

INFLATABLE



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special bonus: some pictures of cats!

OUR ROBOT

The male robot is a hard worker. *Yes I am. Thank you. Hard. Always and only hard. Harder than you care to know.* In moments of heady exaggeration most fleshmen of the human variety, when fully aroused, talk about their lower saluting arm being made of steel. *In your dreams, buddy.* That is a falsehood, something a robot would never commit. *The Real McCoy. Steel all around. Titanium. Don't mess with the best. Not one. Not two. None. I repeat, hard, I am hard.* But with his excess weight, blunt speech patterns, and strange digital personality it's difficult for the robot to inspire a deep loonlike passion in others. In other words our robot is a highly misunderstood sexual being, one that needs physical contact or else he will grow sad, withdraw, and eventually perform the most rudimentary program less than perfectly. *True. I will fail.* A robot depression far exceeds the depths of standard human sorrow. They rarely bounce back. *Press off. Stop life. Stop work. Must sleep. Never wake up.* The problem we're encountering with a number of male robots is this: when the robot prints out his list of annual refinements at the top of the page one always finds the phrase: *In need of a blow job.* And, to the chagrin of the world, it is the last thing the noble robot receives. *Falsehood. Not merely receiver. Not passive. Also pleasure inducer. Lover. Heart throb, et cetera.* The problem could be English, the English language. If the robot, like the world's first bikinis, was **MADE IN FRANCE**, none of this would be happening to him. His fragrant words would cause countless contemporaries to swoon and klank, and drop to their knees. But the English speaking robots, like the German models, talk about sex, *Kann jemand meinen Schwanz Lutschen?*, like they're talking about oral surgery, or commanding a death sentence. *Ja wol mein astounding heap of weird Love.* Consequently they have balls so blue, oh dear lord, so terribly blue. The horrible truth is this: no one wants to suck off a robot, not even another robot. *Someone please. Someone please. Someone please.* You see, he's not going to say it. For some reason the robot can't bring himself to say what he really wants in regards to physical contact. He was programmed to be a gentleman. The

Everything seemed so secretly and profoundly hilarious. You were your own best company. Or rather - and here as always you are so deliciously precise - your own most skillful, fond and shameless procurer of pleasure and sensation. Twenty years ago, the last time I took acid in New Zealand, it was like that too. Even if I wasn't, will never be, as sensitive as you. "My walking stick begins to give me special pleasure. The feeling of loneliness is quickly lost. One becomes so tender, feels that a shadow falling on the paper might hurt it." If I could only flash my alligator purse at deadhead Michael Sweeney and pretend to be the actress in *Pierrot le Fou*.

Fog slams down against the harbor and it's starting to get cold - that cosmetic California microclimate kind of chill. Reaching for our sweaters we start to think about hot soup, and sure enough! - experience a need and it's instantly fulfilled. Five feet in front of us there's a chowder stand, and inside Japanese woman is ladling gummy wads of white New England chowder into bowl-shaped styrofoam. Five bucks a bowl. Everything is immaculately clean - white tiles like the inside of a public toilet, bits of fish displayed behind a glass counter that's climatically controlled. There are no tables. We take our styrofoam and plastic spoons and huddle on a backless bench against the cold. My stomach's roiling like the waves. An industrial sized trashcan beside us overflows.

Sylvere leads me down the dunes out to the ocean, but, "There isn't any beauty anywhere!" I cry. Because beauty exists only through exclusion. A is only A if it's not also B, C and D. The beach, the global food supply, the oil rigs, Korean salad bars, the Hearst Castle up the road. Everything you want, except now you don't want any of it. I'm spitting mucous, retching in the sand.

Dear Walter Benjamin, Dear Sylvere, Do you remember that October, how we took a walking tour in

Bourgogne, France? We were following the *pleton* on a postcard map we'd bought in Vezelay. Through the village, across the fields, into the forest. There were people picking grapes and picnicking on makeshift tables. The oak leaves had already started turning brown. We got lost, and started climbing over broken stiles, and ended up on an old woman's farm. You asked directions and she took us to the cheese house: lumps of runny amber colored cream wrapped in cheesecloth on those ancient dirty wooden shelves. Each cheese was individually aged and formed and then she let us taste it. It was delicious. It was food.

Finally we leave the beach in search of prettiness and lobster dinner. We drive out to the Inn at Morro Bay. Five stars in the AAA handbook. It's 3 p.m. on Sunday and most of the weekend guests have already checked out. A squad of men - male nurses or security guards? - in gray slacks and cranberry polo shirts patrol the grounds. We try to settle by the pool, but even here there's no relief. The pool is situated between a driveway and a parking lot. I'm tripping, sobbing, looking for a place that isn't marred by ugliness to rest. And so I wander in to Room 112 and lay down on the freshly made California king-sized bed to take a nap. But even here the ugliness is overwhelming: the size of the bed, the swirls of imitation stucco on the wall, chrome furniture and rayon bougainvillea. I take a shower in the bathroom where the corner of the toilet roll has thoughtfully been folded down. Welcome Guests. A white van pulls up discreetly at the curb. White plastic vats containing cleaning products? body fluids? are emptied and replaced by a second squad of nurses. The Inn at Morro Bay: rehearsal for a hospice. It's a five star medical waste treatment plant. Lobster has become unthinkable. How can anyone believe in this facility's promises of

luxury when clearly, it's designed to process guests like so much waste?

The cancerous equality of California: there is no beauty because everyone is garbage. Everything is cynically contrived to promote the flow of capital and waste.

Dear Walter Benjamin, You vowed to eat a second dinner after finishing at Basso's, no longer fearing solitude so long as there was hashish in the world. The trance wound down when you stopped to have a final ice cream at the Cafe Cours Belsance on Cannebiere. It wasn't far from where you'd started, a cafe where you'd gazed upon some wind-tossed canopy fringes in a state of joy, realizing that the hashish had begun its work. "When I recall this state," you wrote, "I like to think that hashish persuades nature to permit us that squandering of our own existence that we know in love..."

Dear Walter Benjamin, Without love it is impossible to eat.

. . .

Los Angeles, sometime in the late 90's:

I've been living here a year or two and the landscape is an empty screen of white sky days. There's nothing here except for what you're able to project onto it. No information, stimulation. No references, associations, promises and so your own reality expands to fill the day. It's freedom. I am an independent contractor of my own consciousness. Los Angeles is a triumph of the New Age. The only experience that comes close to the totalizing effect of theater now is sadomasochism. It is

utopian diaspora. Because anyone who wants to can consent to play. It's portable, it's emotionally high-tech: the most time-efficient method of creating context and complicity between highly mobile units.

I am kneeling on the floor of the downstairs studio awaiting the arrival of a man I met over the telephone named J. A bowl of ice cubes sits melting on the wicker table. I am very nervous now about these ice cubes. J. called me 40 minutes ago to say that he was leaving Santa Monica. He tells me what to wear, what to do, what to say. It's difficult to time it right because if I go downstairs too soon the ice will melt completely but I need to be completely in position when J. walks in the door. My mind's already split in two: I'm halfway here, the other half is following the most likely route across the 10 East freeway of his car.

I've been kneeling here about 10 minutes in the sheer black blouse, the crotchless panties. My back is straight, my palms and cunt are trembly. The door swings open, my eyes are lowered like he told me, looking only at the black jean legs below his waist. He shuts the door, I take the timing of his footsteps as the cue to speak the line he gave me. My voice comes someplace from the swirl between my downcast eyes and the tension of his footstep, modesty and fear commingling like a cocktail of two complementary drugs, NOW - "My body is yours. You can do what you want with it." I'm speaking in a voice I've never used before.

There is no experimental theater in sadomasochism. That's why I like it. Character is completely preordained and circumscribed -- dominant, submissive. There isn't any room for innovation. It's like what Ezra Pound imagined the Noh theater of Japan to be, a paradox: the performer arrives at his originality only by compliance with tradition. Tonalities and gestures are all completely

set and so exactitude is freedom. His black Levis, my slutty outfit, his black shoes. It's another flip around the immanence of objects in the theater: the objects aren't blank and waiting to be filled by the presence of the actors and the play. The objects here are meaning-cards, they hold all the information. He puts a collar round my neck and slaps me. Handcuffs, blindfolds, gags and whips. The objects tell us who we are and what to do. S&M is like commedia dell'arte, a stock repertoire of stories, bits and lines and gags. He chains my handcuffs to the door. I'm Columbine and he's Pierrot.

