



Still Life on the Williamsburg Bridge/Rust Never Sleeps

# CURARE

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# C U R A R E

**Rage-o-rama** - a column for the no future

Welcome to the second issue of CURARE. If you read it, which I highly recommend, you are in for a hell of a ride. As usual, we have (Jan Schmidt and myself, editors etc.) searched out and accepted a full milieu of writing, from your classic love poems to your drug rants -- your dramas -- your laments of suburban decay. Nothing is too dangerous, nothing is off limits, why just look at the cover. Still Life on the Williamsburg Bridge/Rust Never Sleeps (with apologies to Neal Young). Unfortunately, looking at the results of someone's hurried retreat and or remains of overdose is somewhat nostalgic for me and for many others, whether they deny it or not. The Williamsburg these days is never without a similar scene. Last week though the snow was up to our ears, my friend and I stood for a second at the entrance on the Manhattan side and surveyed the same spot where the Still Life was first discovered. I couldn't count the number of syringe caps that were stuck in the wooden slats of the walkway. This is not good. Still Life. That's what it is and that's what it does.

The Venom Press book party at Larry Jones' Cafe Nico for the first issue of CURARE, Ken DiMaggio's chapbook, Radioactive Carnival, and my book Dear Grim Reaper was one of the best parties I have ever had the pleasure of attending. There will be more. Venom has recently released Resurrection by Gina Bonati, is soon to release Sad Songs in Empty Theatres by Huggy-Bear Ferris, my favorite tattoo artist, and will be "putting to bed" a book of sex fiend monologues by Thaddeus Rutkowski. Though we were not happy about the closing of Mosaic Books, we were able to purchase fifteen chairs from them so some of us, especially the editors, will not have to sit on the floor at future readings.

Kerouac is still God as far as I am concerned. I paid another visit to his grave, driving about seven hours in an ice storm to get there. The Edson Cemetery closes at 4:00. We started out for Lowell, Mass. from Hartford, Conn. around 8:00 AM. The original car died in a horrible little town where there were no bathrooms. Emergency measures were necessary. A rental car was necessary. A rental car which had no horn but at least it was red. I think Jack would have liked a red car. Mud on the windshield from huge trucks barreling through the slush. A bad wiper on my side, so I stared out through three streaks of crud into a white landscape of snow and ice; and wouldn't you know it, that wiper also screeched every time it moved. At least when we hit Mass. the roads were cleaned off some, unlike Conn., where they decided to run snowplows down the main drag in the morning rush hour, causing us to wait in traffic four times, for a total of two hours. The objective, Lowell, was reached at 3:30 PM, just in time for a kamikaze visit to the grave. Of course, it's a flat stone, and of course there is now about 2 feet of snow covering the cemetery. Fortunately, I had Ken DiMaggio there to dig down to the stone, and fortunately the snow was the dry and easily moveable type. He also read the last paragraph from On The Road over Jack's grave. I wish I had thought of that. Snow started coming down heavier. We took pictures and split, getting lost in a part of Lowell that smelled of strong cooking spices which might possibly have been a Little Cambodia. We never made it to the bookstore in town where they sell Kerouac memorabilia. We never made it to Moody Street. We circled around in a literal fog for awhile and finally got back on the Lowell Connector and headed back to Conn. When we got there, we went straight to Dunkin' Donuts to attend the Rant, where we sipped hot chocolate and watched young junkies fall asleep on their donut boxes. Still Life at the Rant. Like I always say, get out there and do something; and then like me, you may live to tell about it.

Luv, J.D. Winter '94

**Poison Pen**  
by JAN SCHMIDT

Rori, my seven year old friend, learned a new song around her school in the Bronx. (It's sung to the Barney melody, which is the tune of "This old man, he played one".) It goes something like this:

I love you  
You love me  
Let's get together and kill Barney  
With a .357 to the back of the head  
Let's celebrate that Barney's dead.

I sang it for my friend who's son is in the first grade in Brooklyn. He says they have a similar "Kill Barney" song there, but it isn't as technically descriptive. I'll have to watch that show some day. Anything that generates that much antagonism, can't be all bad.

Jennifer Blowdryer rescued an alley cat. The cat repaid her generosity by activating her allergies. We took in the little stink cat. Right now, my boyfriend is threatening the cat, "If you mess with any more of my pictures, you're out of here. You can pack up your nasty kitty-litter box and your little scooper, and leave. You hear me? You better mind your behavior. You can't be reverting to your old street cat attitudes, understand?"

**DRIPPING VENOM GOSSIP:** What pop-eyed insect-like poetry hostess has a serious attitude problem?

Ms. Thing has a series which I never go to. A number of close friends were reading for her around the holidays. I went along to listen. However, at least three of them said, "Come on, read something. I'll ask her. I'll get you on the list." Okay. I brought something to read, a section of a short story that ran between three and four minutes. Now granted running a series is hard, and having people ask to read is a problem, but fuck, it's a side effect that comes with the territory.

She calls me second to last. I begin, but before I've been on for two minutes I can feel this nasty irritating buzzing around the room. I'm in the middle of my big three minutes, so I can't turn my attention to smack the little tse-tse fly. After one hundred and eighty seconds I sit down again. One friend tells me that the annoying drone behind me was the dried-up bantam "hostess" scurrying around to each of my friends telling them, that I was reading too long, that I wasn't even on the list, and that they should get me off. Then, when I realized what happened, she disappeared before I had a chance to tell her about herself. Several friends offered to take her out for me. I don't think they meant dating.

As my boyfriend's mother used to say, "She must be smelling her own pee-pee." Sweetheart, you want people at your series you better start treating them with respect. And if you mess with any more of my readings, you're out of here. You can pack up your nasty kitty litter and leave. You hear me? You better mind your behavior. You can't be reverting to your old street cat attitudes, understand?"

On another note. Walking one Sunday afternoon near Avenue C, we passed what used to be the club, The World. It had people milling around outside and the sidewalks were blocked, just like in the olden days. However, we noted the religious sign over the door. It's now a church. "Full circle," someone said. I mentioned that I once saw a catalog for lighting equipment that advertised "How to turn your Synagogue into a Discotheque". It's the nineties, now the discos are turning back into temples. Oh my God.

The new cat went into heat while Rori, the second grader, was staying with us. We nearly lost our minds. At one point, I even made a call to Jennifer saying we had to give back the cat. I sat at the table with Rori. She said, seeing my teary eyes, "What'sa matter?"

"Nothin," I said.

"Well, somethin's the matter," Rori answered calmly. "Grandpa's in the bedroom all grouchy, you're in the kitchen crying, the cat's in heat - and - I'm stressed."

When you have a cat, everyone's got a cat story. My friend Sue had the best. (I changed her name to protect her innocence.) Her sister was a crack addict and at the time had a big thirty pound alley cat and a daughter, who at age four weighed about the same. The crack-heads thought it would be funny to blow crack smoke at the cat on a regular basis. The cat got whacked. It started attacking people, stealing food off their plates and bashing into things aggressively. Sue was afraid that the cat would hurt the child. So she decided to get the giant angry thing out of the house, but the crazed crack cat wouldn't leave. Sue chased it with a broom; it just whirled around in circles, refusing to go out the door. Finally, Sue got a box, captured the enormous ball of furry rage and carried it down the stairs. It clawed its way out of the box and ran back inside.

"How did you finally get rid of it?" I asked.

"A friend came and put a big steak on the roof. We opened the door, and then locked it when he left." I laughed. Remember, I have dibs on this material. Watch for it in you nearest theater: "Cats On Crack", screenplay by Jan Schmidt.

The last Rori information. While she was doing a great job of singing a Sade song, I asked Rori how to sing. "Three things," she said. "You have to do three things. One, you have to have confidence. Two, you have to sing it loud. And three, you have to reeeeealllly feeeeeeeel it." Good advice for anyone. Here's my writing counsel for this column, as the musicians say, if you make a mistake, make it loud. Or as Mykel Board says, "Once, it's a mistake, twice it's jazz."

