motion which she seems to like.

Being highly emotional by her own admission, she is also vocal, not to say outspoken. There were exclamations while we were making love, and later she was laughing with relief.

I read one of her poems, something to the effect of wanting to smoke, with an allusion to inhaling me (the “Essence of Man”)[151] and exhaling her pain. It sounded like I was a joint for her, and that a “good fuck” as she put it is like getting stoned, including the effect of feeling lightheaded. It reminded me of other topics we touched on in our conversations, like the dilemma of maintaining an edge. It is useful for a writer, but you can lose it in a life of dissipation. You can also lose it when you get too comfortable, or normal and secure. The creativity of some is generated by a certain amount of tension and uncertainty, and it may disappear if they’re too insulated.

A conversation the other night was inspired by an advice column in the *Bay Guardian* (a leftwing weekly which she finds boring and predictable). An eighteen-year-old girl wrote in,

[151] In the movie *Barbarella* (1968) the ladies are smoking a big hookah in which a naked man is floating. They are enjoying themselves, but I’m not sure what he is getting out of it.

saying she has been "sexually active" for a few years, but how do you know when you've had an orgasm? Imagine a man asking that, and *vive la difference*.

The subject hit a nerve with her, "I have a lot to say about it." She went on to explain how girls and young women are often not orgasmic. They may not arrive at that biological capacity until they're over thirty (for her it was around thirty-two). They will think that something is wrong with them, or the men they're with, and give up or become disinterested. They might go from man to man thinking it's no big deal, or that it's physical therapy since that is all they're getting from it, a massage below the waist.

Went to sleep around two in the morning.

Sunday, June 12, 1994

10 a.m. We were sitting at the long black table in the other room, having coffee and a cigarette and talking for a while. I noticed some coincidences about the two of us. We both have a black door lying horizontal for a table (mine functions as a desk with an iron typewriter on it). Both of us lived within a block of each other in the Tenderloin. We have a high regard for Dostoevsky, and the carpet in the lobby of her building is the same as the carpet in mine.

She showed me a book her father wrote about Huey Long, "a boss of Louisiana," called *Requiem for a Kingfish*. I flipped through it, and it seemed to be well-written. Her father is a "Baton Rouge public relations consultant, governmental specialist and political analyst… has handled political campaigns for governors, congressmen, judges & legislators, among others." She has a lot of respect for him, but noted that he thought her writing sucked.

I'm on good terms with her "pussy" as she put it, a word she doesn't mind. In this case it refers to a gorgeous feline with the softest fur. His name is Spike, and he has been with her for

over ten years. There was also a white motorcycle helmet with her name on it (a found object). I said she should wear it to a masquerade, maybe with a black veil. She liked the idea.

I left around noon and walked home, where I read for a while. There's a backup of articles I want to rip through or examine with a typewriter on computer networks, autobiography, and single mothers.

Workout on a wooden instrument.

4:00 p.m. I went out for half a pound of coffee. A windy overcast was breaking up a little, and it was two miles there and back. There was a wanted poster on a bank window. Twenty photos of men caught in the act. Eight black, nine white, three Hispanic, the usual proportions of this level of crime. Blacks are over-represented, but whites are holding their own in terms of low-down criminal behavior.

There was an article in the *Wall Street Journal* about a black man with a high-powered job on Wall Street where he managed millions of dollars in investment funds. It turns out he was robbing the investors blind, and it's an example of black people who are integrated into the workforce but with negative results. A black writer with an essay in *Time* magazine said it's further evidence that blacks have arrived if they are in positions of power where they can embezzle vast amounts of money while getting light prison sentences (like so many white men have).

Reminds me of a parable. A couple is driving in China and their car breaks down. There is a hole in the engine. They have it replaced by a local mechanic. They drive off and it breaks down again. Turns out the mechanic replicated everything, including the original defect. Something similar is happening to black people when they're integrated into a system which is

shot through with moral lapses and corruption, and some of them have replicated those in their behavior.[152]

I picked up some coffee and dropped into a bookstore. There was a book on the myths of motherhood, *How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother* (like what, a better breast pump?) What does it matter if this culture "reinvents" the good mother if most women can take it or leave it? It's like the so-called oppression of women by the fashion industry. You would think that all the women are wearing the same clothes, but they're not. Their supposed subservience is spread across a broad spectrum, from fashion victims to someone in a torn slip with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth. They run from conservative to slovenly, and something similar is going on with mothers.

I walked home and caught the last half of a play-off game, a lot of sound and fury signifying basketball. I had a workout on the guitar while the tube was on. It's a shallow diversion which allows for something deeper to come out of the guitar. I was having a subdued Sunday evening, and wondered if having sex every day for the last three days had something to do with it. It left me in a calm state, and I am familiar with that sort of thing. What if you lose an edge with someone and it's harder to be alone?

I called the Phantom of the sound room. He's preoccupied with musical instruments (their acquisition, rather than becoming a good musician). He wants a hollow body and a tube

---

[152] Thomas Sowell makes a good point about black people in the deep south who copied the worst attitudes of their neighbors – the provincial whites who were low-brows known for their drinking and fights. Black people from the Caribbean tend to be more disciplined when they're not subjected to such low-down influences (and aren't impressed with victimology).

He refers to men who go to prison for robbing $400 (on the average) from a bank, compared to those who do less time for white collar crimes involving millions of dollars. However, no one is injured by those abstract methods, compared to someone pulling a gun and running off with the cash. They're punished not so much for the amount stolen, but for being crude about it, not to say a danger to the public.

amp. I think he is dyslexic, a borderline alcoholic, and on the verge of becoming a hardcore burnout. The shock of being a rock musician in a touring band was like a manic-depressive blow with its immediate impact and eventual obsolescence.

I reviewed the journal, crossing out phrases with a dark eyeliner (actually a black pen), while on the tube Colombian natives conducted a ritual to save the world.[153] Then I was on the typewriter for a couple of hours, not saving anybody.

Monday, June 13, 1994

NOTES

> An article in *The New Yorker* (June 13, 1994) by Lucinda Franks called "Return of the Fugitive." I turned eighteen in 1970 when the war in Vietnam was going full-steam, and I was subject to the draft (I had to register when I was sixteen). I went to a C.O. meeting (conscientious objector) with my father, thinking that his being a minister might help. There was an adolescent girl there who said the Vietnamese don't care about their children like we do, and I got so angry I couldn't respond (not sure what she was doing at a C.O. meeting).[154] Meanwhile, on the East Coast a college student "… awoke in her studio apartment [and] had to step over a jumble of rifles, ammunition boxes, walkie-talkies, blasting caps… She had come to believe that the only thing that will stop the Vietnam War is revolutionary action. National Guardsmen have killed four students… President Nixon has been secretly bombing Cambodia and publicly lying about it…." She drove the switch car for a holdup, not realizing that someone in the gang had shot a policeman. It forced her to go underground, and for many years she lived under an assumed name in Oregon. Last year she surrendered to the authorities, having been on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted" list longer than any other woman: Katherine Ann Power.
>
> A couple of things: she was depressed and in therapy after living for many years with an assumed name, so she surrendered – like doing time in prison wouldn't be depressing as well. There was also the hatred and the condemnation from so many people as if she was the one who shot a policeman in the back, when she was only sitting in a switch car at some distance from the robbery (a woman taking the blame for the transgressions of a man, who was sentenced to life in prison long ago).
>
> An essay in *Harpers* from *Out of Control: The Rise of Neo-Biological Civilization* (by Kevin Kelly). It was giving the thumbs up to networks of communication via computer,

[153] The world was still there the next day, so it must have worked.
[154] An example of how emotions can be counter-productive.

where it's okay to talk to strangers or leave notes on the refrigerator of that medium. It amounts to "an uncountable number of overlapping conversations… under eternal construction, in constant flux, and of fleeting permanence." Already it sounds like life, or business as usual. In other words, another tool which is replicating more than it's replacing. It is supposedly an "entirely new writing space, far different from that carved out by a printed book… because of this impermanence, the type of thought encouraged by the Net tends toward the non-dogmatic [!] – the experimental idea, the quip, the global perspective, the interdisciplinary synthesis, and the uninhibited, often emotional, response [like "Die yuppie scum"]. Many participants prefer the quality of writing on the Net to book writing because Net writing is of a conversational, peer-to-peer style, frank and communicative, rather than precise and self-consciously literary. Instead of the rigid/canonical thinking cultivated by the book, the Net stimulates another way of thinking: telegraphic, modular, non-linear, malleable, cooperative."[155]

It sounds like writing with a computer hooked up to a phone line. Where does he get the idea, unless he's had his head up the butt of a computer for most of his adult life, that experimental ideas or the global perspective or quips are not found elsewhere, in books for example, not to say onstage? Or that those who use computers are less rigid and more cooperative in their synthetic responses? Wouldn't it depend on the person? Everything he talks about is found elsewhere, in books and magazines, newspapers, poetry, theater, you name it – with the additional advantage of not being written in electronic sand. Why do overlapping conversations of fleeting permanence have any particular significance, like that isn't what we have already as human beings? It's like saying a computerized Tower of Babel with its disintegrating messages is a good thing. Keats may have thought his name was written in water, but he didn't run his pen through a stream to make that point, and if he had we wouldn't have known about it.

You don't know who you're talking to on a computer, but he says this anonymity is liberating and gender-free.[156] So is writing. You don't have to know who wrote something – man or woman, their race, or what they look like for that matter. He says "the network space shapes us," going on to describe society as a "working pandemonium of fragments – much like the Internet itself." I don't know if that is automatically a good thing. There are drawbacks to a "highly connected yet deeply fragmented society," where people "can no longer rely on a central canon for guidance. They are forced into the modern existential blackness of creating their own cultures, beliefs, markets, and identities from a sticky mess of interdependent pieces…distributed, headless, emergent wholeness becomes the social ideal."

A headless wholeness sounds like a contradiction, a wholeness which is missing something. And when did being headless become an ideal state? Or sticky identities? Or a wholeness where "'I am' becomes hollow." Do computers make it hollow? If society is a pandemonium of fragments wouldn't a central "I am" be all the more necessary? It's

[155] Flash forward many years: the Net has stimulated a lack of cooperation in this country which is so severe there's talk of civil war.

[156] A few years later I met my girlfriend's sister, the psychologist. Her husband was a lawyer who would go online and pretend he was a young lesbian in a chat room.

easy for him to say, as the executive editor of a magazine who had time to form and develop (and centralize his character) without being subject to computerized fragmentation and its inherent loss of self.

He says when we peer into our brains, we find only "networks of mini-minds." There is "no I in charge." Speak for yourself. What happened to *cogito ergo sum*? "Not only does a central-command economy not work, a central-command brain won't either." Does that follow? What about your central nervous system, or the centrality of the heart? I wonder how he wrote this essay, or who or what wrote it – was it a network of molecular connections and neurological synapses (with their fusion and confusion) which operates under a provisional guidance system of an anthropomorphic entity? Why does it remind me of bad metaphors which follow in the wake of scientific advances? Like Darwin with a side-effect of social Darwinism, or Einstein and those half-baked notions that everything is relative, not to say atomic (Nabokov said the theory of relativity doesn't belong in the living room**).** There was Marxist theory, and we got a dictatorial workers' paradise with controlled famines.

So he's big on the decentralized, although you have to have a central focus on a screen in order to experience the decentralization on a network. I can go up on the roof if I want to feel decentralized, or listen to music or smoke a joint. "In the process of connecting everything to everything [what?]… computers elevate the power of the small player. They make room for the different, and they reward small innovations. Instead of enforcing uniformity, they promote heterogeneity, and autonomy. Instead of sucking the soul from human bodies…." You would think he's talking about small literary magazines. I think there is a massive conformity involved in using a computer (where you're forced to jump through the same electronic hoops as everyone else). If the medium is the message, there is something disembodied and remote about it. It reminds me of those phrases floating up in an eight-ball, maybe not sucking the soul from human bodies, but removing the body from the conversation.[157]

Let's say it does amount to a breakthrough, if only in terms of an expanded awareness of other voices out there, which you can listen to or respond to, like dialing someone on the East Coast from your phone and hoping they're in the mood to talk, and you don't just end up talking about the weather. It would seem more of a lateral expansion or breakthrough, more quantitative than qualitative. I haven't seen much evidence of this enormously creative "new writing space." That's like saying it will generate new forms of genius, except unfortunately the forms are transitory and impermanent, like carving the next *Pieta* out of a massive block of soap, or writing the next *Remembrance of Things Past* not only by committee, but with fading ink.