Chris Kraus

DUST

Tracking
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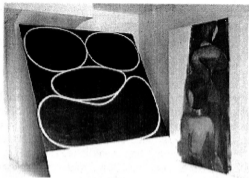
settles

LIFE

Call the interruptions days
call them what you want

Jeremy Sigler





Crushed

I have always understood those people who go on loving one person, one impossible man or woman, all of their lives, maybe longer than that if there is something which is longer than that. A best friend's wife. Their handsome doctor. A man or woman whom they sat next to at dinner while on vacation in a strange land; maybe they just glanced this person on a train, once, twenty, thirty-five years ago. Maybe, if they were lucky (or for some this may have been particularly unlucky - increasing the despair to come), they touched her once, or tasted his skin. These lovers remember the curve of a neck or a slightly chipped tooth. They remember the shadow as she passed through the door, the way the light fell on her - then stopped as if it had no further to go, that was where light was meant to stop. They feel a hole inside where he would fit, a hole that is sometimes made smaller because of work or a child or a house with a garden, but which is never not there.

I understand them because, in a way, I am one of these people, though my love is a love without

lust; it is simply (and not quite so simply, I know) a longing for a glimpse of those hands working, for her crouching legs as she stooped to pick something up off of the floor, for long long arms that wrapped all around me and carried me to a bed where she told me things I know she did not tell to anyone else, as if I were her own ears. My longing is a longing for a mother who died when I was too young to let her go and because of which I have an emptiness inside of me which others keep reserved for more mature loves. My love is the love of a daughter for a mother who was not there to teach her how to love somebody else.

I can not always be reflecting, she would say. And I would look up at her from deep inside my own head.

I guess I know what she meant by this now. I think I know what she meant by this.

It's exhausting, she would say. That is for people who are stronger than me. Or weaker. This said as she sighed into her armchair, picture-book in hand.

Art killed my mother. And I do not mean this in any one of the metaphorical senses in which you most likely think I mean it. I am being quite literal: art killed my mother. She is not the only one to be killed in this manner, though she is the only one I've ever known, and then again - she was my mother. I have read of others. I searched their stories out in local papers and I thought of calling a surviving son or daughter. There was one who I almost did call because he lives quite close, in the next county, and, more importantly, he was there when it happened too. His family had driven out to see that long rolling California countryside, the field covered in those oversized yellow umbrellas, the idea of a man who usually just covers things with a thick canvas cloth. They were meant to be a play on the windmills that sit atop the surrounding agricultural fields. But, windmills work the wind, umbrellas don't. And on this particularly breezy day one of the umbrellas came violently flying out of the ground and hit this young boy's mother in the back, instantly breaking her spine. It had meant to be a day trip. We can all imagine the excitement in the car on

the way there as the parents pointed at this or that, children greedily pushing and pulling at each other to get at the best view.

Maybe, I thought, I could call him, this kid of the dead mother, who was now a young man, and then together we could call a few others and we could form some sort of group; we could curse those deadly "geniuses" and mourn together in yogic circles and discuss our theories of chance. We could form a terrorist group with no other purpose but to bring these theories forcibly home to other people's lives: chance this, fuckers. But I decided against it. How would I introduce myself?

It was a large painting, though it had very little to do with painting except that it had been executed on a huge canvas, or a large piece of wood, rather, and it hung from the wall of the museum. There was no paint whatsoever though there were many found objects and a kind of glue or resin and something that looked like tar. It was huge. I think I've already let you know that it was huge and paintings are hung by people and these people - the two lackeys who had hung this one - had done a bad job. I think I heard they were fired after the incident. I think this information was meant to console me. The painting abruptly, forcefully, violently, fell from the wall and my mother, who was silently inspecting one tiny section of it, was the only one killed in the fall.

There was a large exhibit of some impressionist fellow's and those rooms were densely packed, as rooms ornamented by the safety of regurgitated nineteenth century ideas so often are, while this one remained nearly untravellered. The museum felt itself lucky at this popular distrust of modern art. Many people thanked god and each other and that impressionist fellow for their good luck. I, of course, had no one to thank.

She would force him, my father, to go. One Sunday every eight weeks. And he would give in as a way to relieve the tension in their marriage. They were always a practical thing to my father, these trips to the museums. They were meant to serve the purpose of diffusing what he called her frenzy. We would spend two or three hours - you

really can't expect children to spend more than two or three hours in a museum especially when there is a father subtly but firmly tugging at their arms - and then afterwards my mother would take us out for ice cream or cake or burgers so that we wouldn't complain too much the next time.

The rest of them, my father and three brothers, hated it. But I, I would do anything she said with eager uncton. Yes, Mama. Yes.

At our lunches she would talk about the way that this one depicted loneliness, that one absence, he - continuity, she the mechanical. And I would nod while the boys kicked each other under the table, greasy mouths and fingers.

My brothers were, and still are, animals.

On these little trips to the museums she allowed herself to think of what she had been, or what she could have been if she were one of those people who could be reflecting all the time; if she were stronger, or weaker. She would think of the professor who had told her that his classes were often sprinkled with brilliant young women who saw and thought deeper than most, but that out of some sad shyness kept their thoughts silent. He mourned this, her professor, and begged her to speak up more in class, to share herself with the outside. It must have been this, precisely, that she was thinking as she stood inspecting that tiny fraction of the painting, just before it fell.

I had just walked away from her. We had read the card together. Wood, resin, and tar: I had read it to her; I had read the artist's name, though I will not speak it here, and then she had patted my head. I saw one brother hiding under the bench while the other two searched the white-lit corridors, and I went to kick at him a bit down there. I had just gotten to him, had my leg poised for the strike, when I heard the loud crash.

And then it is all blank. A white plane for two years, a white plane in which there is no mother.

My father was one of those fathers who would not come home till late at night. There were other men and meetings, as there always are, and she would cry and beg him to come home, as she often do, though we all knew that his actual presence would have made no difference. It was the type of man he was that made the tension. When he did come home she would cry directly to him. There were things she could have done, she would wail, things which she gave up for him. He would scream back at her, say it should be her own fear she should be crying to, at, for, because of, not him at all. And then he would storm off to his room, a large room, for he did provide us with big rooms, my father. And since I was always in the wings, waiting for his storming out, I would come in and console her and she would rub my hair and talk in whispers to me. As if I were her own ears.

I was secretly glad for his savagery, for it allowed that open space which I could then inhabit. I would lay on her lap for an hour or so, and then she would sing to me a bit and crouch down into my ear and whisper: Sara: It is time for you to go to sleep. I would root deeper into her lap and she would play with my hair before lifting my head gently off of her.

My brothers, as I've said, were, are, animals. They would fling food at the ceiling in the morning, large globs of butter flying off of the back of their spoons - who could make more stick up there without falling. And the poor woman who came in to cook in the mornings would have to climb onto chairs to get it down with her mop. She was badly paid and I don't know why she endured it, except that women like her always do. I'd sit at the edge of the table, observant and quietly wary of their collective pranks.

So is it without wonder that I sought out her company in the way that I did, waited for her to look, simply look, in my direction so that I could

go rushing over to sit there at her side? Who else did I have to talk to? And who else did she?

I blamed myself for her death. It was his that I had wanted. If I could make him die then she would not have to cry at him any longer. She would be freed. I prayed for him to die, and then when I felt guilt at the wish for death, I would pray that he would just run away. With a secretary or something; it must always be a secretary or a stewardess in such wishes. Leaving the house, and some money to be sure. And then I would decide that running off would not be good enough and wish again for death, because I knew that would be cleaner, of course.

And then, when the painting killed my mother, well I felt it was somehow my fault. I had wished for the death of a parent, after all. And orders, even at the finest restaurants, sometimes come out wrong.

So it is all blank for about two years. A white plane.

At fourteen it starts up again, and at that point I was lost. I had wanted to be an artist. I would be what Mama could not, and I would remember all her lessons. Genius is a sham. Discovery is murder. Nothing, when well thought out, is as good as something. But art had killed my mother, so how could I?