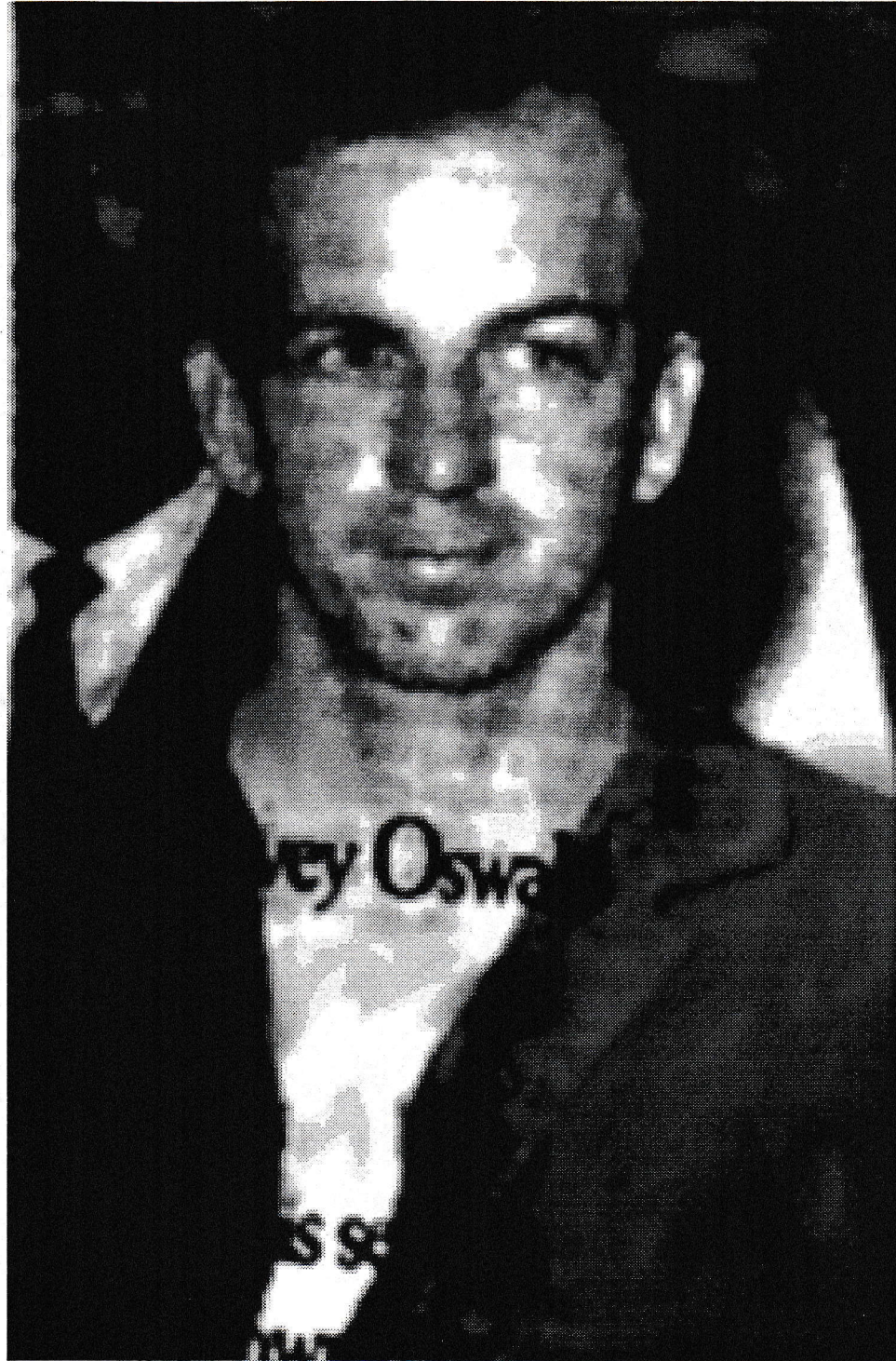
Finally, as Rori says,

See ya.

Don't want ta be ya.

Up in the house all day-a.







ANGEL BABY

Photo by J. D. Rage

SUSAN SHERMAN

**A POEM THAT STARTS IN WINTER**

*I would not try out strange words on you  
or my knowledge of languages (however slight)  
And have you believe it is not war  
That has been the primary motivation of my life  
—July Poem/1966*

This is a poem for people without a history  
Whatever their color Whatever their race  
Who can't remember their mother ever holding them  
Talking to them about their past  
Who find themselves in unknown places  
Without instructions & without a guide

This is a poem for the children of immigrants  
Whose parents wanted so much to forget to leave behind  
The places they were born the places they fled  
They never spoke of those days to their children  
Never even told them their grandparents' names  
Who died leaving their children lost and restless  
Rootless hungry

*This is a poem that starts in winter  
But never ends A poem about people  
About individuals With specific features  
Proper names*

This is a poem for Sarah whose mother was Jewish but no one could tell  
She had blond hair blue eyes It was 1939  
She taught Sarah a lesson about vision  
How to make people see past you How to hide  
In moments of doubt they would always throw it in your face  
You could count on it  
"Dirty Jew"

*This is a poem about words*

This is a poem about Sarah's mother  
Who never stepped inside a synagogue after the age of eight  
Who never forgave her own parents for what she was born  
An immigrant poor  
Who lived her contradictions until the day she died  
Who left her lie behind her A legacy drawn  
In her daughter's face

*This is a poem for Sarah's mother A poem about words*

This is a poem for Barbara 1961 Whose father warned her  
If she was involved with those radicals at Berkeley those "Reds"  
He would be the first to give her name to the FBI To turn her in  
She never doubted he was serious She learned that day never to trust  
& never to speak

*This is a poem about trust*



This is a poem for Carole who cried out in shame  
Discovering her ancestors had killed & robbed  
To gain a country Carole who had a history  
She no longer wished to claim

This is a poem for a Vietnamese poet Havana, 1969  
Who praised three young Americans for their courage  
Standing against their own country their own people  
For what they felt right  
He had no choice was forced to fight No virtue in that  
They thought him too generous mistaken at best But still it helped  
But still it healed

*It was winter then too*

This is a poem about digging images from rage when all else fails  
When there is no common past  
An anger imbedded so deeply  
It survives

*This is a poem about war*

This is a poem for Brenda who fell in love with a woman  
Years before it became a political act  
Who decades later still stumbles over words long forbidden  
Jealous of those who proclaim their love nonchalantly  
"Lesbian"

*This is a poem for Brenda  
This is a poem about words  
A poem about winter A poem about war*

This is a poem for those caught between worlds  
Squeezed between times For people without a history  
Who connect with no ancestral past

*This is a poem about them about me*

This is a poem about words like dialogue compassion  
which have yet to appear but people this poem  
About war contradiction rage choice anger  
Trust

*This is a poem that starts in winter  
But never ends*

*This is a poem about people individuals  
with specific features  
Proper names*

CHARLENE CAMBRIDGE

*I have been a willing participant  
in the abortion of my dreams.  
Passively allowing the confinement of creativity,  
silent witness to the annihilation of individuality  
These, the only children allowed me.  
Choosing the safety of mere existence  
over the terror of the infinitely greater responsibility  
of parenting the true self.*

*This reluctant confession will not give birth to change:  
Seeds of revolution do not grow on verdant ground  
I have chosen the soft, lush, fertile material  
in which to build my tomb.  
My bareness is, after all, mine.  
I will treasure it, suckling at my breast  
like a leech on a dying sloth.  
It is mine.  
Its emptiness defines me beyond mere life.  
I will not be remembered for my works.  
I refuse the honor of ancestorship.  
I will leave no drama for greedy mourners.  
I light no flames.  
I leave no ashes.*

*Suicide note #102 3/18/92*

**WOMEN THAT DON'T SMILE**

women when they smile,  
say things like:  
Oh I don't mind. It's O.K. to shit on me  
I'm O.K. really, and if you let me, I'll make you O.K. too  
No, that's alright, my problems aren't as important as yours  
Don't leave me, I need you for confirmation of reality  
I won't hurt you, I'm really quite harmless  
Don't worry I'm no threat to you at all.  
But women that don't smile,

**NOW THAT'S A DIFFERENT STORY.**

RONNIE SWAIN-GALICKI

"EULOGY TO A STRANGLED QUEEN" (GAY SERIAL KILLER U.K. STYLE)

25-July-93.