He does have a good point as far as the subversion of totalitarian governments and dissolving borders, but that was also true of the printing press with its democratizing moveable type, or telephones for that matter. It's another way of distributing a current of

[157] See how that works when it comes to online dating.

expression and ideas. It could also be another Pandora's box,[158] but in reverse. The evils and the miseries of the world are sucked into the box, and then you stick your head in it.

I was talking with the Professor a few days ago about information being transformed from one medium to another, with the previous one rendered obsolete and generating profits in the transition (like music on tapes and records being transferred to CD's). When the train lines in Los Angeles were torn up in the 1950's, they were replaced with freeways by corporations related to the auto industry which stood to benefit from the lack of public transportation, increasing the need for cars, tires, gas, insurance, etc. There was a fragmentation of the country into millions of drivers, a working pandemonium of cars. Not surprisingly, the metaphor of highway is used in the computer realm – the information highway and the flow of traffic on the internet.

At the warehouse gallery the other night, we were sitting in the ecstasy lounge with throbbing sounds and warm pulsing screens dissolving into anti-matter dreamy stuff. There was a girl on ecstasy which transcends the ego who wallowed in the molecular swamp of her body. LSD, more than the expanded consciousness of computer networks, is something which millions of people took and yet when you think about it, not many brought much back from those far-flung psychotropic frontiers. It is as hard as remembering a dream, much less making any sense of it. The main point was to have the experience as an end in itself. It had some influence on a few mediums of expression, but not many actual descriptions of what it was like and what hallucinations were seen. There is *The Miserable Miracle* by Henry Michaux, *The Doors of Perception* by Aldous Huxley, and *Electric Ladyland* by Jimi Hendrix, but it would seem to be one of those self-cancelling dimensions. The more you take the less ability or inclination there is to put it in writing - those prismatic skies where you can feel the heavy droning of a planet turning in the void.

Look at Timothy Leary, and how little was conveyed of the lysergic dimensions he explored so many times, or is that because he was an academic?

[158] The myth of Pandora comes from a Greek poem around 700 BC. The gods create a woman. They give her a jar (not a box) and tell her not to open it because it is full of misery and hardship. They also instill in her a sense of curiosity, and guess what? She opens the jar, a dark cloud of misery and hardship fills the world, and we can blame a woman for it. Sound familiar? The Biblical version is worse, especially after the Christians got done with it. Not only is the first woman (all about Eve) blamed for eating from the Tree of Knowledge, it is used to justify her subservience to men. They made up a myth which explains why women are supposed to serve men. Even more strange, because of the actions of two fictional characters, the rest of the human race will suffer. They are burdened with a neurotic sense of original sin, a wariness of knowledge, and an ephemeral after-life. There is no original sin in Islam and Judaism (which also doesn't bother with the after-life).

I was typing in the morning when there was a phone call from the Czech woman. I hadn't heard from her in a while, a soft voice with an accent. She has been accumulating more books, mostly about death, and has around twenty. She was getting her references mixed up since she reads several at the same time. Most of it is rather dry stuff, so she included a novel: *Suicide Blonde*. When she broke up with a Latino man and he killed himself in his mother's home it left a black hole that pulled her down. There were half-hearted attempts to be with another man, but it didn't work out. She said we should get together and is working less hours now. She has stopped drinking (vodka was a universal cure-all), and is now a vegetarian with a Hindu diet.

Went to work in the afternoon.

One of our clients is recovering from a work-related injury (a spine operation). He managed to walk into a sign post which was on the curb but leaning over at a 60-degree angle (it should have been sticking up at 90 degrees to the sidewalk). The Attorney said it was "blocking the sidewalk" which wasn't true, and you would have to be even more of a klutz to walk into it if that were the case. He was with a friend so you wonder how it happened, or why the town is liable for over $30,000 in damages (loss of wages, medical, etc.).

Some of the work involved the Attorney having to explain his methods, since he had been dipping into an old woman's trust account that he managed. He's already on probation with the State Bar for "co-mingling funds," as well as "client abandonment."[159] There was a history of checks from her account, a number of which were to himself or to "cash" in the exact amount of the interest payment on a private loan of his. There is some question if he replaced the amounts, but it's still not kosher.

[159] Flash forward to 2000: An attorney has to try really hard to get disbarred, but he managed, and those were the two main charges. I was gone by then, working for a personal injury lawyer who owned the building where the Attorney ended up renting an office (on the edge of North Beach).

5:00 p.m. I walked V. to the station. Her curiosity about love and sex is going strong. She asked how it went with the woman I was seeing over the weekend. I said there were a couple of parties. She said, "Maybe it's none of my business," and in no time we were talking about it, with her speculating it will fall off if I do it too often.

She said something that got me thinking, if for some there is a monotony of copulation and it forces them to travel now and then, or go away on weekends. They hit the road so they can fuck in different surroundings – that is what it takes to jazz it up, rather than a constantly rejuvenated mind. The destination may be nothing special, it's just that it is not what they are used to, including a room where they will end up nude. They might explore the neighborhood, and kill time as it were, but they are there because it is a change of environment. It functions as an erotic adjustment, with the nerve ends being stimulated by the unfamiliar, and they take it to bed.[160]

I said it isn't boring if you have a good libido, know a few positions (from the Kama Sutra), and your mind has traveled in the meantime. When you're with the same woman, even the next night, it still is from a different angle.[161] She had a positive response, like I was telling her how well I handle money.

6:00 p.m. I went home. It was a long quiet evening, reading the paper, then the journal from a few months ago, crossing out a lot of it. A workout on a wooden instrument. It seems to be a form of self-hypnosis, a therapeutic end in itself. There was an idiosyncratic finesse, having warmed up that morning. Later I heard some classical guitar on the radio and was humbled, but

---

160 The body-bored are leaving town, they're on the road, it's bumper to bumper.
Take a woman to the Aphrodisiac Hotel and hump her.
Venus wants a change of venue on the avenue of sighs,
the average love affair requires something different or it dies.

161 "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man." Heraclitus (6th century BC)

that is beside the point. It's like comparing styles of art, some going for the delicate and others for a car wreck. I am somewhere in between. It will remain to be seen if it's unheard of.

Typing until 1:30 in the morning, then went to sleep.

Tuesday, June 14, 1994

Morning, the light and heat returned. I was caught in a minor dilemma between the typewriter and the cliffs a few miles away.

I called Ming at work and said we're having some communication problems. She thought it was me. She sounded a little grumpy yesterday at work, and didn't call last night, having been under an "emotional strain" which is wearing her out. I'm not sure what it is about, although it sounds like her. I think the strain is in her veins, and she shares it with those around her, especially men. I've known the feeling once in a while, although she gauges the caliber of a man to the extent he is immune to her (though not indifferent).

People inflict what they are made of on others, whether they want to or not. After spending hours with someone you're infected by their spirit, whether it's dizzy, depressed, detached, delightful, or drunk. When I hang out with the Phantom of the sound-room it leaves me feeling like a slacker, and with Jon in St. Helena I absorb a certain lassitude according to his way of life (or maybe it's the weather, since he can be wired and efficient). When you're with someone you find yourself adapting to their timing which can throw you off.[162]

[162] One of our clients showed up in the office after spending a few days on the street (a manic-depressive who was off his meds). I took him out on the balcony to get him away from the others, a dirty and unshaven mess who was muttering about bugs crawling under his skin. After fifteen minutes I was mildly infected by his mental instability, and realized how much I depend on the logic and the rationality of others. I would not want to work in a mental ward. I'm a thin-skinned chameleon who reflects his surroundings to a certain extent. I was going to say that I'm impressionable, but the definition is "easily influenced because of a lack of critical ability," which isn't the case.

That reminds me, yesterday morning someone rang the buzzer downstairs at the front gate. I picked up the intercom and a woman said, “Who are you…. Who are you… what do you want?” I went back to the typewriter.

Phone call from D. at the office, with her smooth DJ voice. She is slender (with more curves than a model), but the lush magnitudes of her heart and soul are like a parachute fanning out behind her. I wonder if it comes from living in the deep south. You can know someone by what they bring out in you. In this case, I’m coming up with better lines and a more intelligent repartee, like when a musician plays with better musicians. We talked for a while. She said she has reservations to a performance on Thursday night, a lesbian talking about her father. It’s a one-woman show starring Margo Gomez.

Went to work for a couple of hours.

5:00 p.m. I walked to Ming’s office. I was a little off, and not sure why. Since I saw her last week I’ve been through some changes involving D., and maybe there was some minor psychic conflict here. I shook it off, and we took a bus to my neighborhood, picking up red snapper, spinach, and a porter beer. We walked to my place. I was in a critical-relaxed mood and said something about her evasive tendencies. She is up in the air about our flying to San Diego in eight or nine days, and I don’t know if she wants to go.

She was taken aback, and faintly amused, recognizing herself and her proclivities. She said she is being an ambiguous flake with everyone, and doesn’t know why she was doing it with me. “Sorry.” She gave me the usual rundown - her life is going nowhere, doesn’t like her job, a glorified receptionist with no meaning in her life and no man either - which is fine her. She keeps reiterating how “asexual” she is. “I don’t even masturbate.” We discussed the fact that maybe she should, if some of her tension comes from being pent-up.

She is in a slump which occurs after college when someone doesn't know what to do with their life. Their dreams are out of touch with the reality of a mundane job. She is driven and ambitious, but used to be a lazy beatnik tomboy who would hang out with friends for hours or days on end, and some of that is still with her. However, she was not impressed with how she spent the weekend doing just that, instead of, I don't know, filling out applications. There were some comments on the woman I'm seeing. I've been vague about the details, but she asked if I am using condoms and offered to bring me some, having a supply from where she used to work. She figured they would expire before she got around to using them.

We were in the kitchen for a while preparing some things, and I washed the dishes.

9:00 p.m. We went up on the roof with cigarettes and a beer. She wasn't drinking, and there was an orange glow fading on the horizon when she told me what was on her mind. She is good at concealing what she's thinking, and likes to give the impression that nothing gets to her, or she is indifferent. I said as much and she gave me a look, like "Could you please not believe everything I say or project? You know me better."

She brought up something from an evening a couple of months ago when we had been shooting from the hip with a half-drunken aim. I wanted to find out where I stood with her (like a reality check), since it felt like we were in love, and others thought as much, but it wasn't like that. Things were said which, she said, "Tore me apart." It made her wonder what is wrong with her, seeing as how we have a close connection and her relations with men are a mess. Here was someone who meant a lot to her, but she kept him at arm's length (which allows for a massage). It was odd that this was on her mind as I thought it was resolved. It wasn't like it's anything new, or that we haven't known each other for years, or that there's any question that we love each other. It's just a question of what sort of wavelength it's on. I referred to some of that, and she

nodded in agreement. There is plenty of evidence as to why we're better off as friends, but once in a while my imagination runs amok and wants to take it further. I get ideas about the potential of a situation, but my nervous system is not unrealistic. It can tell when a woman isn't turned on by my presence, and I get over it.

It turns out she has been associating me with a general maleness (which sounds impersonal and objectifying). She doesn't want to lead me on, or give the wrong impression to someone she never wants to hurt. So Ming was being evasive, even with the San Diego trip, which I thought she wanted to do, and in fact she does. Anyhow, we settled it, that phase is over, and she should have known better. As she noted, I prefer a more aggressive woman, at least you know where you stand. The idea of having to talk a woman into bed has never appealed to me.

She asked how it feels, now that I am having sex again, and if I am excited. Apparently, I was being nonchalant. It felt like I had returned to a normal state, a condition I am more or less used to, having been sleeping with women pretty steadily since high school. The last year was an aberration of going without, and I wonder if living in the Tenderloin had anything to do with that.[163] Not only was I isolated, but I was internalizing a bleak worldview. I was like someone who goes without water for hours, and it's getting dire. Then he finds a glass of water and returns to his normal state in a few minutes.

I said, "Let's make a deal." She said, "Okay." "You will have to tear my shirt off and say you want it, and anything short of that will not mean anything, so we can relax like we usually do." She admitted she can be ambiguous at times, what with naked massages in my bed, or taking baths together with a bottle of tequila, but she figured I could handle it. She said, "That's true, you never make me uncomfortable or like I should be careful." Ming was satisfied and

[163] I'm careful with women, having been in a full-blown romance before. Years later you wash up on shore, having been beaten black and blue by the rocks and riptides of a long affair.

relieved, and we went downstairs. I fried the snapper with green onions, pepper, and lemon juice. It was a nice meal at the round wooden table in the front room. She lit a few candles and we zoned out with the tube on. *NYPD* - her idea. She was surprised when a woman dropped her robe from behind. "I can see the outer curve of her breast," she said.