I hated my father and I refused to cry at him to come home. No one would have to console me as I had done my mother. My brothers were out fucking everything they could get their hands on. Pretending to love this one and that, spreading their semen like wild cats in ever expanding concentric circles of territorial display. And through all this finding a fitting excuse for their fraternal violence when one would sleep with

the girlfriend of the other. Then the sibling socks in the face were justifiable: You knew that she was mine.

So where was I?

That fall, in the ninth grade, we read "A Rose for Emily" and I was fascinated by the way Emily had gotten the arsenic from the pharmacist. One haughty look and he had had to give it to her, though he was suspicious of her need of it. Dead Homer. My father could be a dead Homer. I would storm into a pharmacy and defiantly ask for some arsenic. I would have to dress up in one of Mother's old dresses so that I could disguise my fifteen year oldness. And then, if the old man doubted me, I would squint angrily at him and repeat my order. Of course I would get it.

And then my mother would be avenged, for, needless to say, even when I felt some guilt I blamed my father, not those poorly trained museum hangers, for my mother's death.

Poor dead father. I was already wryly mourning the fool as I put my schoolbook in my desk, before the noontime break.

It was my oldest brother who discovered him. You've met him, so you know he's rather stupid.

It wasn't hard. I'd seen "Suspicion" and realized that, yes, milk would hide the taste. So in a display of daughterly love I fed it to my father myself, and in his stupid vanity he did not even question this first ever gesture of filial devotion from his one and only girl.

So what if I failed. I had been overly cautious in my measurements, should have poured when I sprinkled. So what if after his initial sip my father gave me his first ever kiss on my forehead, said that he knew we could set things right between us. So what if I nodded like his good little girl, and then stepped sprightly up the stairs. So what if my brother wailed when he saw my father foaming at the mouth. So what if the ambulance arrived in time. So what if I confessed before they even had him out the door. I don't care that you all know. I hated him. I still hate him. And so what if I have to live here now, visited upon by you and your imbecile looks, your sidelong glances, your judgmental smile. You are

not a good doctor, that I know. Three years, three years it took you to get me to tell you this story, and now I've only given it to you out of boredom, not to reward you for what you imagine has been your hard work. You are not a good doctor. All that training and you still can't hide your weighted expressions.

Veronica Gonzalez



MARY, MARY

a speed-play

Fade up to "White Christmas" as sung by Bing Crosby. Tableau. A suburban middle-class Xmas dinner table, c. 1965. A palm tree in the background, suggestive of California. The table is an economical plastic-and-Formica model; the dishes and cups are ordinary as well, but the food is healthier-than-life, and arranged around a raised centerpiece featuring a giant whole pineapple, and other large fresh fruits. MOM and DAD, who are in their middle-thirties, hold big cocktail glasses.

MOM and DAD sit at the table opposite each other, stage left and right. The three children, two girls and one boy, all of whom are portrayed as under ten years of age in ACT ONE, sit facing the audience along one length of the table. THE BROTHER, who is the middle child in age, is flanked by the TWO SISTERS. BROTHER wears a set of stuffed reindeer antlers; YOUNGER



ACT ONE

SISTER and OLDER SISTER both wear red Santa's Elves Hats, as does MOM, except that MOM's hat is in a larger, adult size. DAD does not wear a hat.

Fade out music. Silence. Begin.

There is a great deal of tension, the source of which is DAD's unhappiness.

MOM quietly dishes out food onto plates. The CHILDREN sit sullenly. DAD scowls at ALL.

When DAD begins to eat, the CHILDREN follow suit, as does MOM.

Mom: (the last to begin to eat) Well, Merry Christmas everyone.

Children: (weakly) Merry Christmas.

Dad: (nods to MOM, beat, then) Let's chew with our mouths closed and try not to spill anything, shall we?

Silence.

BROTHER reaches out for a second-helping of a food dish. His shirt-sleeves drag across the table, and his plate.

Dad: (sighs, to himself) Brother. (annoyed) How many times have I told you to roll up your sleeves when you're at the table? Huh, how many? (to MOM) No, Mary. Uh-uh. I-don't-give-a-good-god-damn if it is Christmas. (to BROTHER) Were you born in a barn? (beat, angry) Well? Were you? (pause, to himself, quieter) For crying out loud.

YOUNGER and OLDER SISTER look down at their plates. BROTHER freezes, looks at his sleeves, then at MOM. MOM gets up and moves behind BROTHER to silently help him with the sleeves. DAD glares around the table, then angrily digs into his food. MOM goes back and sits down.

Dad: (after a long pause, sulkily) The turkey's good.

Mom: (pause, then casually) Not too dry, dear?

Silence. Blackout. End Act One.

ACT TWO

Fade up with "White Christmas." Tableau. About ten years later. The table and the food are exactly as in ACT ONE. The CHILDREN are now teen-agers; they all still wear their previous Xmas Party Hats. MOM still wears her Santa's Hat also. The seating arrangements are as before. Fade out music.

All begin to eat simultaneously, with relish, as if caught at mid-meal.

Brother: (stoned) I'm playing Dean in the class comedy-skit next month.

He laughs.

Dad: (annoyed) Don't laugh with your mouth full. It's disgusting.

Mom: (beat) Oh, that's an easy costume, dear.

Younger Sister: (beat, with her mouth full) Huh?

Mom: A t-shirt and jeans. (really working at it) Cigarettes, rolled up in the sleeve, if your father will let you, that is!

MOM smiles at DAD.

Dad: (beat, annoyed, with his mouth full) What?

Older Sister: (patient) Brother's talking about Watergate, mom. THAT Dean. Not James Dean.

MOM looks quizzically at BROTHER.

Brother: (laughs, stoned) John Dean. You know. Nixon's cabinet. You know. (beat, seriously) You know, it's an important part. You know?

Mom: (embarrassed) Oh.

MOM laughs a little laugh. KIDS look down at their plates. DAD scowls at ALL.

Dad: (mocking) You know, you know, you know. (beat, sarcastic) No, she doesn't know.

Younger Sister: (changing the subject) That's all we do all day long at school, is watch those stupid hearings on TV.

Mom: (pleasantly) Because it's important to history, that's why.

Older Sister: (to YOUNGER SISTER, sarcastic) Duh.

Younger Sister: (TO OLDER SISTER, argumentative) It's boring.

Dad: (bullying) You have to be an idiot not to know ALREADY that Nixon's a slob. (beat) If YOU KNOW ANYTHING about history YOU KNOW that he used to stand on the steps of Congress, with his friend, McCarthy. They'd shout and wave around a piece of paper, "I have here in my hand a list of one-hundred elected government officials, investigated and proven to be card-carrying members of the communist party!" (beat) Do you think they ever showed anybody their so-called

list? (silence) Alcohol-related illnesses my foot. (beat) And that, for your information, is why Our Founding Fathers never intended for every god-damned slob-stupido in this country to VOTE. Understand? (pause, quieter) Anybody with half a brain knows what Nixon is.

(a long uncomfortable pause)

Brother: (loud, in an awkward attempt at DAD's style of ridicule) Maybe he's gay.

The SISTERS giggle. MOM begins to giggle too.

Dad: (swallowing slowly, then) What did you say young man?

The giggling becomes infectious.

Older Sister: (blurring, tattle-tale style) He said, maybe Nixon's gay!

MOM, BROTHER and SISTERS go on an uncontrollable laughing jag, which infuriates DAD. (DAD hadn't heard BROTHER's comment, due to the fact that he was involved with his own vitriol.) DAD glares around the table and then angrily spears some food and begins to chew it.

Dad: (with his mouth full of food) THAT'S ENOUGH.

MOM, BROTHER and SISTERS cover their mouths and try to stop laughing.

Dad: (swallowing, then shouting) And why do they call them gays? (beat) Gay means happy! They have no right to be happy! They should be called sad! (coining a word) Sads! (beat) Sads, sads, sads!

DAD pounds his fist on the table, as he repeats "sads."

MOM and the KIDS look down at their plates.

Silence. Blackout. End Act Two.

ACT THREE

Fade up to "White Christmas." Tableau. Another twenty years or so later. MOM and DAD are pushing seventy. MOM has lost a bit of hearing; DAD has lost a lot of his ability to dominate.