Emanuel,

Emanuel,

Emanuel

of London or formerly of London and Earth.

I see your picture in every paper

on the telie

and in my brain movie screen all day and night.

Emanuel

You poor bald soul

you walked into a men's room stall

what did you do but fall to your knees,

Into the hands of a strangler that you took home.

I sympathize

I've met many a killer

a killer, diller

Who hugged away my breath of life

or razored away at my heart with a knife

Too blind in love to see

kissing me into his battered wife

my atrophied legs like a duncun fife

could barely crawl away

Emanuel

They buried you today.



ANGRY WOMEN

I'm walking up 14th street and see a white migrant worker face and begin romanticizing it, how noble I am in my pity, but wait a minute he's said something. I strain to catch what it was... "nice tits, babe".

I'm hurt and paralyzed by the fact that I can't walk around my neighborhood without malicious sexual hisses, but it's more fucked up than just anger, I know this assault is the only power left them, Yeah, I've got nothing, but I can still make you feel like shit for a second, still fuck you, rape you, stick it in. Maybe I should get angry, maybe that's where the communication gets so funny, writing think pieces when violence is the answer. But the last time I tried that I had a Budweiser bottle broken on my face, which gave me a black eye, cut my lip open, and smashed my four front teeth. Not only that, but the police took away my tear gas canister for the last time, continuing my small on-going relationship with law enforcement, which has always consisted of them taking my accessories away, a frustrating case of cognitive fashion dissonance. And I don't even know if that makes me angry or just annoyed.

I'm angry I can hardly ever feel, for years, just went from one reaction to another, had months taken up by people I didn't even like because I thought they were somehow my fault, but I'm also ambivalent, I was there too, and I might be angry that not only is this not unique, there are not even any unique words for it, it's rooted in clichés more inescapable than those used for writing about love, heroin, or road trips. I must put gigantic implied quote marks around even my painful core.

I'm angry I never had anywhere to fit in with all my power and weakness, nowhere to feel safe, but I'm also similar to a church lady now, the treasurer at my weekly meeting, eagerly waiting for the rest of the world to come into the fold with me, umm hmmm, I hear myself saying on the phone, practically flapping a fan and sipping lemonade, that's Right!!

I'm lost but I'm mad at the punk boy who wrote a song where I was lost, because I wasn't lost that time in Chicago. I was there because I fell in love with a transvestite and her drifter step brother while on ecstasy, and their dead gay father too, he struck me as graceful, she was brilliant dazzling, a liar and the truth, and I just happened to be on a codeine that night the punk boy met me at the 24 hour Xerox shop, all night Kinko's.

I'm angry about Smut Fests. It began when I admitted that I had made a porn video, hustled a little, for hard cash, and got paid more for sexily admitting it in penthouse, then everyone wanted to hear and that's real too, why not, and I put on Smut Fests and we all explained what we got paid for, and it was kind of degrading but to tell you the truth I sort of liked that, why not, I grew up in this culture even though the nearest gas station was three miles down the road, but I was more ambivalent than a slogan, Sex Positive, Post Porn Modernist, what ever, and felt funny, and it wasn't a bachelor party but maybe it was, and who cares but it made me retreat into a layer of apathetic pudge, and I'm angry I started doing these readings and then it turned into this perpetual fucking thing with slogans -- it seems it got out of control, but I still like the attention. I'm angry about my time limit, Angry Women, but I'm also ambivalent, cause what was I going to do with more time anyway, I haven't written a new piece I'm happy about in ages, and after all I'm not an actress. I'm angry that even though I don't like Gregory Corso there is no female Gregory Corso because we are all so busy carefully orchestrating our rage, we will get angry but it will be just like this and you will continue to book us because we are manageable, we know the deal, which is usually no deal at all, and you can buy the video too, here's how, even though I don't like drinking there's something to be said for it if it's the only option to this crazy agreeableness I'm crippled by, and this maybe means we are angrier even than drunk men, we don't even have the faith to just hang our rage out in the air, without wanting or pleasing or selling, because we must believe there is no point, Angry Women, St. Marks, October 30th, time limit, 6 minutes, 10:30 pm, \$5.00.

KEN DIMAGGIO

**THE TV DINNER CULTURE POEM**

I want to be thin! thin! thin! Because thin is the world that I see on the television! And I want to eat! eat! eat! because pigging out is what all the thin people do in the commercials! And I want to be junk! junk! junk! Because junk is what the people who are thin love to talk about and eat! And I want to kill! kill! kill! I mean I want to smile! smile! smile! Because killing I mean smiling is what thin happy people on television are all about

but what do I really know I'm just Joe Blow your average genocidal American businessman I'm just Joe Blow the imagination-dead cretin in staff accounting or mid-level management I'm just Joe Genocidal Blow with the same extermination-wrought business degree from the state University of Drinking and Fucking I'm just Joe the conformist killer blow and I parrot all the horrors that my newspaper and TV helps me to be an indecisive and politically useful captive of which is why I bark like a dog because I killed my sense of language after getting a college education in spinelessness flatulence cheating and how to conform to the herd mentality I just bark like a dog because stupidly amiability unoriginality along with a racist and misogynist-ridden vocabulary are the things that get me promotions duplexes and a prison-like security I just bark like a dog which means I say things like get out there and vote life is what you make it a penny earned a penny saved work makes free and might makes right yes my name is Joe Rotweiller Blow and I work in a radon-contaminated laboratory commute on a Nuremberg Nazi-rally like interstate go to a duplex in a neighborhood sterile and under lock like a mental hospital catatonic ward and go to a family that greedily consumes what is garbage what is rotted like maggots on a butchered corpse and then after I'm done crawling and then after I'm done computing and then after I'm done counting and then after I'm done killing I'll just sit down in what looks like an electric chair put my feet up on what looks like some third world person's head put my arm around a spouse whose own business Doberman career has turned her

into a mannequin and turn on to the  
Great American Zowie! Sports bash-  
ing! Language hating! Anorexic loving television!

And that's where I get my culture from!

From pretty female newscasters who  
majored in breast development and how to be  
feminine while still staying tough

that's where I get my culture from!

from McNewspapers that read like McDonalds and  
from McNovels that read like Mc-  
Cheeseburgers and from McMovies with the  
depth of Quarter Pounders and from  
McMusic pre-packaged and trayed  
like french fries Big Macs and other micro-  
fried things in styrofoam containers yes  
that's how I get my culture a  
culture that unthinkingly places killers  
along side of Santas and Santas along  
side of Coca Cola and Coca Cola along side  
of the killing fields of Cambodia and the  
killing fields of Cambodia along  
side of newly built Polynesianed-  
styled retirement villages in Florida! That's  
how I get my culture!

which is why it makes sense to be  
mediocre genocidal unimaginative and a  
half-hearted Christian

and that's why so many of us go to the  
University major in business lose our  
sense of verbal and analytical capabilities  
and graduate as obedient and  
trained Dobermans and pit bulls

and like our Santas along side of our Serial  
Killer culture

neither does Jane or Joe the happy  
mundane Blow make no distinction in  
loving the kicks from your employer or in  
still loving your secretary after you  
publicly humiliate her

It's just get kicked and give kicks! It's just  
get humiliated and humiliate someone back! It's  
just get spit upon and then spit on whoever  
else is next in line it's just getting  
alienated from a higher power and de-  
humanizing someone who's below you it's just fuck  
you fuck me in the concentration camp  
corporation it's just the Easter Bunny  
along side of the traveling salesman  
child molester it's just the McComedy

that's always placed before the McHorror and the Mc-  
Tragedy it's just the shallow anorexic un-  
realistic but murderously sought after TV  
Dinner culture which is why I'm Joe the  
National Socialist Blow because I'll mimic  
any madman on television so long as I can  
get a garage a divorce and a chance to  
sadistically abuse the next person in line  
which brings me to Jane the S.S. Officer  
Doe who can't prove herself enough by  
making corporations like Apartheid  
Wounded Knee and Auschwitz plenty of  
bucks which is what Joe General  
Custer Blow has been doing all his life on  
the rape for new markets on the take from  
cretinous chief executives on the make for a  
spouse who will provide emptiness un-  
imagination and crass consumer com-  
fort O Jane! O Joe! And  
the religious zealous mission you and  
your vibrators lawnmowers and companies  
have now become! Mediocrity Uber  
Alles! Can't Beat The Fascism! We Be-  
lieve In Indentured Life Insurance  
Policies And The Junk Food Consuming  
Family! And we are here to lead the  
world to an Easter Bunny Little  
League Protestant Civil Servant  
Holocaust!