11:00 p.m. She was curled up, getting comfortable and sleepy. I found her a T-shirt, and she walked over to a closet door with a mirror and took off her dress. She put the T-shirt on near a doorknob hung with several ties. A few of them had leaped onto her dress when it was coming off, or they were pulled there by magnetic force. A couple were on the floor, and one was entangled in her clothes when she brought them over to the bed. She lay down, talking for a few minutes, then rolled over and passed out.

I sat there for a while, reading the paper. There was an article on the poet Adrienne Rich. I was ready for an analytic deconstruction, then realized I don't have anything against her, but rather how she was filtered through the small mind of the reviewer, who quoted some of her more clunky sermonizing lines. The reviewer was condescending about W.H. Auden, while speaking in reverent tones about someone who could never write a poem as good as "Limestone."

I thought of the woman lying next to me with long black hair. She is pulled in different directions, including the metabolic dreamland of hallucinogenic mushrooms which she's done before. She has some conflicting and/or synthesizing dimensions and directions, making her an unknown quantity with qualitative side-effects.[164] She is unknown to herself at times, though dying for a fixed direction which would focus all her energies.

---

164 The woman is loyal and continual with a short attention span.
Chinese and American.
Used to be a thrasher tomboy, with increasingly business-like tendencies.
Highly sexual, and yet is capable of shutting it off for months.

Wednesday, June 15, 1994

Woke up early, the morning light streaming through the eastern windows in the front room. It was not even seven. There was the usual morning routine, where she is stiff and I apply some pressure to her shoulders, back, and tailbone while lying on her side, the covers thrown off. She lifted her T-shirt up and asked if I would scratch her back (last night she said she doesn't like anyone to touch her). I did it lightly, including her legs and butt, but her belly is too soft in her opinion. "I'm bloated." Her upper half is heavier, being a large-boned woman with an ample bosom. She was wearing black briefs which were so minimal in front that her pubic hair was sticking out. The spiky hair is dark and soft, and I'm not sure if she cuts it. There was no effort to hide it, like her breasts are more provocative and her pubis is utilitarian. It's small enough to not attract attention.

Last night before falling asleep she said she can tell if her period is coming. She feels a thick flow inside, and even knows when "the egg drops or when the semen leaves." Last week was a false alarm, but now she thinks it is the real thing. Her periods are irregular, what with all the stress in her life. Also, she was brushing her teeth in the bathroom last night. I found her a spare toothbrush and she said we would have to hide it, "for when your girlfriends come over." A necklace she made for me was hanging on the doorknob. She wondered why I don't wear it. I said it looks nice there, like a reminder of her. "OH SO YOU CAN THINK ABOUT ME WHENEVER YOU TAKE A SHIT!" She has a way with words.

Very sensual, but hard to satisfy in bed. "Insatiable," she said.
More liberated territories and crossed boundaries than you can shake a nightclub at.
Has an "organizer" in her cluttered bag.
Athletic with muscled legs and slim hips, but is headed for a well-rounded womanly condition.
Reggae-timeless, but is hounded by a schedule.

Ming took off her T-shirt and slipped her long green dress on, buttoned up the front, and left her bra off. She was out the door at 7 a.m., too conscientious to call in sick so we could go out to the cliffs, though she was dying to go. She has been talking about quitting her job so she won't be miserable all the time. I muttered something about her being miserable anyway. "I'll pretend you didn't say that."

Last night on the sofa she referred to how grumpy she's been lately – what else is new – and wondered why I don't think of her like that. There was a comment about the observer affecting the observed. In this case, I don't see her at her worst because my being there puts her in a better mood. She sort of agreed, and I made the analogy of a scientist observing sub-atomic behavior where he has to take into account that his presence and the mechanical means of observation are affecting what is being observed. Not that she resembles sub-atomic chaos or those random ricochets in a vacuum. Feel like a charged particle? It turned out she is not familiar with the wave or particle theory of light. Meanwhile, she was sitting in front of the tube. There was a commercial about a woman who lost ten pounds, and she muttered, "Bullshit."

We were in her apartment last week when the cat got sick in the hall. I told her about it, and she wanted me to deal with it. I thought that she should do it, so she cleaned it up while saying she couldn't have kids if that sort of thing is hard for her. It's like she doesn't have the stomach for having kids.[165]

I went back to sleep instead of going out to the cliffs, effectively eclipsing any beach time.

---

[165] Flash forward a few years when she had two daughters. There is something about being pregnant which gives a woman the stomach (and the heart) for having kids, including a chemical transformation which ensures that she will love them no matter what – thus ensuring the survival of the species. It would die out at some point if mothers weren't inclined to have eternal patience with a squalling rug-rat.

I went to work in the afternoon, and put together a file on a new case. The wife of an old client, in her forties, stole a bottle of vodka which was smashed when she was apprehended in the parking lot and put up a struggle. It turned out she had just had her hair done and hadn't paid for it. They didn't press charges. Sounds like a bad haircut and she needed a drink. We had a note from her doctor which attested to her being a manic-depressive who requires lithium. There were ameliorating circumstances, and the police report is balanced with a note from the doctor.

I walked V. to the station. She was talking about Maria who she thinks is kind of loose, if not a living soap opera. The latter gave up on the legal assistant in the office and is running around with a Filipino weight-lifter. They "did it" four times last weekend. He was even "inside her" once. V. is a little vague about these things, but was amazed that no condoms were used. This is someone who had a baby out of wedlock and doesn't need more accidents. She using the rhythm method (where she leaves the radio on a rhythm and blues station), and just had her period so things are okay for the time being. It would seem our lives are semi-transparent. The information which some women pass around among themselves as to who is sleeping with whom, and to what effect - you would think it was the main event. I'm not sure why V. tells me all this stuff, except she loves to gossip.

6:00 p.m. I walked to the pool, having phoned Ming who said she wanted to work out, but that was this morning, with her mind having gone through changes by the hour, and now she wanted to go home and organize her life. I had a workout on the weight machines, then swam a mile in the pool. I had gone a quarter mile when a man got in to share the lane. At the half-mile mark the man, a slow swimmer, said, "YOU have a lot of endurance," but I didn't stop.

Walking home with a clear mind I noticed a tall building with a flag which signified the silken currents undulating in the air. When I got home there was a phone call from D. I had faxed

her some things from the office, like "PETITION TO DESTROY WORTHLESS PERSON." I asked if she knew any worthless persons. "Oh yes." However, she expected more in the way of literary efforts. I said I would bring some tomorrow, probably old poems.

Later I said something vague about how life is hard for some people, and the next moment she was in tears. She apologized for being "disturbing." I wondered what kind of men can't handle a woman who is depressed. "No one died or anything." I never found out what was bothering her, but said I would be here if she wants to talk about it.[166] However, the evening was eclipsed phone-wise when I called Ming (by request) and it turned into an epic conversation where we generate a mutual atmosphere and aren't compelled to leave it. Our thoughts flew around, although she did two-thirds of the talking. Ming inhabits her mind with a relentless presence. That reminds me, she was listening to her messages the other day. There was one from a friend and it went on and on, slow and meandering. The woman talked about her emotions, and it didn't matter that she was speaking to a dead-end phone machine.

Ming wallows in amorphous slowly fluctuating states of mind and soul, and it lends itself to conversations which can stretch out for hours, like a stream of consciousness. It goes off in any direction, but it wreaks havoc with her material concerns when it comes to getting ahead in the world. It was typical that she had to go home and sit on her bed with forms relating to school applications and how to start a business, and yet from 9:30 until midnight she was on the phone with me. The conversation touched on things that were far removed from school and work. There was much about the past, and how she related to her father and her older brothers, and if that had

[166] Flash forward: it took a while before I realized the extent of her depression, though she was forthcoming about it, having suffered the effects for many years. There was some mention of a hallucinogenic mushroom tea she kept in her refrigerator in Baton Rouge. When she came to San Francisco she took Ecstasy and went to clubs every weekend for a couple of years – which may have depleted her serotonin, the body's feel-good drug. There was also something called Pill Corner in her neighborhood, which she frequented from time to time (and kept a secret). Later on she was self-medicating with pot, Prozac, and white wine, but the drinking got worse.

some bearing on her relations with men. She liked her brothers, and had a "crush" on one as a little girl and felt left out when he got a girlfriend. She hated her father for a long time, who is cold and patriarchal. That alone might have turned her off to Chinese men, who I never saw her with.

As for opening a café, there were some contradictory intentions. She wants it be a place for women, maybe getting a government grant on a non-profit basis. She also wants a going concern that channels $50,000 a year in her direction and does not exclude men. I said, "What about a community service place for Asian women?" She hadn't thought of that, and wasn't sure they needed it. I said there is a Vietnamese community in the Tenderloin, but she said she isn't interested in Vietnamese girls who hang out with their boyfriends.

I mentioned how modern or Americanized some Asian girls are. I was on a 30 Stockton bus which was full of sixth graders who had just graduated. They were mostly Chinese or Vietnamese kids, and were signing year books. "Wuss up girlfriend?" They were a noisy bunch with a few girls in the back. One of them stuck her head out the window and yelled "FUCK YOU!" while flipping off someone and laughed. Ming wasn't sure if that is an improvement. The other day I took a 30 bus to work and was suddenly engulfed in chaos. It was packed with ten-year-old Chinese kids, all yelling in a foreign language.

There was a comment about how hard it is to be twenty-four and lacking direction. She still thinks she was a man in a previous life. "A nice man…." There was the usual question of why I'm more at ease with things. I have a typewriter and guitar for realizing and releasing tension. Also, she is sexually frustrated in ways I hardly know about. She reiterated that she doesn't like anyone to touch her, but whenever we're together she wants a back rub or to sleep together, curled up side-by-side. She admitted that for all intents and purposes it might appear to

some that we're a couple. She blew the last relationship when he proposed and she revealed how hesitant she was, even though the break-up was devastating. I'm not sure if it's an autonomous ego thing or what, but the thought of getting married makes her feel compromised, and not without reason. She grew up with a domineering domestic male (her father), and knows the home has often been a trap for women.

That said, she prefers the company and the voices of men. She has very few women friends, and was let down by the woman who was going to start a café with her, and then decided to join the Peace Corps. As for feeling like her job is meaningless and she could be replaced, I said most people can be replaced (if we're genetic replicas). Entire generations are replaced by an ensuing generation, and so forth. I had the feeling with a couple of girlfriends that I was replaceable, at least from their generic point of view.

We got off the phone an hour past her bedtime. I wondered why I write about her so much, and if it shows a wary love of women with some analytic doubts. She's the woman I am closest to, having known her for five years, and we have grown into soul-baring transparencies for each other. Ming is confessional and blunt about herself. Nothing is hidden, having the X-ray vision of a woman who will talk about her periods, if her breasts are heavy or sagging, and how it feels good when she urinates. She informs me of her fluctuating emotional states, opinions on the news, her sexual encounters, and the last time she was hugging the toilet (Happy New Year).

Ming is like an open window on what it's like to be a woman these days, complete with contradictory motivations and concerns which segue into major topics – from women's rights and ethnic issues to the problematic continuums of love and sex, androgyny and gender roles, the existentialism of a woman with a fatalistic awareness.

I write about her because I love her and I like to think about her, communicating more with her than anyone else (until recently). She has a welter of doubts about her life. I write about her because we talk so much and I record and analyze a conversation – one in which the words and references are going by in a stream that is reflecting the zeitgeist, or our version of it.

I write about her in the form of endless character sketches, and from different angles, like an artist working with a model. He is preoccupied with that particular model, who unlocks the possibilities and compositions for him - all the more so with an inherent spark gap where they stay at arm's length. That is where the writing comes into focus. It is possible she constitutes a missing chord, a fully orchestrated often dissonant chord of someone's being-in-the-world, where the sketches and the observations are a casual encounter with an original intensity.

It's ironic that I am platonic with a very physical woman, but on full-blown sexual terms with a woman who's a writer, and that occurred within two weeks of having met her, while I've known the other one for years.

12:30 a.m. I went into the front room and soon had a pile of poems on the floor. I was looking for a few for D. to read, including the one about T.S. Eliot who is ruminating in a smoking jacket. It constituted a review of long-ignored and semi-poetic efforts. Some were holding up, and some were out of focus. Others were an inconsequential bore and didn't move, just words on a page.