Strangely enough, none of the CHILDREN, who are now pushing forty, are particularly conscious of these changes in MOM and DAD, or in themselves.

The table is as before, except that MOM and DAD no longer have cocktail glasses at their places; instead, they have at their places the children's cups from ACT ONE, and the CHILDREN's cups have been replaced by big cocktail glasses.

The family has finished dinner and is about to commence with dessert.

The family's seating arrangements, and their party hats, are as before in both ACTS ONE and TWO, i.e., BROTHER still wears the stuffed reindeer antlers, etc.

Younger Sister: (mock loud) Tell her, brother. You're the lawyer. An I.O.U. is an I.O.U. On the back of her business card or where EVER. (as if reading) "I.O.U. one painting."

DAD opens his mouth to say something; no one notices.

Older Sister: (mock smug) It doesn't say when. WHEN I owe it to you.

Younger Sister: (mock drunk) Up yours. Welcher.

DAD glares around the table; no one notices. MOM serves pie slices.

Brother: (mock authoritative) The holder of an I.O.U. can call the debt, technically-

Younger Sister: And I call it, I call it!

Brother: (mock faggy) -Anytime.

BROTHER and YOUNGER SISTER laugh. MOM smiles around the table, continuing to serve pie.

Older Sister: This is Art we're talking about. ART. Art cannot be forced!

Younger Sister: (mock angry) Come on. You've got hundreds over there! You owe me!

Older Sister: (mock mock) I owe you?

Brother: (mock smug) You DID write it down.

DAD tries to interrupt, but he's ignored.

Dad: Did I, Did I tell you the one about, the one about, you know, the old lady who took her grandson to the, to the opera...

A pause.

Older Sister: (mock hostile) Oh I get it. Two against one. I'm used to two against one. I'm used to THAT.

Younger Sister: (mock laugh, sing-song) Ha-ha. Ha-ha. Ha-ha.

Brother: (mock faggy arrogance) The kid wins. The system has ruled.

YOUNGER SISTER bangs twice on the table as if wielding a gavel.

Older Sister: (mock surrender) Alright, alright. I give up.

Younger Sister: (mock glee) Court adjourned!

The CHILDREN laugh. MOM joins in the laughter too, even though she isn't quite following the conversation.

The laughter dies down. DAD struggles for attention.

Dad: And her grandson says, her grandson, you know, says, Grandma, why is that man, that man on the stage up there, you know, why is that man hitting that fat lady with his, with his black stick...

Older Sister: (beat, finishing the joke) And why is that fat lady screaming.

Brother: (beat) Yeah Dad. You told us that one.

Younger Sister: Once or twice.

A long pause. THE KIDS look down at their plates, covering their mouths with their hands in order to somewhat muffle their laughs. MOM looks around trying to figure out what's going on. DAD struggles to his feet.

Dad: (sputtering, to KIDS) You know- your mother- doesn't like it when you- (pause) when you- argue. (to himself) Ought to have more couch. Bunch of- heathens. (angry, to MOM) I'll be- god-damned if- I'll sit here and- listen to this- CRAPOLA.

The CHILDREN look, not down, but at DAD and then MOM and then each other. DAD begins to stagger off sulkily with the help of a cane.

Dad: (stops) Mary.

Silence falls over the table. MOM is confused about what happened, but she gets up and begins to follow DAD off stage. DAD exits, expecting MOM to follow.

Mom: (before leaving) Your father's right, you know. No one should ever eat, oops (she laughs a little laugh), no one should ever TALK (beat) with their mouths full. (for effect) Especially at Christmas. (beat) You kids know better. (she smiles and gives an embarrassed laugh)

MOM exits. The CHILDREN remain alone. A long, silent pause ensues, and then the CHILDREN erupt in loud, long laughter.

Older Sister: (mock digging into pie) Well! More for us!

Laughter.

Brother: (mock shock) Hey, this time he sent himself to his room!

Laughter.

Older Sister: (mock punch-line) If he remembers where it is!

Laughter.

Younger Sister: (mock relief) Mom'll find it for him.

Laughter.

Brother: (mock street) You know, he ain't all that'n a bag a chips no mo'.

Screams of laughter, then subsiding.

Older Sister: (she grins) Funny isn't it? WE can go home to peace and quiet.

Brother: (mock faggy) Isn't SINGLE life great? (mock broad wink)

Younger Sister: (beat, with her mouth full of pie) Huh?

(a pause)

Brother: Oh. Yeah. Well. (mock hostility) I don't know about you, but I like it that way!

Older Sister: (mock defensiveness) Yeah! More for us!

Laughter.

Younger Sister: (hollow) Right.

A long pause; the CHILDREN drink cocktails.

Younger Sister: (guilty) I feel sorry for Mom, though.

Brother: (guilty) Mom? She's used to it.

Older Sister: Yeah. (guilty) Stop feeling guilty

Brother: (mock cheer) We're here to get drunk! (mock faggy) And drool with our mouths full!

Laughter.

Older Sister: (mock butch) Whether you like it or not young lady!

Laughter. Then, pause.

Younger Sister: Well, here's to...

Pause. She raises her glass.

Brother: (faggy) ...To another great...

Older Sister: (airy) ...As usual!

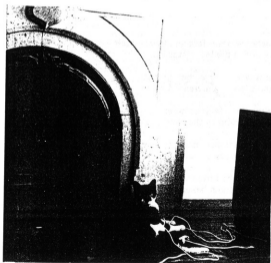
Younger Sister: (beat, weakly) Merry Christmas everybody.

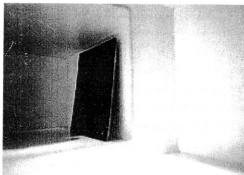
The CHILDREN toast each other. They drink.

Silence. Blackout.

END OF PLAY

Susan Hansell





DEPOSIT

Sometimes water falls and leaves itself
like blood in the basin, staining.

That is when I remember, go out
of the silence I've created

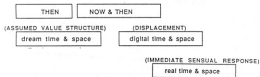
as a mouth unfolds to open
when mimicked by the hand.

A name is another imitation,
tumbling across centuries

a bud detached from stem.
The past returns beheaded --

Gone, gone, my blooming.

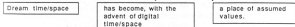
T.V.AST.V.



Dealing with the representation of objects and materials there is the possibility of rehoving these objects and materials from the assumed value structure of what has become dreamtime/space in our relationship with the world around us. If digital time/space is functioning as a dream state, we are then able to move the objects and materials into a real time/space and in effect bring about the possibility of utilizing material relationships that do not require the use of the fable (CONVENIENT) of history to function.

material relationships without the use of assumed value structures

The attempt would invest a real time set of sensual values into a dream time/space that is not dependent upon previous aesthetics for its use. Past and future are available but not necessary for use in the present.



A CONCEPT (IDEA) OF ENDEAVOR (WORK) WITHOUT A COMMITMENT IS NOT A REASONABLE ASSUMPTION

Dr. F

REALITY

DREAM SPACE

OR

REALITY BASED
ON ASSUMPTIONS
NOT NECESSARILY

CORRECT

CONSTANT PLACATION OF PIGVIOUS AESTHETICS CONSUMES
PRESENT RESOURCES TO THE EXTENT THAT AS THE NEEDS &
DESIRES OF A PRESENT AESTHETIC MAKE THEMSELVES FELT
(EVEN WHEN THE BASIS IS IN A PREVIOUS AESTHETIC)
THE RESOURCES HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTED

A REASONABLE ASSUMPTION SEEMS TO BE THAT PROLONGED
NEGOTIATIONS WITH A NON-ACCOMMODATING STRUCTURE IS
NOT THE ROLE AND OR USE OF EITHER THE ART OR THE
ARTIST

LAWRENCE WEINER

editor's note: a month or so following the publication of Inflatable 2, I received a large package in the mail that bore the return address of a medium-security prison in New England. It was from a young man whom I had known as a child. We'd attended the same public school for a brief time. Though I've racked my brains, all I remember about this pale skinny boy was his generosity in the cafeteria. He would give freely from his lunch-box: twinkies, brownies, chips, etc. He always brought extras for me and my friend Paul. After I moved, I never thought of him, except for the day I heard he'd gotten into some kind of scandal having to do with a local church and a satanic cult. That's Henry! I remember saying when I saw his picture in clippings from the local paper that Paul sent along to me; he looks so different.