O my McPaper! O my McNovel! O my  
McMovie! O my McTV Dinner Civil  
Servant Anorexic-Mimic Duplex Murder  
Culture!

Because of you I know nothing which  
makes me happy! And because of you  
I can just consume and not have  
to think or take responsibility and  
because of you I never have to  
prove myself just smile a lot nod my  
head and stuff myself and because  
of you I have stupidity a pass-the-rape  
bureaucratic job a share the genocide exploitative  
thirsty respectable empty life O my Mc-  
Country!

It's the only way I know how to  
address you and at this point the only  
way to address you is to eat you!

And O my McComedy and my Mc-  
Tragedy!

getting ever more sentimental and  
schlocky as my promotions involve  
acts of cowardice and cretinism

and O my McNormalcy

blind to its own exploitation greed and  
selfishness

and all too aware of some dying  
creature's pathetic artificially altered  
alcoholic or drug-related momentary sense  
of bliss

and what do I really know

I'm just Joe Blow

your average genocidal American business-  
man

I'm just Joe Blow

spinelessness flatulence thoughtlessness and  
the overwhelming need to conform which  
is why I end this poem marching  
now with a banner which on one  
side has a swastika and on the other  
the logo for Coca Cola I'm just  
getting in step now with all the  
staff accountants the fundamentalist  
preachers the directors of Human  
Resources and pro-life bomb-carrying  
protesters I'm just taking my place  
one two three I'm just blending in  
to one happy smiling face four  
five six I'm just marching like every-  
body else in the sealed boxcar like inter-  
state and like everybody else I'm just  
taking my share of pillage plunder  
and rape which makes seven eight nine  
and ten

and that's how we go to McWork

and that's how we go to McFamily

and that's how we become Mc-  
Respectable Content

and spiritually and compassionately  
empty amen

\*



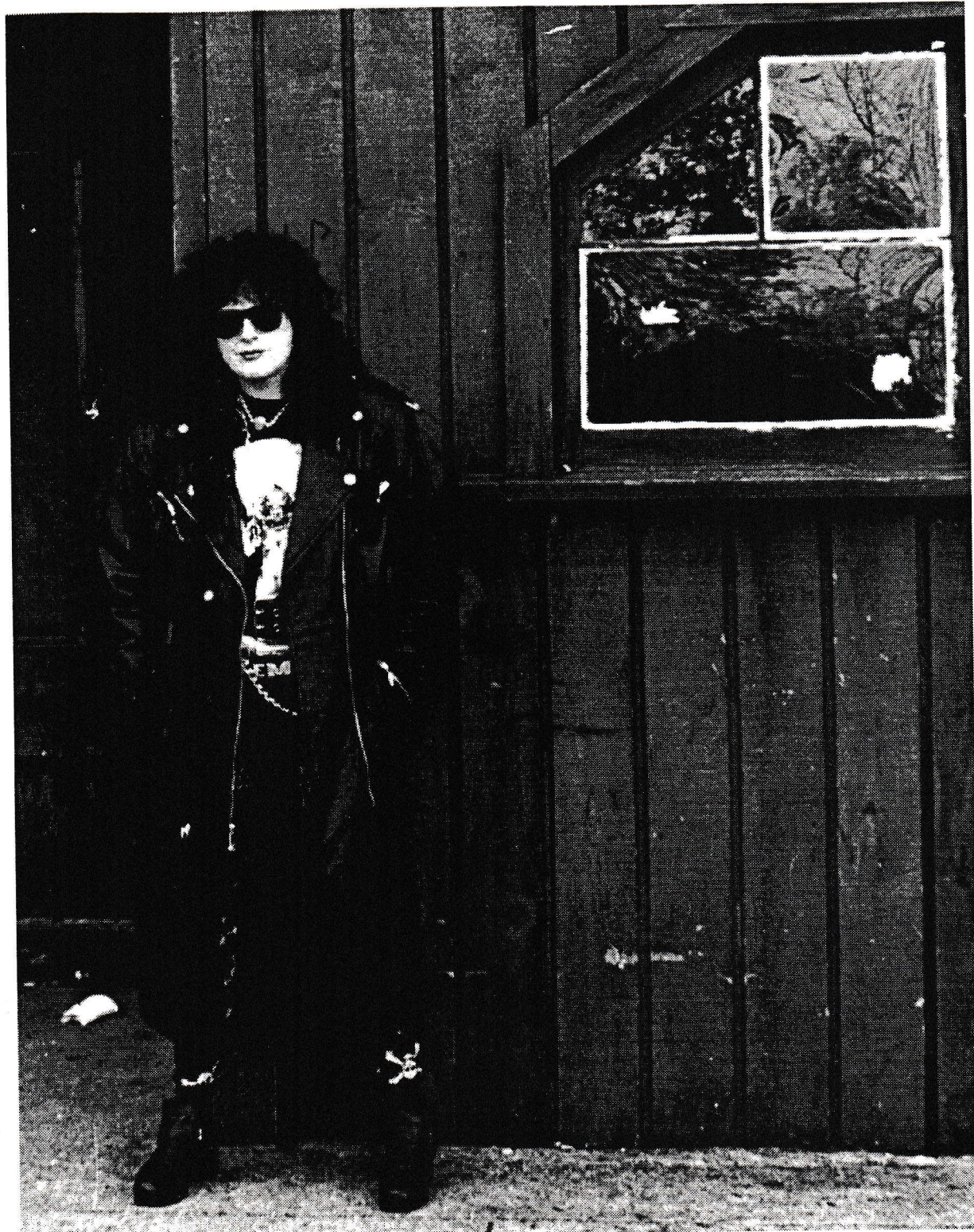


Photo by Ken DiMaggio

**Futility**

when you think about making some connection  
what comes to mind?  
shadows of the drunken day you loved the truck driver  
with the long black hair back in 1966  
or of the time Spook mainlined you in his aunt's kitchen  
with the syringe he found in the refrigerator  
under the butter dish  
or Crazy Bill in his police cap  
clear blue eyes hiding all the bed bugs in his brain  
up close you could see  
dementia laughing at the world behind those pupils  
bright and innocent  
but wicked when soaked in peach brandy  
when you think about futility  
in comes Mugsy with his water bottle  
swigging from it all day long to counteract  
the dehydration caused by Lithium and  
liberal doses of Heaven Hill bourbon  
telling bad jokes  
wanting something he couldn't even describe  
that no one could give him  
inviting you to try anyway  
even though you knew he was beyond your powers  
he could have been successful  
when he tried to fly  
why did they stop him?  
it was obvious to anyone that he was a wild bird  
and you think about connection  
want to get with somebody  
and there is somebody  
who is nobody who is there but not there  
who is flapping some strong wings  
around the perimeter  
but never darting in for a taste of you  
no way to make contact  
locked up by time and indoctrination  
inside a lead box  
there is a heart beating  
sometimes smashing away in there  
like it could break your ribs  
you want it to crack them wide open to see if  
you would feel anything  
other than automatic critical analysis  
what does it mean? Who did it and why  
and when and to what purpose  
other than damnation  
I dare to walk through the graveyards  
but I can not speak of anything  
with living value  
I can cry profusely for the dead  
and pine away for those I have never met  
but I can't bust through the walls  
I have constructed to scare away humanity  
to stave off the possibility of rejection