Thursday, June 16, 1994

NOTES

> An article by a woman in the *Chronicle* yesterday, THOUGHT CRIME LOG 1994. L.A. County has a law that a public employee, a fireman, is not allowed to bring a *Playboy* magazine with him to work. Such things are banned "even in employee dormitories and locker rooms." (This is supported by the National Organization of Women.) We're

talking about "quiet reading," and nothing to do with putting pin-ups on the wall. The EEOC has "broad guidelines" where "harassment doesn't even have to be 'targeted specifically' toward the plaintiff." A female county employee who helped draft the county policy said it would apply to other magazines, like *Vanity Fair, Sports Illustrated*, and any magazine in which "women are scantily clad." I think that would include some women's magazines.

The writer thinks this is a bit much, though she would prefer that *Playboy* magazine didn't exist. "The female body is beautiful, but the magazine's professional pictorials appeal to men because of the subliminal message that men don't have to take a female boss or colleague seriously because between the sheets, a *Playboy* spread is who she is or should be."

How does she know or presume to speak of what appeals to men? Can a man make pronouncements about what appeals to women and get away with it? If "the female body is beautiful" wouldn't that be enough? Does she really think the professional pictorials – women with a certain occupation – are the main thing? Men only look at the magazine when women in their line of work have a spread? Must be a lot of plumbers and truck drivers out there who're still waiting. But men like the magazine because of the subliminal messages related to the women's occupations. How does she know what happens on the subliminal level? It is by definition "below the threshold of sensation or consciousness; perceived by or affecting someone's mind without their being aware of it." So the male readers don't know what's going on, but she does.

Maybe it functions as a fantasy-relief, like what women get from supermarket romance novels. The other gender appears in an unreal light of being willing and friendly, as opposed to what men are usually dealing with. They wouldn't last long if they couldn't take a female boss or colleague seriously, and said they want to see her naked (this is leaving aside the possibility that one's boss or colleagues don't resemble the playmate of the month). For that matter, does she think men don't take it seriously, going to bed with a woman?

If we judge human beings by how they're portrayed in magazines, including the ads, you might suppose that people are an extension of a commodity, or they're commodity eunuchs. Look at a women's magazine like *Cosmopolitan*, you would think they have nothing better to do than sit around in their underwear while trying on different kinds of perfume with perfect skin as a form of transcendental meditation, and in those brief moments when they're not thinking about themselves by way of skin and hair and nails and feminine hygiene products or styles of clothing, they are running through a thousand variations on the when, where, and how of a relationship. In that sort of publication, the physicality of women is to *Playboy* what calculus is to simple addition.

Whatever one thinks about the *Playboy* type, it is not so far removed from what a lot of women might prefer, or at least not mind: a man who is well-mannered, healthy, and surrounded with a lot of status objects (along with an active libido which holds women in high esteem). Tell me that's a combination which most women despise. The status

objects alone would function as a magnet for some women. The whole point about the gentleman playboy as imagined by the magazine is that he doesn't have to be rude or guilty of harassment. It's ironic that this aspect is ignored, while the assumption is that photos of the female form are enough to make a man uncivilized.[167]

There are not many magazines with pictures of naked men for women, but that never stopped women from seeing men as "playthings." And that is giving them some credit for being broadminded – it's not just a man's body they're toying with, but his income and emotions, if not his sanity.

"Between the sheets, a *Playboy* spread is who she is or should be." Not really, you don't want a woman who is simply posing, much less someone who is frozen in the headlights of a two-dimensional photo shoot. You don't want someone who costs thousands of dollars just to take her clothes off.

In other words, not many men assume that women want to lay around naked and smiling. The message from the magazine is that some women are not opposed to that, but with the assumption that a man is qualified and well-equipped with some commodities, along with being financially well off, physically fit, and good looking.

For as long as I've had anything to do with women or girls, going back to high school, it was not uncommon for them to lie around naked and smiling. This is real life, far from the influence of *Playboy* magazine. Most of them had never read it, and were feminists and mothers, neo-lesbians, or the girl next door. You could say they like the sun and know they're pretty. They don't want to hide it, and they get off on the attention. Whether they resemble pin-up models is beside the point. If it idealizes women, I would say that fashion magazines do the same (with far less verisimilitude).

9:00 a.m. I was lying in bed, half asleep, when Ming called from work. She wanted me to check the flights to San Diego.

There was a photo on the front page of the morning paper: "The area outside O.J. Simpson's home has become jammed by journalists seeking a glimpse of the former football great." There is reason to believe he may have stabbed his ex-wife and her male friend to death. I'm thinking what's wrong with this picture? A bored photographer who takes a picture of other photographers and it is on the front page. It seems like journalism is telescoping further away

[167] Some people find the human form disturbing. It has led to censorship, particularly from a funereal religious angle.

from anything of substance. The “journalists seeking a glimpse” were standing around with their equipment, just in case he drove off in a car. We don’t know what he looks like? Have all the previous photos of him been rendered obsolete by this turn of events? Do people want to observe the features of this man to see if he looks guilty, or to assure themselves that he is human after allegedly killing a woman? And what are the words of his attorney worth when he says to the press, “My client is innocent.” It’s meaningless and paid for, on the level of a hired mourner.

Meanwhile, there is a journalism of the fleeting glimpse, a journalistic verite of politicians caught emerging from or getting into limos, who predictably have little to say, a wave of the hand, or maybe an inconsequential verbal brush-off. The journalistic effort amounts to a pathetic verification that said politician exists and he or she is ambulatory, with a further confirmation as to what they’re wearing.

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

6:30 p.m. I left and went to the old neighborhood, walking down Hyde Street. A white whore on the corner turned and started walking towards me. They do that sometimes. It’s a feigned showdown to get your attention, veering to the side at the last second in case you hadn’t noticed the mini-skirt and nearly-exposed tits, a wave of perfume wafting over your senses. A minute later I passed two women as they did a little white powder hand-off.

I turned on Eddy Street and glanced up at the building. D. was standing on her wide balcony on the fifteenth floor, a little figure. Security is tight in the building, and I waited for her. She came out in a purple coat, matching lipstick, and hoop earrings, and we walked to the underground monorail. It took us in a mechanical rush to the Castro district where there was a one-woman show by Margo Gomez, who prefers the company of women. It was about her father, and was in a small club with folding chairs. She impersonated different characters,

including her father, who had some vitality and charm, but wasn't politically correct at times. A Latino man in New York City, working the *teatro*, and I figured she took after him in some respects. There were impressions of people she knew as a girl, as if immediate human beings were more real to her than anything else, and they left an imprint.

When it was over we walked out into a cold wind, and took a cab to D.'s apartment where we sat around for an hour, talking and sipping from tall glasses of champagne. Eventually we were in her bedroom which overlooks the city at night, and things were clicking between us. Mentally we're on a similar wavelength, and it's bringing out her finer points. There are times when I've been led astray by the appearance of a woman. It can be a dead end when it comes to any real rapport, while with D. the parallel affinities and the historical dimension of the woman are something to write home about.

We made love a couple of times and dissolved into the night.

Friday, June 17, 1994

8:00 a.m. I walked her to the Powell Street station (where the cable cars revolve) by way of Eddy Street. We were walking a gauntlet of some unemployed and derelict human beings, most of them black. I am impressed with the substance of this woman. A cable car from downtown runs to within a few blocks of my apartment. When I was home there was a call from B. There is a man who has been courting her for a couple of years, but she told him she is with a woman. He had the pleasure of her company now and then, so it wasn't a total waste of time.

12:00 p.m. I met V. in the office (she called and said, "Leave now."), and we went to the Hunan place for lunch. Smoked ham, rice, and tea. The woman is interested in anything to do

with love affairs. I think the topic fills her with a warm current, and lets her exercise her skepticism and her curiosity. I was toying with her a little, and said,

> "Daytona thinks I'm sexy."
> "She must be blind."
> "Daytona said she likes my skin."
> "She's lying."

I have the feeling that my sleeping with a woman is something she is picking up on with a sensual approval, as if coming close to one woman I am coming close to others.[168] Meanwhile, there are the ongoing problems of her assistant, who is apparently a lousy judge of character. Maria had one or two weekends with the weightlifter, but it's over now, and he's with someone else. We returned to the office where I did some work.

5:00 p.m. I went to Ming's office. "You look summery," she said, and we took a bus to her place. We hung out in her room with a rubber plant, the white floor, and a bottle of Chianti. It was nearly seven when we left, having caught a glimpse of something her roommate was watching on the tube with rapt attention, though she later regretted it. A white car on the freeway which was followed in slow motion by a helicopter and police cars.

We walked to the Strand Theater on the main drag to see *Philadelphia* (1993), which was her idea. I had suggested *Helas Pour Moi* (1993), but she has no concept of Godard. She admitted later what a relief it was to be in tears over someone's problems other than her own. She was sniffling and weeping during the film. When we left her eyes were red, and she seemed to have regressed to when she was a girl, and also looked the part – wearing sneakers, a heavy old shirt, and a baseball cap. She can also be a femme fatale, but it is a look that she avoids these days, insisting on how "sexless" she has become. It is a neutral state in which she found a modicum of calm.

---

[168] "When it rains, it pours."

Ming was leaning on my arm while we walked to her place, and soon were sitting in the kitchen with her roommate having wine and talking about the film. Both of them like to cry at movies, but I don't.[169] I think the medium is manipulating our emotions, and I was put off by a panning shot of a warm family gathering with not much dialogue. The film was wallowing in some unearned sympathy, and the ending threw me off. What was moving was the scene with the opera sequence (from *Andre Chenier*). The dying man explained an aria with Maria Callas to his black attorney who was skeptical.

Eventually we went into her room and talked for a while. Then she turned the lights off, with a few candles burning and a half moon in the window. She was curled up beside me and luxuriating in her bed, the physical presence of a friend, the sound of his voice… and fell asleep while I was talking. Not the first time that has happened.

Saturday, June 18, 1994

10:00 a.m. We woke up. It was clear and warm outside. I wore some soft pajama bottoms, which was all she had, and an open shirt. She was in a T-shirt and briefs, and we were in no hurry to get up. After a while I was sitting on her with some morning therapy for her back and shoulders. Then I rolled her over and pulled her up gently by the back of the neck with her head falling back. After that I pushed down on her lower stomach, right above the pubic bone. It brought a look of wonder to her eyes, feeling the organs being reorganized, or something to that effect.

A maneuver followed which was not so therapeutic, where we ended up in a tangle on the floor. There was no one home so we had the flat to ourselves. I made breakfast in the kitchen,

[169] Once in a blue moon though I might get choked up, as happened with films like *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Deer Hunter*.

throwing various things into a wok for a stir fry. It was hot out, and there was some notion of going to the cliffs. However, we have our differences. I would have preferred the Godard film, and spending the night at my place. In the morning we would have been that much closer to the cliffs. We ended up with no Godard, sleeping at her place, and not going anywhere the next day.

We got some sun however, climbing the wooden stairs in back to the roof with a couple of low chairs. We were in our swimsuits, and she lay on a towel. The possibility of going to the cliffs was slipping away as the situation took hold of the afternoon. I didn't expect to be on the roof very long, and forgot that sunlight has an effect no matter where you are, so I got a little burned.

We talked about how dormant she is these days, not having been laid in four or five months (since the break-up). It sounded like she's looking forward to continuing in that state for a year or more. However, the conversation was saturated with sexual references, from a woman's "vaginal grip" (she agreed that it's a real thing) to how long her pubic hair is (there is nothing like a natural woman). There was some replay analysis of our love lives – why it's problematic for some people, and maybe she is getting weird. I said that she was weird already (I wrote wired).

I ended up getting my hair cut with her standing close. I'm more comfortable with her bosom in my face than a pair of scissors, and there were oldies on the radio coming through the window. When the haircut was over she wanted me to cut hers (a trim). I didn't inspire confidence with my questions, but we made an effort using a mirror in the kitchen. The afternoon was turning into a "day of beauty" (her term), and what was next on the agenda? Bubble baths, with her going first in a tile-covered bathroom with mirrors.

She drew a bath with bubbles,[170] took off her swimsuit, and got in the tub. I sat on the side with a cigarette, leaning against the wall ("Put your feet in," she said). I'm not sure if she was testing the waters as to how relaxed we are these days, though it fluctuates. We're back to being naked with each other, maybe because I have a girlfriend and she doesn't have to worry about leading me on.

She was not hiding much at the moment, slowly washing herself with a sponge, her heavy bosom floating in the bubbles. When she sat up it took on a different form according to the pull of gravity. Her dark nipples were erect, and then not so much. It was a lovely sight, but one I'm used to at this point. Having washed her long black hair and rinsed it, put in a conditioner, and rinsed it, she climbed out of the tub and dried off with a towel. There was no attempt to hide that thick bush of hers.