Henry is in prison to this day; he works, he tells me, in the library. What follows is the second chapter of his autobiography, or memoirs. Inflatable 3 contained the introduction, and first chapter. The work will be serialized in this publication; though it is at times unbelievable and at others crude, I am convinced it is of sufficient interest to be brought before the world. The manuscript itself is highly unorganized and sloppy; I have had to fix grammar, punctuation and at times rewrite entire sections of the text to approximate some sense of what I believe Henry is trying to say. Though he is obviously a young man of peculiar intelligence and insight, his prose suffers from a certain archaism of style and propensity to wander. He has taken care throughout to change names and some dates, arguing that what follows should not help shed light on the actual legalities of his story and the stories of others he has known, and I have, at all times, striven to further this intention.

Without further ado, I present to the reader the third chapter.

Mark von Schlegel

To write the life of him who excelled all mankind in writing the lives of others, and who, whether we consider his extraordinary endowments, or his various works, has been equaled by few in any age, is an arduous, and may be reckoned in me a presumptuous task.

--Boswell

THE THIRD CHAPTER

FYI

I would like to say here, if the reader will forgive the interruption, that I'm delighted at my success thus far in placing the events that you've read into a narrative framework. Already they are haunting me less. It's true that I have not yet approached the subject of my own career and have concentrated instead on certain figures whose stories I wish you to understand as having poured the foundation, as it were, on which I can begin to erect the architecture of our house, as it also were, yet I feel that the things foregoing & following maintain without me their own interest for you. Indeed these matters are beginning to call out with greater and greater urgency to me of their own singularities. I begin to fear that my autobiography will consist simply of the writing of other men's histories. And when I consider that the events of the last chapter are hastening toward a climax of their own, and that this catastrophe will weaken by contrast the impacts of the events still to follow, in which I more actively participate, etc.

The reader may more easily forgive this book what may seem its monstrous & imperfect structure if he, Madam, bears in mind that it's an effort, actually, to relate actual events. This ain't, for instance, no novel.

Memoirs?

Perhaps.

Autobiography?
Could be.

BLAME TRUTH

Things have a tendency to peter out. It's the nature, my scientists tell me, of the universe. Of, perhaps, God himself, if the two can be equated. If you hold with the adversary that things don't peter out, you're left with what may be a worse alternative: that things tend to continue on with a dreary insistence, simply sucking out an annoyingly infinite supply of juice from the cosmic belch we've deduced as our author.

Literature, I say, much like deductive science, has always been a sham, not placing an interpreter between man and nature so much as placing in the once perfect world the demand for, or, more precisely, the want of such an interpreter. Then rises criticism, seeking through qualified observation of the text to feel itself observe the world at large -- as if the literary text were a kind of micro-gasmic mirror of reality. Indeed were we to consider more carefully what we mean by 'mirror' we might consider that literature tends, almost exclusively, to reverse the natural order of the universe.

In a book the small bang extends eventually to a larger boom. Indeed in a novel the first bang resembles the geometric conception of the 'point', or the temporal concept of the instant: a letter. Out of nowhere appears a letter (whose coming is prophesied by the title page, whose own coming is strangely prophesied by a first title page, at least in most of the book's I've read). The letter leads eventually to a word, which in turn brings on a sentence which brings a paragraph which brings a chapter which brings on a volume and so on until the whopping conclusion.

The letter leads eventually to a plot with allegoric or realistic (terms I take to be interchangeable) resonances, and climaxes in an emotional, symbolic, or intellectual conflagration. By use of character, setting, theme, this point's progress to its expansive conclusion maintains sufficient interest to seem to reward the reader's patient labor and financial investment with its due yield. To prove the value of said yield, to thwart the intelligent reader's sudden realization that the remainder of her life, Sir, from the first encountering of letter 1, has shortened considerably in the time spent interpreting arbitrary symbols stamped on the hardened pulp of smashed trees, becomes the author's great and active interest. Though your writer tends to complain of your critic, we can see clearly how completely in this good fight the critic is the friend and ally of every writer as usually he and sometimes she intends to demonstrate the primary fact that to avoid social interaction and forgo

the rights to one's own contemplation of nature in general is of mystical benefit to the reader. Is to read to decipher? Is it to reconstruct a destructed puzzle?

Indeed as I read works of contemporary criticism and all sorts of literary theory in a general attempt to acknowledge my own lack of acumen I find myself continually relieved that I am not a writer of the literary. Imagine the pressure! To present a work crafty, cunning and obscure enough to demand its own reconstruction or vice-versa! And at the beginning and the end to be jettisoned out from society like a despised ingrate! At least when the Aztecs sacrificed their victims they made sure each poor soul enjoyed a year of the highest possible esteem, living, indeed, like kings. Sex, tacos, days on the guil! Our literary martyrs enjoy labor and poverty, are the victims of ignorance and nasty looks, sacrificial victims of a democracy in which every slob claims the rights of a king.

The structure of the book, therefore, can be rendered by a simple design (fig. 1), not unsimilar to the shape of a delta. Here point A represents the first letter of the incipient work, point B its ultimate punctuation mark, point C the novel's conceptual end (that entity that tends to be gestured to with a *Finis*), line AB the plot, line AC the more general resonances of the text and angle BAC character, themes and setting.⁹

What Infinite volumes of meaning and import fills area BAC! To maintain, balloon, yes, inflate such a conceptual area at her work's close, Sir, must be the great end of the novelist's work, though the matter inhabiting the area must never be so dense as to clog the machine. For the entire structure must be light and hollow enough so as to be able to be lifted up *in toto* as a horn through which any critic or sales-staff can tinkle to the glory of his or their presence or, indeed, to the glory of the presence of the book itself.

I, however, whose aim it is to write truth, to bear witness like a donkey, to relate events and characters I've known and studied and, in many cases, seen with my own eyes, am not bound to such abstract and fanciful shapes. If my story begins with a bloody catastrophe and progresses towards outcomes more ambiguous, the *whim* on the doorpost was sketched by a greater author than me, the writer of that serialized tragical-comical whose pages appear to turn on their own, so soft and thin that they breeze by buzzed by the master-thumb so fast that one can never quite make them out. That's the real page-turner, not this. And as it seems clear enough that at least while I'm writing this I haven't



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5

fig. 6

⁹ Other possibilities, of course, abound, though they're read more by writers than readers. Figures 2 - 4 will be recognizable to many and figure 5 represents what Dr. Parker has called the asymptotic: the trumpet that silences itself just when it's expected to sound clearly....

yet finished it, so I can't draw for you know *its* particular shape — I will for now leave a fig. 6 empty so that if I remember, when I do finish I may return here and draw for you the final shape of this natural text, hoping not to discover then, like the critic in a poem I know, merely the scrawled lines of my own face on its....

ALL THIS WITHOUT ELECTRICITY

It might be of some interest to someone somewhere, but it will be of little use for me in the end to do this. Lucky enough to have been convicted for a crime looked at by my culture as somewhat heinous, I've had visits from more publishers and (ghost) writers than attorneys, though some of the third fancy themselves the second and vice-versa. Were it not for my notoriety and the great amount of time on my hands, I would never embark upon such a laborious, tedious endeavor as the writing of a book — an endeavor, in here, sadly divorced from the larger concern: the making of a book, a privilege only enjoyed by exhibitionist introverts of the art-world and parasitical extroverts of the publishing-world: both concerned as they are with the selling of objects.

What saddens me is that it's hard for me to even understand, for instance, just what it is I have to sell. Let's say, for argument's sake, that I have actually finished this book, written the whole thing by hand on paper. I offer it to a publisher; the publisher won't even look at it until it's been typed by hand, which effort would involve the creation of an entirely different, new, object, not created by me at all. Well, the fact is that I've already been paid anyway, so that what emerges doesn't matter so much. I've received a large advance, which is unfortunately of no use to me in here, on the strength of a book that does not exist. Swimming outraged in the wake of my pen is logic itself.