because I suffer humiliation in every  
cell to be magnified in every atom  
worse than a premonition of my own  
premature tombstone  
my skin bleeds  
for a tender touch  
my hair waits for a gentle caress  
my mind prays for cool ice to slide  
over it; to tranquilize  
there are others like me  
misfits who look normal  
but have hunchbacked convulsing  
souls blackening and twisting  
them around all their invisible edges  
randomly punching ignorant critics in the head  
with blows that rage uncontrollably out of them  
I never see the storm that lashes from me  
in all directions  
sometimes I feel it just before it washes those who  
approach me right over the end of my deck  
into the abyss like a small puppy swept off  
the end of the Staten Island Ferry churned  
to bits in the motor  
while I reach out my hand that somehow  
misses the disappearing fingertips  
ah another one to mourn for  
another Mugsy, Crazy Bill, Billy Demon, Roberto  
the junkie  
and olive-skinned Spook  
another little red-haired baby  
with a big teddy bear  
sinking under the foaming green tide  
another tenacious ghost to hang around  
haunting me and making accusations about how I  
tried to kill them  
it was better to visit a deserted house  
with a sullen man  
letting him in because he was nothing  
and nothing can't hurt you  
even when it tries  
by disguising itself as a lover  
making love on the floor of a dark empty closet  
making love on the floor of a bar ladies room  
making love up against the wall in a warehouse stairwell  
making love on the floor in a tenement kitchen  
it isn't love  
and you don't make it  
you assume the properties of  
an empty vessel and you weather it  
like you are a hole in wet sand  
like you are the nozzle of a vacuum cleaner  
like you are somebody else's hand  
but not a woman  
and not an exotic apparition  
and not a wistful fantasy  
and nothing real to connect with  
better to pick up a gorgeous stranger in the after-hours  
whisper with heads bent and touching, as if you

had been together forever, as if you believed in  
something, as if you knew each other's mysteries  
better to be rough on him  
to be raw after sex  
and say good-bye easily  
watch him disappear with his handsomeness  
that you will never see so close again  
and you don't even want to  
you just want to remember  
the barstool where you laughed  
and looked forward to the things  
that are now over  
the lovers are dead  
and the connection is fried from  
the hollow sparks that once flew  
lack of devotion eroded my grooves  
now they don't match with anything  
have turned to jagged rust  
achieving the expected conclusion  
only the visions and echoes are still within grasp  
but its better to forget  
and sleep  
let their old desperate faces jump over the fence with  
the sheep  
until everything is fading and simple  
allowing a new face to assemble

in dreams fear is alien  
impassable barriers are cast away like  
stage prop Styrofoam boulders  
sleep is an interlude of death and death is salvation  
unconsciousness has no shackles  
no chain bolted to the floor and  
tied to its feet  
desire tramples hesitation into dust  
the banquet of possibility dazzles ahead  
offering its limitless feast.



BOB HART

HAUNTINGS

In those families,  
in those swiftfoot tribes, the spirits of the dead --  
where leaves were numerous as pages of the galaxies,  
and dark below with meaning --  
spirits became gods and feared,  
and haunted, through the shadowweaving green,  
the sleep and wake of hunters and their homing tribe.  
They say that cities grew there too. Their colored walls  
stand in the sand without further solid company.  
Do spirits still home there? Elsewhere?  
At night the desert itself rises white in the wind.  
Our cities stand in stone.  
It's said that in the silence of dust  
that fugitive radioactive ghosts, like our hoodlums,  
threaten urban and suburban streets.  
Desert sand also has no immunity to their sinister encroach.  
In Davy Jones' locker,  
that place of bones and boards,  
of shells and gold and eerie undulating life,  
that closet with the darkness of a childhood fear,  
they say the deepdrowned spirits sing of the ancient mother  
whose whalegray hair forever smells of salt,  
who like a frightened mind keeps all her births within:  
and they are many.  
Oh, these mothers -- whose faces sometimes flush purple  
sometimes emerald, sometimes black  
or gray -- are poisoned now. They  
die with their children, rotting within.  
Like slimefaced zombies  
corrupting uncalled in their sunken beds,  
they lie in alien restlessness.  
The lively twins, fission and fusion,  
poltergeists with eyes like suns,  
shake a global grave and throw  
our tombstone cities into space:  
public nightmares auguring the dark.  
It was a long time coming on, this haunting of the earth.  
Murderers must kill many victims many ways  
before the murdered form a grisly group  
and chase them roundeyed through the thorny stars.

4/2-22/84

BRUCE WEBER

## PROBLEMS WITH THE ALPHABET

a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m,  
n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z.  
the alphabet  
the alphabet scares me  
the alphabet wants my money  
the alphabet threatens my daughter  
the alphabet eats my breakfast cereal  
the alphabet says be good or i'll destroy you  
it walks all over my books  
it tramples my clothing  
it rips apart my valise  
it burns my identification  
it steals my daddy's pornography  
the alphabet wants to have sex with roman numerals  
the alphabet wants to make the square roots pregnant  
the alphabet wants to make the physicists stop measuring  
every letter big or small is preparing for battle  
every letter wears armor  
every letter sharpens its pencil but doesn't write home  
every letter refuses to dance with the ugly girl  
wearing a polka dot dress  
every letter smiles when the tide comes in and drowns us  
every letter pursues me when i'm paying my bills  
the 26 letters of the english alphabet  
are unmarried and sometimes get lonely  
the 26 letters of the english alphabet  
like to drink martinis and swear  
the 26 letters of the english alphabet  
form a picket at the public school  
so the illiterate students can learn who they are  
the 26 letters of the english alphabet  
refuse to congratulate the grammaticians  
who fix our communication lines  
the 26 letters of the english alphabet  
like to shake their booty  
at the modern language association convention  
the 26 letters of the english alphabet  
do not like poets with a good vocabulary  
the 26 letters of the english alphabet  
are unhappy about every letter in this piece  
they want to split apart  
and go their own way  
they're tired of giving themselves up to my language  
they want to do something better with their lives  
they do not want to be part of my slaughtering of spelling  
they can't decide whether they're going to  
strangle or shoot me when i finish  
they read this poem from the top and call me stupid  
they cringe when i use big words like mississippi  
they scold me with an uncrossed t when i act naughty  
they giggle at my hysteria when i can't think of the correct word  
they want to cut off my fingertips

so i will lose 3 quarts of  
blood and die  
they bicker among themselves and confuse you poor listener  
they tell me to stop writing and play baseball  
they say don't you think this is long enough  
now go run off and leave us alone  
but  
i will keep writing until the alphabet shuts up  
i will become the author of the longest unpublished manuscript  
i will sit here for eternity making up characters and scenes  
or maybe it's time to put away the alphabet and get a life  
maybe i should move to china  
and learn about letters that form pictures  
maybe i can paint my way out of this predicament  
maybe i should rig up  
all the volumes of the  
oxford english dictionary  
so they fall and crush me  
i think i've scareD the 26 letters of the english alphabet  
i hear them groaning and whimpering the words forgive us  
maybe the 26 letters of the english alphabet have begun to  
respect me  
maybe it's time to become friends with every letter  
even q  
i am going to be kind for once in my life  
i am going to be nice to the alphabet  
and end this poem  
now

### Amtrak

He sat next to me.  
A stocky, well dressed man.  
He smelled like dead fetuses.  
A doctor perhaps.  
He said, "Hello. What do you do for a living?"  
"I kill questions."  
Then he said, "You have nice shoes."  
"Fuck you."