I drew a bath for myself ("Want to use my water?" "No.") and sat in the tub while she did things in the mirror. There was a pale green mud pack on her face for a while. It froze her facial expressions in a mask which had a nice effect. The broad planes of her face were simplified and smoother. "Moon head," she said, who doesn't feel attractive these days and doesn't care. After a while I let the water out and stood up, drying off. She had some comment as to my appearing in better shape. "I haven't seen you naked for a while." Come to think of it, she felt my shoulders and chest last night before falling asleep. I think it was in order to not lose touch with the male form, and she was throwing punches this afternoon. She would slam her little fist into my arm or stomach several times to no effect (having given me a second to flex my muscles).

---

[170] Flash forward one or two years: Ming was renting a place in Oakland where I spent the night now and then. Her discretion when it came to being naked was long gone, a passing phase, and there were regular massages with no clothes on, not to mention baths and showers. I was still with D., so she could relax and let her hair down, so to speak. We drove to Lake Tahoe one weekend and ended up in a honeymoon suite near the lake. There was a heart-shaped hot tub in the room, and she poured in so much bubble bath it overflowed with bubbles.

We went back to the roof for a while. I had a towel around my waist with a slight breeze picking up as we were discussing welfare reform. When we returned to her room she put a lotion made of orange peel on her legs, and thought I should do the same. When she noticed I had gotten too much sun she cut off part of her aloe vera plant, sliced the leaf down the middle, and rubbed the juices on my chest. She also put some lotion on my back while I was sitting there, the towel having fallen off.

4:00 p.m. A woman friend of hers arrived downstairs, and I put my clothes on. We hung out for a while and then left, as they were on their way to see some friends in Oakland. Her persona alters in the presence of a girlfriend. She was showing photos of her trip to Humboldt with her lesbian friend, and it sounded like another side of her. It's not a side that she is comfortable with, since she doesn't want to be a lesbian. She doesn't have anything against it, but doesn't like what it brings out in her.

That reminds me, we were talking about how powerful the sex drive is and how it can unconsciously bend one's orientation if it is blocked. Sooner or later one is going in an unforeseen direction as there is a need for physical attention. I have a theory that some gays and lesbians are in that category by default. Relations with the opposite sex were not appealing for one reason or another, so the sex drive bends a person in the direction of another gender (their own). In other words, the sex drive is so powerful it can force you to sleep with people you don't like very much. That might explain the animosity that shows up in an affair, and it is just as common with same-sex relations as it is with men and women. Look at all the instances of men who treat the women they go to bed with badly. You would think they don't like women very much, but their heterosexual sex drive forces them to spend some time with them. You know that something is off when people fuck and then have nothing to talk about.

I went home.

The phone machine was on zero, which didn't phase me. I went to the store, came back, and found it clicking to 1. I hit the playback and found out the zero meant 10. There were now 11 messages on it, including some from D., Jon in St. Helena, the Phantom of the sound-room, and my mother. The few from D. were a puzzle, mostly from last night, with her sounding increasingly concerned. She wanted to know if I called her last night – she had a few friends over – and hung up on her. Unfortunately, I wasn't around to call her back until now.

I called and got her phone machine. She called back a few minutes later, and it was the oddest conversation for a while, like we were on the verge of losing this connection – but she sounded relieved that she had been mistaken. D. thought it might have been me on the phone, saying nothing, and then responding to something she said with "Fuck you" and hanging up.[171] I was supposed to call last night so she thought it might be me, but admitted it was out of character, and yet how well does she know me? It seems she has a tendency to leap to the worst conclusions, especially when it comes to being hurt by a man. I think it has happened before so she assumed the worst, and didn't go near her bed. She slept in the other room, bought new sheets, and threw my poems in the trash, admitting all of this with some embarrassment. I said that I would never act like that, and wouldn't disappear without a reason.

We put that behind us. When she called the other night she was in tears, having had a bad day at the office. This is an emotional woman with a fragile ego, and yet she has the courage to live in the Tenderloin. We made plans to get together that evening. When we got off the phone I thought about it. There was some further mention of the poem I sent her about T.S. Eliot. She

[171] A few years ago I had an eerie phone call from a stranger, and it went on a for a while. It was late at night and a wrong number, but he wanted to talk. I think he dialed a random number out of desperation, since he sounded like he was on drugs, or coming down, a young man in a tenuous state, very hesitant. "Do you want to hurt me?" He might have been putting me on, but it went on too long and he sounded depressed, so I played it like a suicide hotline.

read it yesterday, and said it was poignant, well-constructed, and I think she meant it. I worked out on a wooden instrument, and then turned on the opera.

It was nearly ten when I returned to her place. We hung out for a while, talking with her writer friend, the well-rounded woman with massive cleavage, about perceptual limitations and whether character is fate. D. wore a long and elegant dress with boots. There were notes taped to a sliding glass door on the fifteenth floor, like lofty thoughts which floated above the city. D. showed me a slip from a fortune cookie, "You have the ability to know & sense a higher truth." I wondered if she was relying on fortune cookies to increase her self-awareness. It sounded like, "You have no sense."

We left with Minnie, and walked to her car around the corner. It was one of the corners where the black guys hang out, and a couple were walking toward us. One of them had no shirt on and was in a threatening state, seeing if he could get a reaction from the white folks. He tried to provoke us while walking on a public sidewalk, and made some manic gestures, very close. Your nerves tense up when that occurs, but having some experience with the neighborhood you know the best thing is to not react, like he's invisible, which worked. He was only pretending to jump us (if I made a move it would have been an excuse for him to escalate the situation).[172]

We got into a dark and sinister-looking Firebird, (with Minnie referring to it as a robo-dick), and drove to the DNA Lounge with police everywhere. The place was crowded and Pussy Tourette was on stage (we missed Pansy Division, which was fine with me). The headliners were insufferable, but this was out of left field with a professional vengeance. A bare-chested man in a femme/butch outfit (I never did figure it out) was posing as a queer torch singer with a woman

[172] A few months later D. and I were starting to walk out of a liquor store on the corner when we were confronted with a black man swinging a hatchet in the doorway. I took a couple of seconds to assess the situation. It wasn't directed at us necessarily as he was swinging it around like a fool (one of the locals), so we carefully made our way around him and headed for her building.

on either side of him in flannel shirts, black mini-skirts, and garter belts. There was a loud soundtrack as they belted out some three-part harmonies about FREE PUSSY. Their moves were syncopated with an occasional change of pace, including a rock and roll number which was throbbing as a striptease, but I think it was an old hamburger commercial.

Disjointed and eclectic images from silent films, including Mae West, were projected on a screen behind them. Near the end the singer said that one of the girls was leaving the group, having been accepted into the Conservatory of Music (she had done a pseudo-opera number), "but me and _____ suck, so we'll be doing this FOREVER."

Pussy T. came back for an encore, sat near the front of the stage, and crossing his or her legs with a rimshot on the soundtrack went into a song about a FRENCH BITCH. D. and I were near the bar having drinks. After a while I followed her upstairs, heading for the back and through a door into a private lounge which is run by her friend Tornado. There were a couple of rooms with a delirious layout, like a wrap-around hallucination for communing with your fellow humanoids. There were only a few people there, and we sat on a lounge with glimpses of the headliner group about to go on. Eventually we followed them out, and were subjected to some homo-kitsch which came with grey pompadour wigs and swirling psychedelic suits. I don't mind it when musicians are exaggerated, fey, or weirdly dressed, but they sounded awful.

We were on the second floor in back, having a coffee and whiskey, and after a couple of songs returned to the lounge. It started filling up and soon was packed. D. said she will be a DJ there next week. The crowd was on the homosexual side, with a few seven-foot drag queens looking like Rocky Horrors who want to be in a movie. I'm amazed at how many people she knows, as if it is more real to her than writing. We are different in that respect, with her saying that as a writer she's a good socializer, and as a socializer I'm a better writer. I can do the

former, but not all the time (which might require medication), while engaging in small talk and following up on contacts.

Among her acquaintances:

A homosexual man around thirty who was good enough to give recitals as a classical pianist, but works as a computer programmer.[173]

Tornado, who runs the private lounge (by invitation only), in her late thirties. Her look was extra-special in a see-through blouse (she had a spread in *Penthouse* magazine in the late 70's). She is another one of D.'s friends whose way of making a living is a mystery. I got a big hug and a kiss on the lips from her when we were leaving.

The DJ spinning records, another marginal eclectic expressionist (by way of writing and music) in his late thirties. He gets by one way or another.

The long-haired homosexual rock guitarist who was in the last band, and his tall hairdresser boyfriend (possibly a lounge singer).

And Minnie who drove us here in black pants and a low-cut see-through top, along with a short spiky haircut. She can't get laid to save her life, which is a little surprising. This is a luscious woman with a quick mind who is literate and drives a hot car.

Eventually D. and I were on the dance floor, and surprised each other with some mutual moves in tune with the music. We got into a semi-torrid routine, too casual for a lambada, but in

[173] D. knew some homosexual men in Baton Rouge, and moved out here with a few of them, having some affinities and liking their company. A man who doesn't keep his end of the conversation up is not much interest to her, straight or otherwise.

that neighborhood.[174] Her sexual undercurrent is near the surface, and I was feeling the heat in a burgundy silk shirt.

1:30 a.m. Minnie drove the two of us back to the hood, with more police doing roadblock checks. We levitated to her floor, and it wasn't long before D. and I were lying on her bed with the lights out. The city lights were coming in, and I was having an out-of-the-body experience as provided by her mouth.

Sunday, June 19, 1994

10:00 a.m. Regaining consciousness….

11:00 a.m. We walked to Market Street a few blocks away and found a café near the police barricade with coffee, apple juice, and a banana-nut muffin. It was warm out, and we were just in time for the "women's motorcycle contingent," otherwise known as DYKES ON BIKES. I thought of a harlot on a Harley, revving up a man-made machine between her legs. There was an endless number of women on bikes, not a few of them bare-breasted on a chopper with a girlfriend in back. One was lying in front of the driver in fishnet stockings with her legs around the driver. There was a Darwinian profusion of looks for the women, and what some might call unnatural selection with a motorcycle sleight of hand. They were so confident you'd think they had invented motorcycles.

A parade with maybe two hundred contingents, and it took three hours to go by, like a sociological review of a so-called subculture. A study in normality variation with a theme that gays and lesbians can be found in every walk of life. They are normal-looking people with ordinary occupations, your next-door neighbors, etc., so there were contingents representing

[174] 1977, a punk club in North Beach where the bands didn't come on until 11 p.m. I came up with a maneuver with an art student from Memphis where I stuck my leg out and she rode my thigh while being thrown from side to side. She was nineteen and we were having an affair, but it didn't last long.

various facets of the workforce. One problem in emphasizing the dull-normal aspects of a subculture is it makes for a dull-normal parade, though there were some manifestations of the outrageous and flamboyant, from the queens in feather boas to the ominous leather boys who're into sadomasochism. They followed a group of parenting lesbians who were pushing baby carriages.

D. and I had a running commentary as to how many pedestrian categories there would be, like gays and lesbians with unpaid phone bills, or ex-schoolmates of gays and lesbians. She suggested a contest of lines and I forgot about it. Apparently, I won it when the Wells Fargo group went by in matching corporate T-shirts, and I said I wanted to yell, "I'm losing interest!"

D. is capable of shouting at someone in a parade, especially politicians moving in slow motion on the back of their convertibles. She doesn't trust political machinations, including the illusion that if someone is the same gender, race, or sexual persuasion their integrity is less suspect or corruptible. There was Congresswoman Pelosi, District Attorney Arlo Smith, and some city supervisors who didn't get much attention, including Angela Alioto. The writer Armistead Maupin was waving to the crowd with his writing hand. He wrote *Tales of the City*, a newspaper serial which began in the *Chronicle* in the 1970's,[175] and here he was out on the town.

There were girls with floppy tits walking along with no shirt on, or half naked and painted blue (Luna Sea). They were making boobs as ordinary for us as they are for them. There was every size and shape, from heavy sagging tits to those which are barely there. A naked woman had a snare drum hanging in front of her not-so-private parts (rim-shot).

A naked man on stilts with long hair.

A few throbbing floats, but not enough music overall.

[175] One of the characters is a transwoman named Anna Madrigal (an anagram for "A man and a girl.") In the movie version the role is played by a woman named Olympia Dukakis.