The writing of a book is the endeavor of an idiot. Readers even, as consumers, lead lives of superior sense. What defines them at least has an empirical existence in the world; by the time they get it the text has settled up into the husk of a book. The writer, on the other hand, at least in the case of his first work, which this is for me, by the way, is defined by what is in the process or what is yet to be, the creator of some primal entity that can only exist in copy, like Man. The original, usually, has no empirical existence and if it seems to, like your *Declaration of Independence*, it has no single author. The best writers, for this reason, your Gold-Smiths, Austens, Dostoyevskies, Heilintzins tend to be dead.⁹ Furthermore, even dis-regarding the problem that the writer's text, as we call it to deny the problem, may not exist, there are so many things easier to make, things that call for less industry, less time alone, and

provide richer vistas along the pathways of communication. Fortune cookies, poems, films and sound recordings come to mind. There are those in the institution wherein I now dwell who, by means of wires stretched between the ends of boards, can produce the most resonant of *plinks* either as accompaniment to the spoken voice or as a kind of soloist plinking with solitary self-confidence. Happily, with the technology now available to any visionary such occurrences can be recorded in a binary language and reproduced for posterity for less cost and with far less trouble than a volume such as this.

As of course the artist of any discipline must possess understanding so great as to be itself a commodity demanded by the less precocious audience, the author of a book must possess it to the greatest degree, just as the demand he makes on his readership is the greatest demand ever placed by an artist on his audience, with the exception of contemporary theatrical performances who interrupt their audience's boredom with violent personal assaults. Yes the understanding and wit of the writer must necessarily be monumentally vast. It is for such reasons that I, for one, will not write literature. If my understanding fails to explain such a hodgepodge quixotism as the writing of a novel — even when the author's photo displays a phenological outgrowth on the forehead of such subtle or blatant force and sublimity and humor etc. enough to signal the kind of understanding that launches every authorship, still in retrospect the degree of this understanding is somewhat deflated by the presence of the book itself. Such a soul could say more with greater efficiency, as I've said already, in countless other modes. This essential paradox of the novel, bound up as it is in the nature of the author may best be expressed by the language of the only people who found it necessary to express the idea more simply than any other, that is, the marvelous French, who give us the phrase *Idiot Savant*. Though every author possesses a certain maniacal and monomaniacal talent in the building up of a text, and in the sheer will of the effort approaches some of the lesser qualities associated with the divine, his or her understanding of the world at large and in what ways the book is and is not a part and parcel of this world is so low as to inhabit the childish realm of idiocy.

As I am neither an idiot, insofar as I easily judge myself surrounded by idiots and these unfortunates are defined in opposition to myself, neither am I of so fortunate a mind as to be designated Savant, least of all in regards to my understanding of literature and the proper modes of constructing a book. My evidence lies open before you.

I am also, and this is an aside, quite at a loss in regards to other realms of knowledge. The great developments of our age are mysterious to me. I have never seen an electron which I have not

⁹ The first appearance of what may prove to be a major theme.

TO BRUISE
HER BREAST
WITH THE
REPEATED PAT
OF A SINGLE
FILBERT
HAIR



THE PHOTOGRAPHER OF MODERN LIFE: SOME THOUGHTS ON
"UNTITLED" BY SHARON LOCKHART

To see clearly what truths lie behind things, look at the surface.
Henri de Montherlant

*I paint what I see and not what others choose to see, I paint what is there and
not what is not there.*
Edouard Manet

"Untitled" is a color photograph 73" high and 109" long. Ambitious size - almost as big as the cinema. It's a full length portrait of a man in a hotel room some stories high. Perhaps near an airport. There's an American flag in the distance but it's not clear because the room's full length glass windows reflect the room which is behind the camera, as well as what is outside. There is a bluish late afternoon light saturating the flat cityscape of Los Angeles. There are yellow lights from lamps and ceiling lights "receding" into the reflective glass above and behind him. A narrow band of ceiling lights significantly mirrors the horizon. Two dramatic vertical window supports divide the work and frame the man just off center to the left. There is a bed that is doubled by being reflected on two panes of glass. The man holds his waist with his hand

and turns to look at something to his left, out of the frame.

The high contrast color photography and the ambiguity of planes from the reflective glass are reminiscent of the photography in Godard's recent work. Back lighting and hard edged architectural verticals perpendicular to the picture frame flatten out the image, while the simultaneous use of deep focus create a dialectic which in his later work is used to create highly ambiguous, extraordinarily beautiful images. Godard's films from *Sauve qui peut (La Vie)* to *Forever Mozart* remain grounded in the aesthetics of European art history, particularly that art history that deals with portraiture: Rembrandt, Goya, Velazquez, Manet, Renoir, Picasso are artists to which he has repeatedly alluded. Both Nature and human history in that work are seen as intertwined in ambiguities to the point of being ultimately unknowable. This sense of the unknown is diametrically opposed to the work of current cultural theorists who base their work on French Post Structuralist ideas that are in essence socially determined and language based. In Godard's current work, and those that are influenced by it - be it Milan Kundera, Hal Hartley or John Baldessari - the natural world, and mankind's life span within nature, contain the absolute laws within which humans play out their histories, such as they are: incomplete, fragmented contradictory and without an essence. This explains, at least in Godard's work, the consistent use of simultaneous incomplete narratives, and the way he uses an "explosion of genres" (Truffaut's term) in which a fedora hat can stand in for a cinematic genre and a historical period. Various fragments from music, text and image are then set in motion as in musical counterpoint. In short, this is an aesthetic of paradox. So it is with "Untitled".

Perhaps this was a room Sharon stayed in once to give a talk in some city, like the character Ryder in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*. She saw the pictorial possibilities and then got a male model to create the implication of a sexual narrative; surely the bed (doubled) makes that implicit. But that's too vague. He doesn't appear - with that seriousness - to be in a sexy mood. He is definitely posing with hand on hip in a three quarter turn that is a tradition from the time of Baroque portraiture. But the pose seems done without much conviction. His mind is elsewhere. He is a traveler that is between places. The "decisive moment" has passed or is yet to arrive. This is why this image seems as contemporary as it does. I see in him the unease every mammal feels made to pose inside a highly complex functional space. This alienation is subtle, as we don't see the dramatic hysteria portrayed by Nan Goldin, in which she brilliantly depicts human animals in an environment where they can never hope to be at home. The man is a traveler. It's his story...How about this: The man's own rage for order is "mirrored" by the linearity of the room's receding perspective and rational organization, dissolving into the Noir city...Phew! Problem. Must perspective and linearity be rational (and by inference, curved lines emotional)? No. Mondrian was a dancer who painted flowers, and Gaudi made sculptural architecture that looks crazy on the surface,

but is, in its structure, obsessively symmetrical. We're back where we started! Who does work with reflections? Richard Estes. There too we see "behind" and "through" at the same time. Usually he uses diagonals receding into space with glass fronts on one side mirroring the other side in reverse; it becomes more interesting when he tackles a scene head on, where front and back, solid and transparent, all ambiguous to the brink of abstraction, clash in harmony. The result is pictorially baroque abstract play that has much in common with Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, yet it's as concrete as - well - concrete. In short the work becomes about that paradox - very much like "Untitled". It's about a quotidian context that is so rich in details it becomes an enigma. Even the old Manhattan subway becomes a Sphinx. Perhaps Estes uses actual words so often, in street signs and advertising, because even the words cease to be language, and become art: The opposite of conceptual art.