He was reading a Sunday New York Times, trying to catch up on what others like him were doing, before his arrival at Penn Station.  
His partner, who was depressed because he couldn't sit next to him, asked if he wanted something from the cafe car.  
"Yes. I will have bla, bla, and bla. Here is some money."  
"Oh no, I have it covered."  
They both laughed.  
I thought, was that a fetus joke.

He came back with the stuff.  
"Here you go."  
He didn't say thank you.

Out of a need to feel accepted, he said,  
"May I shine your shoes?"  
"No. But look at his shoes."  
"Oh wow, those are really nice shoes."  
"Fuck you."  
He went back to his seat.

While eating, the possible doctor, still smelling like death, was scrambling thru every page to catch up on what's happening to doctor Jack Kevorkian.

Bored.  
Looking out the window,  
reflecting on the books I read on my trip,  
Dear Grim Reaper and Radioactive Carnival.

I thought to myself.

Should I be or should I not be grateful for being the tailed penetrator, out of thousands of fellow tailed, potential penetrators to have impregnated mother's egg.

### Holiday Inn

I'm sitting here,  
in Haverhill, Massachusetts.  
Watching television,  
something that I never do.

The reason that I have this opportunity in my menial, non-materialistic life is because someone else is paying for it.

Visiting one of the two reasons why that I am on this planet, father.  
Who put me here and left.

The latter,  
mother,  
has condemned my whole life because of too many similarities to the former,  
is curious of the outcome.

I am sitting here in a room that is so unrealistic,

I am going to throw up.



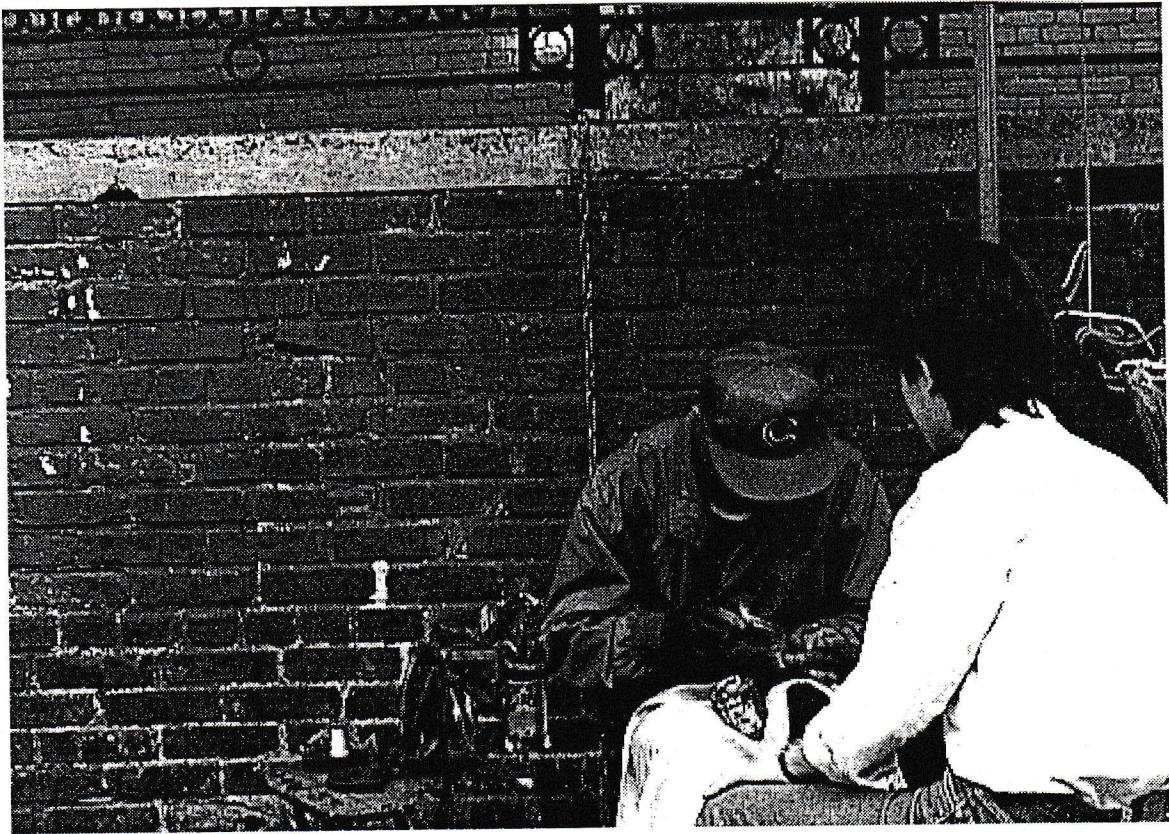


Photo By Arthur Rivers

CHANTAY JONES

TO: My Loving Brother (Ray)

**A GIFT OF LOVE**

No ship, hardship, friendship, kinship  
No matter what my ship, or where I was sailing  
You have always been my lifeline and anchor.

**"He helps me"**  
**"He holds me"**  
**"He hugs me"**  
**"He loves me"**  
**"He protects me"**  
**"He provides for me"**  
**"He cares for me"**  
**"He shares with me"**  
**"He's always there when I need him"**

Some call him Daddy, others call him Father  
I have no choice - I call him "my younger/wiser Brother."

You are the strongest - gentlest man I have ever known.  
To you I give my **eternal love.**

**Love Always**  
**Your Sister**  
**Chantay**

**MIGRAINE**

The interior waterfall  
 at an early ungodly hour  
 The anxiety  
     of leaving  
 The stream of phone calls  
     when I should be  
         sleeping  
  
 The wish  
     for everything  
 given up  
     for a moment of  
 Quietude  
     of nothing  
     no radio  
 to drown  
     the sound of running water  
     the sounds  
         of wanting  
 everything  
     to point toward silence  
  
 Bright light  
     painful  
 sound of dry cereal  
     in a metal bowl  
 speaks digging drill  
     deep in the  
         wish  
             \*     \*     \*  
  
 Of nebulous  
     area of survival  
 The sight before  
     it becomes bright  
 The rush  
     to land enslaved  
         in a race against  
 the final ring of  
     what was practiced  
 in principal  
     the first time  
 the crying child  
     is left in  
         kindergarten  
             \*     \*     \*  
  
 Of nebulous  
     area of survival  
 of the sight  
     in the early day  
 of the slaves  
     to Methadone  
  
 lining up.  
     more broken down. . .  
     than desperate  
 Of the old whore  
     talking to herself. . .

Of the pierced  
     faces and orange hair --  
 walking  
     toward the park  
 to begin to sleep. . .  
     \*     \*     \*  
  
 To be ready  
     to feel the afternoon  
 melt away  
     in closed eyes  
 as it becomes  
     something different  
  
 when  
     the dream begins  
 to be  
     considerate  
 after breaking  
     the phone  
 . . . after answering  
 politely  
     with a curse  
     \*     \*     \*  
  
 Camaraderie  
     of slow times.  
 when  
     two faces meet  
         briefly -  
 then go separate ways  
     the truce of dimness tolerance.  
     \*     \*     \*  
  
 Fast fading  
 the feeling of happiness  
     when loneliness  
 of counting raindrops  
     becomes. . .  
 on effort wasted  
     in lack of better thoughts  
         to have.  
     \*     \*     \*  
  
 The indoor waterfall  
     at the  
         ungodly hour  
 the wishes  
     that did not happen  
 running away  
     when I should be  
         sleeping  
  
 Annoyance  
     the walk  
 into twilight . . .  
     day  
         to not melt  
  
 not fast  
     enough  
 in nervous desire  
     unfulfilled

-EAK - Early morning - July of 1993 - on  
 the way to Coney Island -

Ptr Kozlowski

SometIMeS  
It GEts haRd  
to sEparAte thE MomEnts.

SomETimes ITs reALLy hArD

TO SepaRate The MomEnts.  
SomEtiMes it'S jUsT Hard to SeParAte THE moMeNts.