Condoms and glass bead necklaces were thrown to the crowd. I caught a couple of the necklaces and gave them to D. There were some comments as to how Mardi Gras in New Orleans is more rowdy, rude, and full of drunken slobs.

A black man in a jockstrap, boots, and a stylized appearance. He was posing so hard I thought it would sprain his attitude.

A small contingent which got no applause was pushing a golden coffin.

Other causes were represented, from the Wobblies (a queer labor group), to a woman with one breast.

Latino, Asian, and black people. A banner for Iranian dykes. I have several women friends who would fit in those categories, but didn't see them.

A man in a tight-fitting gown to his ankles where it fanned out. The outline of his cock was visible.

There was precious little in the way of conceptual or artistic floats, although Voice Farm wasn't bad, including two "Tupperware" dykes with a 1950's housewife look. One had a dildo strapped on and was going through the motions. The float was giving off smoke and bubbles.

"Pacific Heights matrons" – two guys in (I wrote two guy sin) – black jockstraps, spike heels, and short hoop skirts without the skirt.

A contingent of women with a banner, a few of them topless, advertising in no uncertain terms what they were about: FIST-FUCKING DYKES.

The innocent bystanders were treated to signs like: GIVE PENIS A CHANCE… GET YOUR ROSARY OFF MY OVARY… FUCK TO COME, NOT TO CONCEIVE.

For a while we were standing next to a couple of Latino men with the smell of pot, and she ended up buying some.

1:00 p.m. After a couple of hours we walked towards the Civic Center seeing more of the parade. There were strange characters not only in the parade, but on the sidewalk, and a lot of bare butts. Public acceptance is the bottom line. We rested on a wooden bench. A couple of glittering top-heavy queens in big wigs walked by in heels, with the girders of a construction site nearby. The dome of City Hall was a block away, presiding over a homosexual version of the pursuit of happiness.

We went out for breakfast a few blocks away.

Afterward there was some question if I would like to go back to her place. In a few seconds I had an under-the-table hard-on which revealed the physiology of mind over matter. We headed for her apartment, walking by some idle wasted lives on the sidewalk. A black man with slogans on his T-shirt: LEAVE ME ALONE, and DON'T ASK ME 4 SHIT. Further evidence of a rich oral tradition.

We hung out at her place for a few hours, and went through some poems which were retrieved from the trash with a few coffee stains. D. had a serious proposal to push my writing, since I have a character defect when it comes to that sort of thing – I just don't do it. I was on the floor and going through a few of her albums, like *Scraping Foetus Off the Wheel*. She went through a period in the mid-eighties of liking Foetus**,** and saw him at the I-Beam on Haight Street. So did I, in 1985 (with her a year later). However, she got over him, and said he went too far with his negative industrial noise. She thought it might have something to do with Lydia Lunch, who he recorded with for a while.

She doesn't like Karen Finley either, not having much patience for the pious victim routine, or the politics of "everything is oppressive." She is not impressed with a lot of what

passes for art and poetics these days. When an artist put a urinal in an art show like a participation trophy, he put a curse on modern art and it has struggled with it ever since.[176]

D. put on some spaced-out reggae with an echoing sound-effect (Sky Juice). She really likes Jamaican sound engineers like King Tubby[177] and Prince Jammy, and so do I. It sounds like the recording equipment has been smoking pot, what with the "extreme delays, echoes, reverb and phase effects." It is echo location coming from a radio, if not an existential reverb. Remove the vocals and exaggerate the drum and bass, making up in special effects what it is lacking in velocity. Sub-reggae dub.

We had the tube on for a while. I was looking for a basketball game, but it wasn't on yet. I stumbled on a Mexican TV show which was full of hot-blooded kitsch. There were a couple of women singers who were wild and steamy, like wearing a tight dress is a form of foreplay. There was a group of mild-mannered men in a formal time-warp of the 1950's. I wondered if some kind of role reversal was going on, when you often hear that it's the men who are aggressive and the women who're restrained (be careful with that apostrophe) in Latino culture.

We were on the floor with a pillow, and the woman was anything but restrained. I floated out the window again.

5:30 p.m. We went out, walking up Hyde Street (past my old place), and parted company on California. I walked home. It felt like my life was in disarray because of my accelerated socializing. I hadn't slept at home in three nights. I proceeded to fall asleep around seven, coming to a couple of hours later in the dark, and was mystified as to why it happened. I must be getting more relaxed with her, who puts me at ease in ways that I'm not used to anymore.

---

[176] Marcel Duchamp, "Fountain" (1917)

[177] I read about him later, with someone saying he should be included in a history of great inventors, having invented dub music (though not the sound equipment he was using). There were others, but he was a sonic pioneer. He was returning from his studio one night when he was shot. The killer was never found (1941-1989).

There was a series of phone calls, including with my father, and Jon in St. Helena, followed by some typing. At one in the morning there was a phone call from the Phantom. He said he bought a new tube amp and I should come over tomorrow night.

Monday, June 20, 1994

Phone call from the Professor in Los Angeles. He was talking about the black millionaire who killed "a white woman and a Jew." There was some question as to whether he was holding a gun to his head during his inconsequential getaway ride, or was it a picture of his family, like nostalgia is a way to end your life.[178]

The coverage has been over the top, which is not surprising since the suspect is "one of the most famous people ever to face murder charges in the United States." That would get the attention of the press, and the circumstances are inflated by the latest equipment, with a slow-mo chase scene being broadcast coast-to-coast. There was a helicopter with a video camera hooked up to the TV screens of private citizens across the country. It would seem the equipment is expanding the parameters and emptiness of an event. Something similar occurs with war when it is hard to tell if men are testing the latest equipment, or the latest equipment is testing them, who're driving under the influence of their own machines.

The self-conscious dimension of the coverage, with reporters interviewing people as they watch television hundreds of miles away. There was the inevitable accusation by a hesitating black woman that it constituted another example of "racism." The system is racist for reporting the news, but a black man killing a white woman is not.[179] Maybe she realized what a weak

[178] Nostalgia used to be considered a mental disorder.
[179] The assumption is that black people can't be racist, no matter how badly they speak of or treat people of other races, because they were historically oppressed in this country. At what level of prosperity does that immunity by way of a centuries-old oppression disappear, with the obtuse claim of "systemic racism"

comment it was, when the evidence points to his having been given preferential kid-glove treatment from start to finish, including a long and patient, downright gentle, police escort for his "getaway." Celebrities are sacred, no matter what race they are.

There was an article in the paper by a woman on "whether participation in violent sports leads to violent acts against women off the field," because it requires a "repression of empathy." I would hope a man can tell the difference between a 250-pound defensive lineman in a helmet (on whom he wastes little empathy) and his girlfriend, but I think the issue is more complicated.[180] You could say that it's an outlet for the violent tendencies of men, and any athlete who is famous and well off becomes a target for predatory women. The ulterior motives may be causing friction if the man is feeling used, if not "objectified."

She was beaten up in 1989, and they separated in 1992, but she still was spending time with him, a handsome friendly thug with a capacity for what the dominant culture wanted, from broken-field running to rental car commercials. He wore that socialization like a well-tailored suit, but underneath it there remained a person who would pull a knife on his wife.

We talked about it for a while, and then the Professor brought up the domestic problems of one of his daughters, a nurse in San Francisco. She is thirty and was living with a black man, having had a baby with him. She was fine with that initially, but associating with black people came with a few hard knocks. The black girls on her basketball team in college were pretty rough, and she was cold-cocked by a black man in a club. He was feeling her up from behind,

---

undermined by the fact that the system is shot through with black professionals, including mayors and police chiefs. It is further undermined by the fact that black people in this country have the highest income level of any blacks on earth, while at the same time robbing and killing far more whites every year than the reverse. The assumption that "Only white people can be racist" has given many blacks a free pass when it comes to racial abuse, and there's a double standard in the discourse. For as long as I can remember (and especially in the media), white people use the equivalent of a careful beach ball when discussing race, while blacks are playing hardball.

[180] Maybe it goes both ways. Participating in romantic situations off the field leads to expressions of empathy on the field. You hug a defensive lineman and end up with a blown play and a holding penalty.

and when she turned around and objected, he knocked her to the floor (such savoir faire) (it must have been a cultural misunderstanding). More particularly, she found the father of her child was running around with other women. They separated, but he thinks he has a claim on her (I wonder if that comes with child support), and hit her recently. Her father is worried, and wants her to leave town if she has to.

There is also his growing pessimism with the diversity in his college. It is something how a leftwing intellectual who is half-Jewish and participated in the Civil Rights Movement and efforts to increase the enrollment of minorities in higher education, a proponent of the constitutional melting pot, is disillusioned when it comes to integrated schools and neighborhoods. He never expected the declining standards, the insulting attitudes, as if the more that blacks are benefitting from the system, the more they have to act like whites are worthless or worse. And please don't bore them with the irrelevant thoughts of dead white European males who never had a TV show.

As a professor hired by the state he dare not say anything about it, and laughs at the very thought of free speech in a public university. He has to deal with multi-ethnic students (the school is in south-central Los Angeles) who would sooner go to the administration to complain about a grade than open a book. You would think it is an example of elitist coercion if they're asked to read the course material. One problem which might be transcending race is if the conflict has McLuhanesque proportions. The Professor represents the linear print mode, while a lot of students (of any race) are inundated with an audio-visual dimension. They might go through the motions of buying a book, but then request a video for the subject to make sense to them.

He also felt ignored on Father's Day, but I think that's just as much his fault.

I had been typing for hours when B. called, talking about the weekend. She was relieved to have missed the parade. I suppose she feels like she is living it and that's enough, having a girlfriend with a sick cat and migraine headaches. She asked if I want to go to a club tonight. The French anesthesiologist had called and said a friend of hers is singing there. I said I couldn't make it since I'm going to the sound-room.

I took a bus downtown and when I walked into the office I felt a cold chill from the receptionist. I should have known - she was gone for two weeks and I didn't go to her wedding on Saturday. For some reason I thought the invitation was a mere formality, and with so many there I wouldn't be missed. "Dog eat your papers?" she asked. I was surprised, since V. said no one from the office went, and Ami had been pleasant with her. We managed some small talk on the subject of her hands which had an intricate tattoo pattern, like tight gloves made of lace. She said it was henna and would slowly fade over the next two weeks. It's part of the ritual of getting married. I went to my desk, impressed with her and less so with myself.

I worked for a couple of hours, then at five I left with V. On the way back I bought a flower from a Russian woman, a big lily with a fern, and put it in a long glass vase on her desk with a note.

6:00 p.m. I left work and walked to the bus, took it out to Masonic and a few minutes later was at the flat, talking in the kitchen with Elmo and the Phantom. Elmo lives in St. Helena with Jon, but stays here sometimes. Both of them like to flip through catalogues of sound equipment, amplifiers, and guitars. They were looking at a "vacuum head tube" from Russia. We went down to the garage around eight, and there was the usual smell of gas and oil with eviscerated motorcycles. In the sound-room I plugged the Les Paul into the new tube amp (a 30-

watt Crate). It has a cleaner sound, and I must have liked it since I didn't stop for the next three hours.

There was a jam with Elmo on bass and the Phantom on drums. There was another one with a drum machine which we taped and then listened to, all of which went on for over an hour. Then Elmo had to go to sleep, and the Phantom was in and out a couple of times, finally saying he would be back in a while. He does it all the time, these mysterious disappearances (while downing a forty-ounce of weak beer), but I didn't mind. There are worse things than being hooked up in the basement with a $1400 Les Paul flame-top and a good amp with reverb which I was putting through the paces for nearly an hour and a half, slamming a chord or note progression into a sudden echoing silence, or making it scream and moan and clear the air, not to say my mind, with the clearest tones. The notes are drawn out fine as a wire, and have a throbbing current running through them, which is to say running through me.

By the time the Phantom returned in an altered state[181] I was exhausted and could hardly stand up. We shut off the equipment and I had a cigarette in the garage, feeling like a sonic zombie. He talked about how Jimmy Page or Hendrix got their sound with Marshall amps. Earlier in the kitchen he played a live version of "Red House" with Hendrix stretching out for thirteen minutes. I saw him in Los Angeles in 1968 (which impressed the hell out of Elmo and the Phantom).

I left, walking up the street and then ran for the bus. It was 11:30 when I got home, and there were three messages on the phone machine. I had a premonition that the Actress' daughter called, and in fact she left a well-spoken message. Maya said she likes my new phone message. Some acoustic guitar was followed by, "Let me take this moment to say you have reached the

[181] I think he was scoring drugs on Haight Street.

right place at the wrong time," and it ended with a few more guitar notes. She invited me to a swim party on Saturday.