I see conceptual art as a form of rhetoric. This explains its great success in academic life and its failure outside of that milieu: the closest antecedent to conceptual art, for me, is late 19th century academic painting. The same concern for "ideas" - but with rigor! - yes, with professionalism! - yes, rules! - of course! - a cultural product democratically equal to everything else! At least on paper. The academic art of the 19th century got its sense of power in part from an aristocratic aloofness to the popular arts; that same sense is present now but the conditions which define that power have changed. Contemporary art is democratic only in its theories, for in practice it remains "superior" to the popular arts by virtue of its pious critical sense and its ironic detachment - it is an art of connoisseurship. The effectiveness is palpable. In that sense it borrows only the fashions of the popular arts, not its populism. The high brow credentials of "Art" look out of place in our century of "Democracy" and "equality" and so it must be made to wear a funny mustache. (But without the self-deprecation of Chaplin - to say nothing of his sensibilities) The work of so many artists now is so radical in its posturing and so conservative in its content. It's an art of nostalgia that has no memory. Even that famous irony (Jeff Koons, Andreas Serrano, Barbara Kruger, Damien Hirst, Joel Peter Witkin, Mike Kelley, etc.) is just a defense mechanism that's taken over the organism it was meant to serve. "Blue Chip" artists in the West now are so much like the "State approved" artists of the old Soviet Union it will give future historians a great opportunity to compare Western/Soviet Technocracy. This leads to what Henri Lefebvre described, in his extraordinary *Introduction to Modernity*, as "creative over self conscious activity (which) becomes introspective and is in danger of neglecting the work of art itself, and of never expressing itself in action. It deludes itself, becomes whimsical and complacent; it wants only to be charming, irritating (provocative, challenging), pleasing. Once established in this way subjectivity cuts itself off from practical activity, and atrophies". Notice that for Lefebvre there is no great separation to be made, necessarily, between irritating and pleasing art. What Lefebvre is writing about is the separation between art-making and the experience of the artist in the

world. He saw, as early as the mid-fifties, that irony had a double edge; that it inevitably created a distance between artists and their own experience; from that "irony tower" (Andrew Solomon's term) artists could survey whole historical periods, but not see their own silliness; they could see the social panorama of urban politics, but not the waiter serving them. That irony meant so much at one point, in the early part of our century, and now it means so little. Compare any work of Conceptual art to Mike Leigh's *Naked* or Tsai Ming-liang's *Vive L'Amour*, two recent films that are very reminiscent of "Untitled": In their depiction of human beings in relation to architectural spaces: A contemporary experience par excellence. These directors are able to use irony without being devoured by it. Philosophy generally and French Cultural Theory in particular are popular in academic life in large part because they justify an "art of ideas" at the expense of experience, which (being messy, unreliable and liquid - in every sense of that term!) is made to take a back seat to Reason - the mind that sees through "Myths", including - presumably - the "Myth" of nature. Perhaps philosophy must always be Platonic by default if not by design. In any case great film work puts art in a bad light - that's for sure! Let the historians figure out the mess. They'll need Camus! Don't get me started! "Untitled" has elements of conceptual photography such as hyper-self consciousness, and a deliberate mimicking of photographic genres, yet it does not belong with traditional conceptual photography because there is no irony there to act as a screen between viewer and image, such as we see in Jeff Wall's or Araki's work. Ms. Lockhart has more in common with contemporary European portrait photography by Valerie Jouve, Albrecht Fuchs and Julia Sörgel.

Este's paintings are pictures and I want to call "Untitled" an image and not a picture or a photograph. I'm not just being an old egg. Look for yourself. It's a frame from a film still - of course. Almost all photography, which is not nostalgic, is now cinematic in some sense. Although perhaps we are simply replacing one nostalgia for another. But what's the narrative? She'll tell you the film it came from and the whole story but I mean really. The narratives in Cindy Sherman's work are clear as a textbook on "How to Read a Film" which is why they make great post-cards (don't get me wrong - I love those film stills and remember seeing them with awe in a gallery in New York many years ago when they were still small!). The narrative possibilities in "Untitled" are ambiguous but so what? Ambiguity to what end? Every fashion magazine has pictorial that imply all sorts of narratives sometimes with a great deal of subtlety - though usually not. In a sense fashion forces photography to be democratic - but at a price! Everything is reduced to effects, everything has a reason, everything has a function, everything is a style. But there is more going on here because I can look at this image for a long time - therefore I know it's not fashion. Is it size that makes a difference? Maybe, but no. Is it that the figure does not resemble a professional model, and so is a deconstruction of fashion photography? Come on! - something else.

This isn't the image of a man, but of a city with a hotel room with a man in it. What is that content about? Surely it must be the relationship of the man to his environment, specifically the glass that separates him from the outside world, but that in turn makes it available to him as a landscape which is already framed. That is, it takes him away from the world to return it to him as an aesthetic object for contemplation and reflection. Why is this reflection necessarily melancholic? Only Antonioni has shown us concrete and glass with that degree of success. And as in Antonioni this particular time/place is full and empty, it is inside and outside. With all those reflections on the glass it appears that this cage has a boundary that extends out into space and turns back in on itself. And what does a man do in this cage? He poses, not as a tortured victim in the manner of Francis Bacon, but as a man living inside and through it. This is an image of our everyday experience. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the inter-subjective nature of experience as perception/expression is borne out in images of everyday life, such as "Untitled", revealing the extraordinary in the ordinary - the epiphanies happen not from great events, but out of the minutiae of that everyday contact.

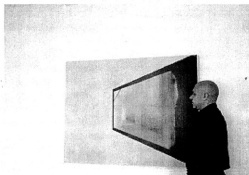
That "everyday life", which is the subject of realism, is something Baudelaire fought to see in art (in essays such as the brilliant *The Artist of Everyday Life*) and thought he had found not in Manet but in Constantin Guys. Manet's pictures were paradoxical and suggested illusive allegorical-meanings that uneasily shared the same pictorial space; that ambiguity reached a point where nothing was easily reducible to literary or critical language systems, not even the poetry of Baudelaire. Manet's ambiguity still provokes critics with the need to explain. Guy's work on the contrary already looks like a series of illustrations for Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen*. Manet's paintings are pictorially over-full of meanings, making them unlikely to work as illustration for anyone; Guy's work conveys through a very specific illustrative style, the "quick sketch", what may (still today!) signify "modern".

Manet's work then and "Untitled" now make conscious use of traditional conventions and of subtle incongruities between the different kinds of modernity on display. The unity of meaning found in much contemporary art is a property of mind - and Platonically so in most cases - and not of nature, which is where we mammals spend our time on earth, even if that nature happens to be transformed by us into hotels done in the "International Style". Sharon's "depth of field" technique which permits sharp focus over several spatial planes simultaneously constructs a dramatic interrelationship within the frame (what the great critic of depth of field Andre Bazin called the *mise-en-scene*) but one that remains a tableaux immediates. Such a space makes itself felt as a series of contradictory elements: it is artificial and realistic, it has a quotidian subject with traditional classical references, and it captures a particular second and an entire past of personal, social and cultural references. It resonates. Hitchcock understood this enigmatic space and linked it to memory, desire, and

death in *Vertigo*. Godard understands it too as he attempts to do the near impossible film the present. Lockhart has done the next to impossible: she has photographed it. It's there for future generations to see. But for a second (all you need if you have a camera) everything is suspended in air and weighed down by gravity. Solids become transparent, transparencies are transposed into solids. I think I hear a phone ringing. The dogs go on with their doggy life. Some Beethoven late quartets are playing. The Old Masters: How well they understood! A jet is heard in the distance. A car door opens and slams shut. The expensive delicate hotel that must have seen something amazing. What happens then? Come on now...everybody has a story.

George Porcari

...everybody has a story.



HOLES AND LIGHTS

A Rock Concert Special

"Beneath each word lies a sort of existential geology . . . a speech full of holes and full of lights."

-- Roland Barthes

SECTION 1 VANILLA FUDGE

The Vanilla Fudge, along with the Velvet Underground, could be considered the avant-garde of the New York area. Elaborating the earlier electronic experimentations of London and Los Angeles based groups, the Fudge's performance sound suggests Edgar Varese wedded to the Stones' "Have You Seen Your Mother

Baby?": a series of discontinuous punctuations of sound which occasionally succeed in canceling each other out when crossed by the extreme feedback or organ buzz. The use of the feedback produces a flat, static monotone devoid of interest at one moment, and at the next, jarringly present simply as noise.

Conjoined and overlaid over all of this is a sensibility (particularly apparent in the drawn-out, over-blown organ sections) of Brooklyn Italian-American Barocco: a correscating, false, overtly 'sweet' ('rich' to sickening) which is a lugubriously (in-) "elegant" stylistic paste (its furniture equivalent is known as "Hollywood")-- co-practiced by such New York City area groups as the Four Seasons, the Shangri-la's and the Young Rascals.