A MomeNt wHen YOu nEed ME fRom a MoMent WHen I

NEEDed you and

couldn't flnd you

BAAYY

BA

sOMETimes IT GEts haRd: to KEeP tHe momENts toGether;  
SomeTIMes,

iT'S ReaLLy HaRD:

To KeEP the COnnEction IN Mind BetWeeN One

MomEnT And AnOthEr

A MomEnt whEN we're NOt In LOvE wiTh All The MO-

MenTS whEn WE ARe.

SomeTImEs It's PrettY HaRD t'

keep the moments together.

YOU THINK THAT'S BAD, IT'S EVEN HARDER  
TRYING TO KEEP APART TWO DIFFERENT  
SIDES OF ONE AND THE SAME MOMENT  
IT'S PRACTICALLY BORDERING ON THE IMPOSSIBLE  
TRYING TO SEPARATE TWO DISPARATE FACES OF  
one  
SAME AND VARIED MOMENT, LIKE ONE

moment when my pants of cold breath  
are nearly visible in the empty spaces that I prowl  
the while your  
breath of sleeping graces hairs of a forearm not  
belonging either to you or to me.

I am waiting for a bus in the rain. These days  
I love everybody.  
I haven't been unhappy in a long time.  
Though I am afraid the bus isn't going to come. It is Monday.  
I am going to my small red theatre.  
I could take a cab if I had money but I don't. It is not cold  
- only wet, and I am under a canopy.  
The bus never comes to Avenue C and 12th. I should have  
remembered.  
I have watched and seen two turn when they should have  
come straight to where I am waiting.  
Nevertheless,  
I am not late, yet. and I live with someone I love, still.  
The sidewalk is slick with ice and people falling.  
If this one turns,  
I will walk.  
Afterall,  
I haven't been unhappy in long time.

winter '94

**Prodigal**

Louie got back  
from Youngstown U.  
where he learned  
how to sell  
shit home improvements  
to farm families

said he'd filled  
a whole county  
with Insul-Brick barns

but left when  
his lover started  
bringing guys home  
into their bed

"I'd just pretend  
I was asleep" he  
said. "They were  
all too big  
to fuck with.  
she made sure of that."

Got married, started  
making ugly kids  
became a buyer  
for Gimbel's Auto

won't get up  
from dinner to  
answer the phone

**Odyssey**

One bad ford  
no baggage  
16 hours road  
pilgrimage Syracuse to  
Michigan's upper peninsula  
the cat howling  
in endless heat  
the whole way

Rain on skinny  
last growth beech  
but the motorcycle  
waiting he rode  
5 minutes then  
an outcast dog  
came from nowhere  
bit his ass  
then went back

The bike hit  
a beech fork  
bent block cracked  
he drove back  
half bloody assed  
gas cards maxed  
drained the hoses  
at closed stations

when he'd talk  
at all he'd say  
the best part  
was rabies shots

**CUNT SUICIDE**

As an option of the day I am aware of my death.  
No radical departures are necessary  
however, they ease the transition.  
Do you know the definition of *quagmire*?  
A little boy, age 7, fell into one and left a twin.  
I've outlived so many others. Why?  
My mother has outlived me already. How?  
Her finances in order until and in case she dies at age 90.  
My son has yet begun to live.  
2 more years learning a hard lesson and  
he gets a second chance. When?  
Outside, the unknown lives. Where?  
Oh, current topic  
oh, what a way out -  
does this offer you hope?  
You see, my life is not of consequence  
to an Emperor, the President or Gangland members.  
Instead of continuing this process -  
or start a failing venture -  
someone else will care for daily details.  
Find the pet and furniture new homes.  
Use my electronics, read my books and past information.  
More miscellaneous that all or nothing  
of importance except to myself.  
Am I really that un-retrievable?  
Am I talking myself out of this choice?  
Who is asking these questions?  
Do I have to answer them today?  
Stomp my foot, sing the blues, write a letter, go down Moses.  
Instead of getting to the point, the issue...  
What's the matter?  
"Cut the drama," she said.  
"C'mon baby," I said,  
"just fuck me."

will inman

memories shaped in questions

1

you at fifteen were more of a man than i at thirty-one. i wanted to trade in my oncoming middle age to be a peer with you, your brothers and sister. i wanted to have with you what i'd missed in my teens -- so much time alone back then. i hungered over your beauty, your virile seriousness. your dignity was of earth, you knew who you were, grounded in family, though your fantasy knew me as one from an unlikely dream. you were black. i was white. our difference was deeper than sex, shallower than mirrors

3

when you found the young woman with whom you'd later marry, i did not try to interfere. you preferred women, you wanted family, children. i never wanted a slave. i didn't, couldn't, own you. you asked me to be your best man: only time in my life i ever wore a tuxedo. did we take off more than we put on? i still wear your body in my memory like an ocean beach with deep dunes and rhythmic tidal surges and ebbs. my own beat yet is rooted with yours in the moon

2

in New York, you asked me factual questions about heights of buildings, ages of bridges. when i said i didn't know, you wryly downgraded my college years. i claimed more interest in essences than in facts: you fanned my essences from your nose with impatient hand. we both laughed. but i was stung. now that i'm old and you're fifty, i wonder what you feel, if you remember me as molester or as real friend. i remember you as friend and primary love. do our orbits secretly still run in sync?

4

by today's laws, i could be in prison for loving you. for touching your body with adult fingers. i hope remorseless that i touched your spirit with as much meaning as you touched mine. that i did not wound your life with my invasive grab. i reach now into black virgin night for the raw innocence of god, draw down that merciless gravity into the fury of my thirst, and hear your voice, low, ironic, tender, mock my sacred lust with a final invitation



Photo of will inman by LaVerne Harrell Clark



will inman

spring sits different from yard

to yard

now i'm on the prowl, what naked hunt  
in deep woods. i look at this virgin page  
the way a mountain lion stares through thicket  
toward a shadow-rustle. something's  
**there**, but she nor i knows what. our eyes  
widen, then narrow hard. my spine  
quivers for its cast-off tail, the twitch  
reaches backward to my tongue.

spring  
sits different from yard to yard. two of my  
neighbors have irises in bloom for a week.  
my first iris opened two days ago. still,  
and not so still, things happen when seasons  
turn.

yesterday, i saw four cedar waxwings.  
this morning, i see small motion on a wild  
geranium. i creep closer, watching. i kneel,  
let a blue swallowtail crawl onto my finger.  
he's the littlest blue i've ever seen, a third  
normal size. late fall caterpillars or  
early spring butterflies sometimes come out  
dwarf. this blue male is perfect. he's still  
slow, maybe just wing-stretched from chrysalis.  
i let him off on feathery dill, where his  
caterpillar may have fed.

the garden is rife  
with three kinds of doves. i hope the blue  
will fly free soon. today's low wind can  
swoop down like wings of blue sky female  
to carry him beyond birds.

this dawn, moon  
was bright crescent through thin clouds.  
i study this pencil, wanting  
to lick away blood.

HAL SIROWITZ

**Before The Dark**

Don't ride your bicycle when it's twilight,  
Mother said. You might see the cars, but  
they may not see you. It'll be a shame  
if you were to die now, because everything you know  
about death, you learned from me, & I'm sorry  
to say that I got all my information secondhand,  
so I'm not sure if all of it is true.  
And I'd appreciate it if you waited until I was dead  
to die, so I don't have to go through the agony of burying you.

**The Wait**

You make love the old-fashioned way,  
she said. You don't take off your clothes.  
I'm glad you left mine on too. Humping  
is a lost art. You're one of the few men  
I know who practices it. I wasn't ready  
for anything more serious. I look  
forward to seeing you next week,  
but don't be disappointed if I'm  
still not ready. I don't know  
how long it'll take. It could be  
a month, or it might take longer.  
But once I start, I never stop,

**Dead Love**

Masturbation relaxes me  
until I start thinking about you.  
At first you couldn't keep your hands  
off me, but lately they've been staying  
by your side, & I end up doing everything by myself.