A long message from Ming. She sounded different for some reason, and meandered on and on until the tape ran out. She talked about everything from my getting a recording contract to her sunburned shoulders, Chinese opera, and was sorry she missed me yesterday.

A call from B. with more information about the club. My social life is heating up and getting a bit crowded. I'm supposed to go to San Diego this weekend, but there is an opening at the Show and Tell Gallery on Thursday, a swim party on Saturday afternoon, the DNA Lounge that night (if my girlfriend is a DJ), and a book release party on Sunday afternoon. It's possible that I'll be out of town for all of it.

Went to sleep without a second thought.

Tuesday, June 21, 1994

NOTES

A small article in the paper, like a footnote: "Simpson Loses Job with Hertz."

Consider that his kids are now like orphans. Their mother is gone and their father will be in prison for a long time (presumably). The victim of a crime is usually operating with a network of friends and relatives. When killing him or her you're doing serious damage to a number of others. It has a desultory effect on the victim's friends and relatives who go on living, but as witnesses of pain and absence.

The stabbing has a fallout which is proportionate to his fame. An incident involving his private life becomes a dark cloud dropping smoke and ash on millions of people from coast to coast, including the black community. There was some commentary on his letting down the cause, so to speak (though he never had much to do with black people, and his white wife was an example of that).

There was a new roommate in the kitchen of the sound-room flat last night, a college student who was reading *War and Peace*. He was offended by the spectators lining the freeway and cheering on a man accused of murder. "Go O.J.!" We talked about why

people like violence, but maybe like is not the word. It has to do with their not being on the receiving end of said violence. When it happens to someone else they are relieved it wasn't them, and they are cheering that.

Most people were not involved in the private lives of the victims and the accused, so how should they react? They have enough problems of their own. If some of them are "cheering" it's because they want to make a tasteless and absurd event more tasteless and absurd (read Camus). Or the problems of the rich and famous make them feel like cheering.

The Phantom said, "Maybe O.J. was just returning his rental car." I said, "It Hertz." I should also mention that there is a high school half a block from my apartment, and the suspect graduated from there.

Meanwhile, the student was sitting at the table, pulling a twisted string between his hands and making a lid on it spin at a furious rate. He was waiting for when the string broke and the lid went spinning across the floor. He said it relieves his tension. Elmo said, "Why don't you just jack off?"

Ming is realistic to a fault, but she has been doing things like buying lottery tickets and reading astrology columns. She is usually put off by her own (a Scorpio), but thought that mine was apropos and read it to me:

> Are you afraid of feeling secure? Do you equate being comfortable with being bored & lazy? Do you suspect that your restless pioneer spirit makes you unfit for the slow, meticulous work of building sturdy foundations? I understand, my friend. I was once like you. But three years ago I stumbled upon a teacher who proved to me I could be a responsible wild man. Now I'm as organized as any accountant, yet more radical and outrageous than ever.
>
> I would love for you to find the electric sense of peace I know – the sizzling, unpredictable sense of stability….

There was something about "eternal surprise" and a radical sabbatical. I'm not sure about the pioneer reference, but I sometimes think of sturdy foundations as cement shoes, and how you can be nullified by too much insulation. That said, the most radical musicians are no strangers to hard work and a tight schedule. But "a neat desk is a sign of a sick mind."

An advice column by a woman in the *SF Weekly*. A woman wrote in, "Although I love my boyfriend dearly, he dresses like a complete geek." The response, after discussing "open closet surgery," went like this: "Do whatever you must and remember, a well-dressed man is a woman's ultimate accessory." All the better if she can drain the rest of

him, his time and emotions, money, even semen, and wear his life like an outfit which she might discard when her psychological closet is getting crowded or needs updating.

Talking with D. If life is a process where you're changing and evolving, consider those who're on Death Row. Much of what is indecent about the state putting someone to death is when they wait so long – like ten years or more, during which time the person who committed the crime has grown into another version of himself.[182] It's more arbitrary for the state to electrocute someone when the execution is far removed from when the crime occurred. Imagine being held to account, much less executed, for something you did ten or fifteen years ago. You might be feeling different from the person you used to be, especially if you had been

Men are known for getting outside themselves with a mechanical/objective orientation. Consequently, they're more likely to hurt or kill others, and to generate an overbearing if not imperialistic presence in the world.

Typing in the morning.

Phone call from Ming at work. She said she had the time off for our trip to San Diego. We're leaving on Thursday night for four days. There was some question of whether I could stand her for that long, which we soon turned around. Could she tolerate my presence for that long? She said I was the least irritating part of her life. I said, "Irritation is the spice of life," in which case she is spicy. She admitted there is always something getting on her nerves.

What to bring? Camera, tennis racket, hiking boots, etc. She said she bought a swim suit. We weren't sure about books, so I said,

"You could be intellectual stimulation for me."

[182] Flash forward: I worked for a criminal defense attorney from 2005 to 2012, and he specialized in the death penalty. We had a case which began around the time I started, and was still not resolved when I left (a black man who committed fatal child abuse). Another case involved a young black man in a gang who shot a few people, and the fact that he was given life in prison was considered such a positive thing that one of the attorneys gave us objects made of plexiglass with the word LIFE on them. Oddly enough, one of the few cases we had involving white men was the West Memphis Three. They were barely out of high school and unfairly convicted of killing three boys, and we helped to get them released. It was a long and complicated effort. One thing they were guilty of (besides living in the wrong part of the country) was listening to heavy metal music, a sure sign of homicidal tendencies.

"And I can be intellectually stimulating for YOU."
"I just said that."
"Oh, right. Well, for each other."

Ming is gung ho about jumping off the cliff in La Jolla, then touring the slums of Tijuana with my father. We're looking forward to swimming and the desert. I said,

"You might want to bring a summer dress."
"You're going to take me to dinner?"

2:00 p.m. I walked over Russian Hill to the Art Institute. I want to say the show was all downhill from there, but it was more of a puzzlement by Karen Finley, a foul-mouthed moralizer in an art world context. There was an installation called "Moral History." The first thing I saw was a video with a one-minute tape loop in a museum. She was walking around naked and posing next to statues, like a tall thin figurine by Giacometti, or a more realistic statue of a woman. Then she ran off with her angry breasts bouncing.

A long wooden table was covered with art books which were open to offending pictures and articles on which she scribbled her comments. They were mostly in a sarcastic or carping vein, replying to every little thing that pissed her off. Only a small portion of it was pornographic. She is offended by the image of the female nude no matter how demure or inoffensive, with portraits by Matisse, Degas, Picasso, and Gauguin subjected to her scorn. Degas had sketches of a woman drying herself with a towel. Her comment: "Why not a man drying his testicles or a woman wiping her ass?" A reference to Matisse, "So glad Madame left you." With Gauguin, a comment about how he mistreated his family. Similar with Larry Rivers and others. "I know what you did to your wife or daughter." Looking at reclining female figures, "I don't sit like this." No, but they do, what's your point? You are all women? It constitutes a reduction of womanhood, and that reductionism is a side-effect of those who protest in the name of one group or another. They have to reduce it so it fits into a slogan on a sign.

Sometimes the remarks were irrelevant or uncalled for. With Matisse in front of a model, she wrote a line projecting from his mouth, "Hope they don't sag." With a sculpture by Rodin, "Cutting off her head, good for the design." It seemed like it was open season on any man who made a rendering of a woman with no clothes on, or even sat next to one - from Duchamp playing chess with a naked woman[183] to Courbet, *The Origin of the World* (1866), a lovely composition of a woman in bed with her legs spread. You might think that referring to a woman as "the origin" has a positive connotation, but there it is.

Books by William Burroughs were subjected to her burning derision. He's no "hero" because he shot his wife in Mexico, which Finley said was "accidental" (in quotes). Kerouac was also a problem. Men can go on the road and have nude female models, but women can't, though I'm not sure why not. Male models are unavailable to women? Is this the 1800's? For that matter, when I used to hitch-hike around California there were definitely girls and women out there (including some under-age witches in a converted school bus), and that was in 1969.

I walked to work downtown.

The receptionist called me at my desk and thanked me for the flower. She had lightened up considerably, but wasn't letting me off the hook for having missed her wedding. Later she was in her scornful mode pertaining to men who walk by her desk and stare at the lacy henna pattern on her hands. "Shut up, get out of my face." She was cursing them, and the next minute pushed her chair back and threw one leg up on the desk. The henna pattern was also on her feet. She couldn't really show it, "I'm wearing panty-hose," but pulled those tight so I could see a barely visible outline on her foot. I asked if the same was on her husband.

[183] The woman is Eve Babitz, who wrote a few books, including *Eve's Hollywood* (1974). She was close to the writer Joan Dideon, with the latter as restrained as the former wasn't. Her and Duchamp are sitting in front of his piece, *The Bride Stripped Bare*.

"No, just me."
"That mean you're special?"
"Of course."

Meanwhile, in the window behind her was a view of the bay. I had noticed a white ocean liner going by and looking like a love boat, but now it was gone. We wondered if it sank.

6:00 p.m. I walked home[184] where I reviewed the journal from a year ago, and did some editing. A work-out on a wooden instrument. The hollow present comes with strings attached, while the fine print is reflecting the past.

10:00 p.m. On the phone with D. for an hour and a half, the conversation all over the place, from Karen Finley (they are both in their late thirties) to this business of visiting one's parents. She doesn't like either one.

She went off on a tangent, having read some of the poems but didn't finish and would save the critique for later. It sounded like she is impressed with the structures or the compositions, not to say the "pain." She said it is a rare thing, evoking a writer's pain, but also that of the reader. I said, "The pain of recognition?" "Something like that." It seems I don't know my own work, or what went into it. Most of the poems are from years ago, and caught up in the act of writing, distracted by logistics and linguistics, I don't realize what sort of current is coming through and hitting the page, conveying more emotion than I had planned on.[185] She said

[184] There was a call from the Czech woman this morning. She sounded like she'd had a drink or two, and recommended gingko capsules as a coffee substitute. They're healthier, an anti-oxidant, which I took to mean anti-European. She said she quit her job, and invited me to a Nina Hagen concert in the afternoon.

[185] A relevant topic: writers and poets who don't fully comprehend the connotations or the psychological impact of what they've written – partly because they are behind the scenes, pulling ropes and moving props and fixing the lights. If they were awash in awe about their own work, with tears on every page, the writing might be soggy and unfinished. It reminds me of the terminal detachment of Bob Dylan, who realized he had to be light on his feet like a boxer so he could pivot off in any direction, musically speaking. The lead weight of Social Importance, or being "the Voice of his Generation" would make that hard to do. That's assuming that he understood the impact of his words on other people. Half the time it is the weight of the language itself, and the issues involved. A troubadour is a poetic juggler who throws around concepts like so many knives without getting hurt. He has said as much when he looks back on

she was in tears a couple of times. I took this with a grain of salt, since she seems to be a highly sensitive person who is not far from tears, however often she says “fuck” and lives in a tough neighborhood.

It does ring a bell, not realizing the emotional impact of my words. There have been times when I was with a woman and a line slipped out which sounded good at the moment, but her eyes were getting wide and shooting off sparks because my comment landed with more weight than I expected. When I was in high school I wrote a poem about suicide. I showed it to an older friend and she was worried about me. I was thinking of what would drive a person to kill themself, but it sounded too real, as if that person might be me. Language and ideas in the hands of a young man are like giving him the keys to a fast car. He is driving something which is stronger than him and breaking a few laws in the process, if not actually hitting something. He takes on a powerful profile, but it's more like an impersonation, a high-powered mask.

I put everything into writing something, then throw it aside where it sits for months or years. She understands that, and has offered to be the one to get it out there.[186] She also said she had to stop reading at some point because the thought of the man writing those poems was turning her on. I’m thinking what a fool I’ve been, as if I was in denial of my typographic immersion in the language. I have spent a lot of time with women who did not engage my writing, but it’s something we have in common - like my thought process makes her hot. I like that idea.

---

songs he used to write and doesn’t know how he did it, or why they don’t come so easily anymore. It’s like when he was singing about being a world-weary traveler who was down and out, and he was only nineteen. How could he know the pathos of whoever had gone through that? But then it is a realm of people singing about things they never experienced, like shooting a woman down by the river, or wasting their life in a whorehouse in New Orleans.

[186] Flash forward: she never did.

She thought we should get together tomorrow night, seeing as how I'm leaving town, and will come over around seven – all the better if I have no clothes on when she gets here.