The Fudge's approach is mannerist. The lyrics of their sets (unoriginally 'borrowed' from the past) are subjugated to the entire sound: re-arranged, chopped-up, ground-down, put-down or camped-up. "Bang Bang" is typical; the 'interpretation' is a male impersonation of Cher (who sounds like a flattened-out Sonny anyway): the words being reduced to a group of isolated, flat, staccato eruptions (bang! bang!) a little like the early Kinks. The 'interpretation' is interrupted in the middle by an ear-splitting block like a subway riding on a section of bad track. There is no movement during the built-up pseudo-climax of the opening staccato singing section. Then a false continuity (perhaps moving toward an end) is introduced by the anti-climax of an organ surge, slightly nauseating, only to be interrupted by the singing (just when it seems a mostly instrumental number of the usual length was concluding.) then the break suggesting a subway shriek, followed by repetition of the "Bang Bang" lyrics, etc.

Each of these parts appear isolated -- a separate sequence that doesn't add to a unity (much like the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations" and "Heroes and Villains"), except that the Fudge additionally attempts the superimposition at the same musical moment of the discreet units as well as their disjunction.

The games played with "beginnings", "ends" and "middles" of compositions making difficult the determination of which way the music is spaced are carried by the Vanilla Fudge into the structure of their entire performance block. After they have concluded about three-quarters of the way through what is to be their next to last piece, the lead singer interrupts to announce to the audience. . . that they are the Vanilla Fudge and that their last number will be a nine-minute version of "You Keep Me Hanging On". The set is resumed, ending in a prolonged organ hum, two minutes of which is the beginning (realized in retrospect) of "You Keep Me Hanging On."

SECTION 2 THE SEEDS

"The Seeds", who claim to have originated "flower music", began with their big hit, "The Farmer." "Flower music" apparently means American Indian refrains. "The Farmer" opens with an extended organ solo by Darrel Hopper "borrowed" from the background soundtracks of the Indian Part in cowboy-and-Indian movies. Its even "wallpaper" texture -- flat and uninflected -- nearly disappears in its utter obviousness. It's so stupid there is nothing to grasp: Hopper is a genius. Sky Saxon, the lead singer, does an Indian war dance when he sings; his singing, like his dancing, can best be described as "happy" -- skipping word to word, barely touching ground surface, placing no weight on continuity or meaning.

Around the middle of the act, Saxon announced: "There's going to be someone walking around handing out seeds, just take them home and see what grows."

(Many astrologists believe we are now entering the final "seed period" of the Christian-Piscean Age marking the transition to the coming Aquarian Age as Piscean attitudes of benevolence and unselfish sympathetic love holding in check a darker, sensation-seeking side given to weaknesses of sloppy emotionalism are coming to fullest flower while the world goes to pot.)

The performance closed with a cut from the Seeds' brand new album which seems to be influenced by the Doors. "Fallin'" is perhaps an attempt at Judeo-Christian tragedy/shamanistic rock opera or can be taken literally. At the conclusion of the performance all performers fall down, concluding, "You're falling down" about thirty times. The audience bood.

SECTION 3 THE BYRDS

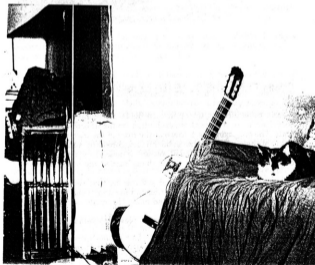
The Byrds began their section with a hummed sutra chant, "We don't exactly know what it is; it's just a place we go sometime." The overpowering, sweetly harmonic texture of guitar and guitar feedback once synonymous with this group seems to have been thinned out in the direction of brittleness (at least in performance). "I Think That Maybe I'm Dreaming" typifies this sharp, acerbic sound dominated in this instance by Mike Clark's superb drumming. There is a more integral use of dissonance in "Universal Decoding Kit" which combined bagpipelike assenance with Everly Brothers lyricism. "Lady Friend", the Byrds' last release, repeats the rolling circularity (sickening sameness as opposed to continuity) which characterizes the best of the Byrds' (and rock and roll generally) songs of the past:

Here it comes again
It's going to happen to me
Here it comes. . . .
It looks like the last wave a drowned in."

The Byrds seem a little bit "out of time" -- they belong to a slightly earlier era. The group image of this band is pervasive, unlike the decentralized "associations" of the more recently formed Seeds and Vanilla Fudge. In their cases, each performer's musical part is conceived as separate from each of

the other's; each musician is content to "do his thing". Such a separate but equal notion is carried into individual difference in dress style. While Daryl Hopper was made up as J. S. Bach (a girl teased from the audience, "Where did you get that cute bow?" The answer, "from the 17th century."), Sky Saxon wore a too-small circus bandleader's (Sgt. Pepper) jacket.

Don Graham, 1969.





COMMITTING THE SEVENTH (a review as literature)

A train pulls through the open corn fields of Nebraska in the year of 1876. Two men sit across from each other on the uncomfortable wooden seats. The one facing west, towards the front of the train is youthful and small; his hair, neatly parted in the middle, is held by some sort of gel. It looks as if he's dipped his head into an oil field. He squints behind a set of glasses that do nothing to diminish his learned and squeamish air.

The other fellow, facing east, toward the caboose, is a 'cowboy'. He wears a 10 gallon hat, a cow skin vest, a blue denim shirt and has a face full of whiskers, neatly trimmed and oiled. He smells hardy.

The younger man speaks up in a nasal New England whine: "I've been reading a book, my dear sir."

"Book, ye say?"

"Indeed. *Far from the Madding Crowd*. The author's name is Hardy. Thomas Hardy. He is an Englishman."

"Englishman, ye say? Don't much like Englishmen," grumbled his rough interlocutor. "Was a hundred years ago to the day we wupp'd 'em. Liars & cheats. Smell funny. Talk funny too, I reck'n."

"Well, never having had the pleasure of making one's acquaintance, I can not honestly say whether or not I admire the Englishman in general. I must confess that I first took up Mr. Hardy's book in order to see for myself what life is like in the countryside. I am travelling to the Colorado territories and I was hoping Mr. Hardy might give me some insight as to what I might expect there."

"Colly-radd-a!" The cowboy growled. "Tough and mean; as dry as a liz'd's tit. Not to mention a fella's gotta watch his back out there. Helps to git a gun.... Can't says I know how're you gonnal like it out in them's parts."

"Well, will I be likely to find any shepherds? Mr. Hardy's hero is a shepherd."

"Shepherd! I knew a Jimmy Shepherd out in Spokane killed an ostrich once. Never met a Shepherd in Colly-radd-a howsever."

"I see. Well, then women farmers? I am very interested. Mr. Hardy's heroine, one Bathsheba, runs a farm by herself. She has eleven servants: seven men and four women who work for her."

The cowboy spat a thick wad of tobacco onto the floor where it glistened ambiguously. "What the hell kinda book is that anyhow? Never heard a no fe-male ranchers, and you could be sure if there were such a one, she'd not be no lady. Never heard of no lady farmers. We need ladies out here, but not to run a damned farm. That hussey oughta find herself a man quick."

"Strange," spoke the young man, with a puzzled face. "Bathsheba did awfully well on her farm. It did seem quite natural."

"What the hell kinda name is Bathsheba any-hows. Boy-howdy never came 'cross that monicker attached to a person. She a Mormon? I've met me a Lizbeth and a Sarah, girls with Chrischun names, no divil names like Bath-sheeb."

"Alas," our young man sighs, expression changing from bewilderment to disappointment. "It seems to me that Mr. Hardy has made a number of unbelievable assertions in his book. These were the only things that I found interesting. Other than them, the book was rather tiring. Yet people back home admired the book immensely. I wonder why."

"Sounds to me like that book's nothing but shee-it. Fiction. Hog feed. Lady farmers, ye say? This Hardy sounds like an idjit. That's bout the size of it. Expect as much from an Englishman. Their heads aint screwed on right since we wupp'd 'em."

The young man reached into his bag and located the book. He pulled out the shabby, worn copy; after walking to the back of the car, he opened the compartment door. The wind blasted like a furnace but his hair remained unfazed. The young man drew his arm behind his head and tossed the book into the Nebraska wilderness.

His copy of *Far from the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy landed in a large patty of manure. It didn't help the harvest that year.

Bill Rees