11:30 p.m. Typing for a while.

Wednesday, June 22, 1994

NOTES

More on KAREN FINLEY:

There was an empty room with a rug and a tape recorder playing her moans when she was in labor a while back. As you walked around the installation you could hear the sounds of her giving birth. Notes were taped to the wall with thoughts on the subject of relaxing. Most of them were rather vacant, like imagine something that bothered you today, then put it in your fist, squeeze it hard, and watch your problem disappear (a dubious form of psychological fisting). Think about relaxing in the sand and waves. "'Moral History' examines the social constriction of female expression: in particular the contradictory experience of women giving birth with exhortations to 'relax' during real pain." I assume there is a need to try to relax, or it is harder to give birth. If it's a contradiction is biology at fault, or the male power structure which oppresses women by telling them to relax?

And what is the social constriction of female expression, seeing as how she is a good example of there being few or no constrictions at all? Look at her resume. There are numerous grants, awards, shows, and publications. I don't think there are constrictions on women when they are in labor. Like what, they're told to be quiet? No yelling? That would be news to my brother when he heard his wife in labor not long ago. And what about those women singers who are caterwauling, if not screaming? Are they socially constricted? They are not allowed to do it in public?

In the main room were three large color photos of "the crowning," where the head is pushing through the vulva. It comes out bloody and unbowed (having sensed the light at the end of the tunnel). That doesn't bother me, but I have women friends who wouldn't like it, and it's in a gallery where she rails against the tradition of the female nude. Is it acceptable because it's her, and it's utilitarian? I get the feeling she's offended by depictions of nude women because they're made by men. How dare they take such liberties with the female form? There seems to a psycho-Puritan inside her which is trying to get out.

That reminds me, in the corridors of the Institute were paintings by students. One of them showed a woman's naked body from her neck to her thighs with big hanging breasts. There were creamy close-up contours, but the composition was "cutting off her head."

This is how we're told that men look at women. They prefer them headless and objectified. However, the painting was by a woman and is a self-portrait.

"'Moral History' examines the historically male-dominated art world and the consequent cultural marginalization of women." What does that mean? Isn't there more to culture than the art world? Haven't a lot of male artists been "marginalized," beginning with those who were unpopular, broke, half out of their minds, or not very good? If women are so often the focus of a composition, it is not exactly marginalizing. What about the millions of people, not to say entire countries, who couldn't care less about the art world, male-dominated or not?

"The installation challenges the Gauguinesque tradition of male artists who receive favorable recognition for prioritizing their art over their familial responsibilities." I think if they receive such recognition it's because the paintings are good, and Gertrude Stein must have been off her rocker (or stoned) when she bought those paintings in the 1920's without making background checks on how the various artists treated their families. I think there are a few women artists who want nothing more than to "prioritize their art."

Upstairs were three old vanities with cosmetics. Written on the mirrors:

"I was not created to please men."
"I was not expected to be talented."
"I make less than a man."

There was a slide show downstairs with sketches and scribbled comments. "Girl talk." "I make 63 cents to your dollar… I have no money" (which doesn't follow). The figure is an average which is skewed by the monolithic salaries of a few men, and it's more than that anyhow. The slides are taking a critical approach to some innocuous turns of speech and terms of endearment. If a man refers to his girlfriend as a "cupcake," what he really means is: I could crush you under my foot and whatever is left I'll let the dog lick off.

It gets a little arbitrary the things she is offended by, which many women wouldn't think twice about. They might be more offended by this installation than most of the things she is referring to.

I've heard a lot of women use perfume or make-up for themselves, but according to Finley these are social constrictions for hiding a woman's real smell, or real appearance. That doesn't make sense when so many women are not compelled to wear make-up, and they walk around as plain as day. Also, her descriptions of women don't sound like any women I know.

"The session" – a chaise lounge and sound tape, eight minutes. The Finley-tuned woman was doing one of her routines. Her voice was dripping with condescension, taking easy shots at a male psychiatrist and putting words in his mouth. There is often a sense that she is setting up an easy target with one hand while she slaps it around with the other.

She puts down a contemporary painter (David Salle), saying his work reconfirms the past. I'm not sure what's wrong with that, and you could easily say it doesn't. She judges past conditions by current politically correct standards and assumes the worst, with the attitude that those constrictions still exist – again, with her being a prime example that they don't. You would think that women are living in a concentration camp where they are forced to walk around in girdles and pointy bras, and since she likes to think of women as victims, it would seem she is a victim of her own bad metaphors.

There are men who have the nerve to think about things, instead of just feeling them. With the latter you don't look too closely at non sequiturs or the empty generalizations of a cranky two-dimensional outlook, but what do I know? If I thought with my stomach or my spleen it might make more sense.

She even exhumed the myth of Adam and Eve (a patriarchal fake-out which makes a fine art of hypocrisy). In her version, the snake is a man's "dick" and the apple his "balls." That doesn't make a lot of sense, but "the theological implications alone are staggering."[187] Does she want to associate the testicles with the tree of knowledge, especially when the word is close to "testify"?

There was a wall upstairs on which women could write their mother's maiden name. One woman wrote that Spanish women never give up their last names. Another woman replied that it wasn't true, and "never say never." Over on the side someone wrote: SF ART INSTITUTE STUDENTS ARE ALL WANKERS.

There was a review of the show in the *SF Weekly* by a woman. She was addressing the marginalization of women, and referred to a recent incident where a bartender wasn't taking her order quickly enough, and passed her up for another woman. She assumed it was because she wasn't wearing make-up. If that's all it takes for her to form an assumption, you can imagine how weak her other assumptions are. However, it led to her saying that Finley "thinks perhaps the only thing women have left in this society is the freedom to look fabulous." A line so vacuous and wrong-headed I skimmed right over it, but the more I think about it, the more I want to analyze the lie. The hyperbole is so obtuse it makes your head spin. It supports an attitude of someone who is braving the worst conditions and yet mostly in her own mind. I tried to figure out what that line means, "the only thing women have left…" We're back in the concentration camp mentality, though women have their own apartments, jobs, and cars, and zero demands to get married, much less to whom, and child-bearing has been thrown out the window. The line would be more credible if you reversed it, that the only freedom women don't have in this society is the freedom to look fabulous since not many do, as anyone from France or Italy might attest. They feel constrained by their lack of imagination, the dour dictates of the women's movement, and the conformities of a workforce which has less vacation time than any other modern country.

[187] Charles Schultz, *Peanuts*

However, “she made perfect sense” when describing one of her performance pieces. No mention here of bad metaphors, it is taken at face value (on the surface, in other words). Finley covered herself with chocolate “because women are treated like shit.” Maybe they’re treated like chocolate, which is slightly different, and fairly positive. Then she covered herself with candy hearts “because after a woman is treated like shit she’s loved more.” This is so dumb it hardly registers in any frame of reference. Is she referring to all the women in this country? How many of them would agree with this assessment? She put on alfalfa sprouts “which look and smell like sperm” because men jerk off on women. Not just a handful of men, or men with a handful of cock, but all men. Then she put tinsel on top. “No matter how bad it gets, a woman always knows how to get dressed for dinner.” Or not. Things have been pretty casual for a long time.

Maybe a few are in a restaurant and they’re dripping in tinsel. It would make more sense to take her literally and say that women are treated like chocolate, candy hearts, and alfalfa sprouts. There are women who like those things, conveying someone who is healthy, sweet, affectionate, and glittering from time to time.

“Since women were always considered emotional, and their bodies were always considered sexual, I might as well use that disadvantage to my advantage.” So she throws her body and emotions into her half-brainer routines. Are we to believe that women are not emotional or sexual? I think most bodies, male or female, are sexual, it’s a biological fact, and there are people who wish their bodies were more sexual, or were seen as such. I suppose women’s magazine are devoted to women appearing less desirable, rather than more. As for women being emotional, I think there is some evidence of that. What makes it a half-truth is the assumption that women are and men aren’t. The latter have a tendency to channel their emotions through machines and music and the occasional weapon.

Finally, this is another woman who has “received numerous awards” for saying that women are not sufficiently rewarded.

I had three loads of laundry spinning in the coin-operated machines down the block by 9:30 a.m., and picked up some typewriter ribbon. That led to more typing.

Phone call from Ming at work. I tried to explain the Karen Finley show, but she wasn’t impressed and wonders why I bother. This happens rather often. I encounter a feminist writer or performer and mention it to a woman friend and she never heard of them (from Germaine Greer to Camille Paglia) and isn’t interested. That puts the radical feminism of some women into perspective if they’re not speaking for all women. It’s the old problem of revolutionaries who’re

a tiny group, but assume they're speaking for the masses. The latter may not want to burn down City Hall.

Went to work in the afternoon.

The Attorney was gone, and I was talking with Ami at the front desk. She was pretty candid about married life. It's been four days and they're already fighting (so much for a honeymoon).[188] There is a good deal of friction. He throws things (she is worried about her glass objects), and their room is a mess. She thinks he is immature, if not spoiled. He lives in his mother's home, and now his wife is there. I didn't ask what his moods were about. She seems to think they come out of nowhere.

Meanwhile, she was pounding a pile of legal documents with a rubber stamp, and said it strengthened her arms. She told me she has biceps, "Here, feel them," and lifted a skinny arm and flexed a little. I felt a muscle, like an oyster, and said I couldn't feel anything.

6:00 p.m. I left the office and headed home.

7:30 p.m. D. arrived with her ubiquitous bottle of champagne while I was on the phone with the Actress. I had a small glass, followed by a beer, and she had the rest of it. We were talking on the bed, with her a little tense from work. This is an intense woman, but she brings out a relaxed and mentally astute side of me. It is a meeting of sympathetic minds and simultaneous bodies, and it's eerie how there is a mutual wavelength, like two literary libidos which have stumbled on a rapport they hadn't given up on finding at thirty-eight and forty-two.

There were some allusions to what she was going through a few months ago, a depression which bordered on the suicidal. She has done a lot of things in her life, from smoking heroin and kissing women to getting published. We went up on the roof around nine with a fading twilight.

[188] It comes from the Scandinavian habit of drinking fermented honey during the first month (or moon) of a marriage. The assumption was that this would help the woman get pregnant. I'm not sure how scientific that is, but being half-drunk for a month might lead to a lot of sex, and we know what that leads to.

It was a little windy with some stratospheric vapors near a full moon which was rising over Russian Hill.[189]

When we returned there was a short critique of a few poems. She pulled them out and warned me that it wouldn't be critical so much as complimentary. I was hearing about things in the poems which I barely knew were there (or which were barely there). I said I get a current of the language going, a little distracted by the mechanical aspect, from ideas to the line breaks, and may not be fully aware of what is hitting the page, the implications and the impact. There was a look of wonder on her face, saying that made it even more impressive. I said I have the feeling a writer or musician or photographer is taking credit for what a medium can do. She said, "Take credit," and went on to describe one poem after another, saying which line left her floored. She is capable of literary recognition, which may have something to do with reading comprehension. I have shown similar poems to other people and gotten a tepid response.[190]

Later she was talking about one of her idols, Ella Fitzgerald, and said her feet were amputated when she was old. D. appreciates a broad range of music, and her record collection might be more eclectic than mine, though mine is more eccentric (or the other way around).[191] Eventually there were candles burning on both sides of the bed with black sheets and she lay there, looking pale and exquisite and wanting me inside her. There was an erotic suspense in the air. She said she thinks about it in the office, squirming in her chair.

---

[189] An illusion, when in fact Russian Hill was turning slowly, along with the entire western hemisphere, and that made the moon appear to rise.

[190] Within a year or two of these reading sessions she was rejecting half the pile, and not without reason.

[191] From *The Ventures in Space* and Eno (*Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)*) to Captain Beefheart (*The Spotlight Kid*), Stockhausen, and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (the soundtrack), there is never a dull moment around here. When I would hang out at the Professor's place we would listen to Judy Garland, Junior Walker & the All Stars, the Bonzo Dog Band, and Russian choral music from the 17th century. His record collection was randomly enhanced when his wife had a radio show on KPFA (before the divorce).

Around midnight with some quiet jazz on the radio I was lying half off the bed with a hand-rolled cigarette. The light touch of her wandering fingers was all it took, and a minute later my erection had returned. It led to an extended fornication - we were going to extremes the second time around. Using a condom, the sensation is a little muted (similar to cocaine which has a numbing effect), and it prolongs the situation. After a while, things were moving at a pace which wasn't gentle. I was wrong about her being fragile, and we locked into a piston motion on a warm night.

A drifting and contented feeling lasted well into the following afternoon.