JAN SCHMIDT

## HAND OF GOD

I do it for the money, sure. But the feeling is next important. It's like I'm the hand of god. I mean -- there'll be a woman sitting at the wheel of her new 1993 Saab or something. While the car's sitting at the light, she'll be figuring out what to cook for supper -- how to get ahead at the job -- what to do with her two kids. And I'll come out of nowhere and throw the spark plug at the window. Shatter all her plans. Life is what happens while you're busy making plans. But this time, LIFE will be ME.

I grab her purse before she knows what's happening and I'm gone. They never catch me. I have it down. I'm short and fast and female. I wear a baseball cap, on forwards with my hair tucked inside, a silk jacket with a light-weight jean jacket over it, and a plastic bag in my pocket. Once I have the purse, I zip through the people on the street. It's amazing what you can do when you're short. Wiggle through them like a kid. No one thinks that what people are yelling about is you.

I turn a corner, take off the hat, let my straight brown hair down, take off the jean jacket, stuff it and the cap into the bag, remove the cash from the wallet and drop the purse. That's it. Sometimes they describe me as a young boy. I know because once in a while, depending on how I feel, I go back and stand around. I listen to what people tell the police. It's funny how little people see. People are so stupid. It's amazing they even continue living.

I never use the credit cards -- you can get too greedy -- you leave trails. That's for drug addicts -- I'm a professional.

I love the idea that my actions have such a huge effect on them. I teach powerlessness and vulnerability. Just like a therapist without a degree. I'm educated too. I got my GED from a matchbook cover. I always thought they were funny. "Blind? Learn to drive at home!" My boyfriend says that. Sometimes he makes me laugh.

That day, I was standing there, thinking about running between people, pumping myself up, telling myself they were all stupid, telling myself that the person whose purse I was gonna snatch wouldn't really know anything except that suddenly, her nice safe world is messed up.

I was at 23rd Street and Third Avenue. A busy corner, but not too busy. First I do the officer check. No one around. No one just standing, waiting for someone, able to be a good witness. I cross the street watching. Never stand still. I do my guy walk. It doesn't really fool people unless they hardly see me. The spark plug is in my hand. I like the feel of it, so small and hard. It works the best for breaking windows, almost like a bullet. Even if I can see a car is unlocked, I like to break the window. It confuses people. I stand there. There's the car. She's the first one at the red light in the lane next to me. She runs her fingers through her straight brown hair. The purse, medium size, beige, looks like soft leather. It's right where it should be, on the seat next to her. The other light turns yellow. I count the seconds, and bam. I throw the plug, the window bursts, I grab the purse in the broken glass and I'm zipping in and out of people's busy lives. All before the woman even begins to scream. One guy tries to run after me. I turn a corner, duck, pull off the hat and jacket, slow down. Walk calmly. Don't run now. The guy pushes past me. People keep walking. I cross the street. Too bad, mister. You're gonna have to be quicker and slicker than that.

My heart is racing. God I love this. I love getting away. I love it. Even though I am still invisible, I'm powerful. I go down the subway to take the number six train. Stand at the end of the platform, take the money out. Two hundreds, four twenties, a five and two ones. Two hundred eighty-six dollars. Good job.

I catch the train back down to the Lower East Side. I touch the money in my pocket even though I know this is not the thing to do. I look at everyone on the train. There's a Chinese woman, with her cheap shoes across from me. I wonder what her life is like? Does she wish she had a different life? Did she come to America and work as a prostitute to pay for her boat ride over here? I read the Post, I know about that stuff. There are two black women across from me. They look tired and worn out. Probably got low-paying jobs and kids to support. There's a Hasidic guy. Wonder if it bothers them, those curls tucked around their ears. I sometimes try to wind my hair around my ears, just to check it out, but it feels funny. I touch the money again.

I check out this guy before I sit down. He's black with a fade. He's okay, I think, resting myself on the outside seat next to him. If he was a true crazy he wouldn't have a good haircut, and if he was a real thug, it would be a better one. I look around at the train full of people, car after car after car of them. Who are they? Where are they going? Nowhere. If I killed every single one of them, it wouldn't make any difference. We have wars, famines, AIDS, murders, and it doesn't make any difference. Human beings are everywhere. They're disgusting. They're worse than cockroaches. Look at them. Reading their papers, not paying attention to anything. I hate all of them. I like what that guy did on the Long Island train. He just started killing people. Good for him. I'd like to do that. Never had any females do it before. Or so they say. No blacks either, before him. Watch out when we start, baby. Watch out.

Directly behind the guy next to me, is a little girl who starts poking him. He turns and gives the little girl a tickle. He turns back and stares into space. The little girl grabs his neck, he turns around and talks to her and the mother. He must be with them, I think. I peek at the child, she's about three, big grin on her face, hair in many little braids with multi-colored barrettes. She says in a deliberately drawn-out voice, "My jacket is bluuuuueee. Baaaalooooo."

The mother laughs, "She's spitting when she says that."

The guy, probably the father, I think, says, "Hey, you shouldn't do that."

The woman goes, "Go ahead, spit at him. Spit right on him."

I look to see what the girl will do. She spits at the guy. He yells at her, "Don't do that." Then to the mother, he says, "Why you tell her to do that? Huh? Why you tell her to do that." The woman doesn't answer, but the child again spits on the man. He pushes the child, "Stop that. Quit spitting. That was so stupid to tell a kid to spit. What's the matter with you. I ought to buss you."

Right over my head, the man reaches and starts slapping the woman upside her head. She turns and hits him back. I move out of the way. The guy stands up and goes around and yells at the mom. Mom moves back by the window and the kid is now on the seat next to where the man is standing. I watch as the little child purses up her mouth to gather a big hunk of spit in her tiny mouth and shoots it out at the man, landing on his pants. "Stop that," he says shaking the girl.

"Don't do that," the little girl yells back, and spits again.

"You see what you started? You see what you do?"

I finger the money in my pocket, again. I'm just glad he hit the mother, not the little girl. I'm glad I didn't have to get into it.

I get off at Broadway Lafayette and walk back to Ridge Street. Everyone is out tonight. The gang that sells the heroin brand "Higher Power" is busy; there are already lines near our building. No one owns our building, no one pays rent, and there's still running water and toilets. I hated the last place I stayed. We had to shit in paper bags.

The door doesn't have a lock, I just push it open and walk up the two flights to our apartment. It's really just a section of floor cut off by some blankets. Buddy is there. He's sitting on the mattress pushed up against the wall like it was a couch. Sally's with him. He can hardly lift his head. She isn't much better.

"You guys high?" I ask.

"No," they say in unison, heads bobbing, nearly kissin their knees.

"Yeah, right," I say.

"You got any money?" Buddy asks.

"A little. Enough for something to eat."

"Come on, baby. Don't you want a couple bags? I'll go cop for you. They got the good stuff today."

"How do you know? You been testing it?"

"No, way. I just heard about it."

"Yeah, right." I go over to my mattress and fall onto it. The TV is on and hooked to someone's electricity in the building next door. Ginger clumps out of the bathroom. She's wearing her short-shorts as usual, cut so high you can see the line of her butt. Her calf-high leather boots with chains and studs jingle and clank as she moves. Her hair is black and cut short around her pouty face. No matter what state she's in, she's thickly done with

make-up. Lots of black eye stuff and red red lipstick on her puffy lips. She carries her works and spoons on one of the hooks on her thick black leather belt full of rings and rattling chains. She stands for a moment in the middle of the room, staring, one leg turned out so that the bruises going up the inside of her very white thigh are exposed.

Her T-shirt is ripped so that you can see the skull tattoo near the round of her breast. It is also tied in a knot so her pierced belly button gazes serenely out at you from the center of her body, like some kind of sexual third eye. Buddy, Sally and I gape at her. Ginger sometimes lives there. Buddy told me she was born in Rumania.

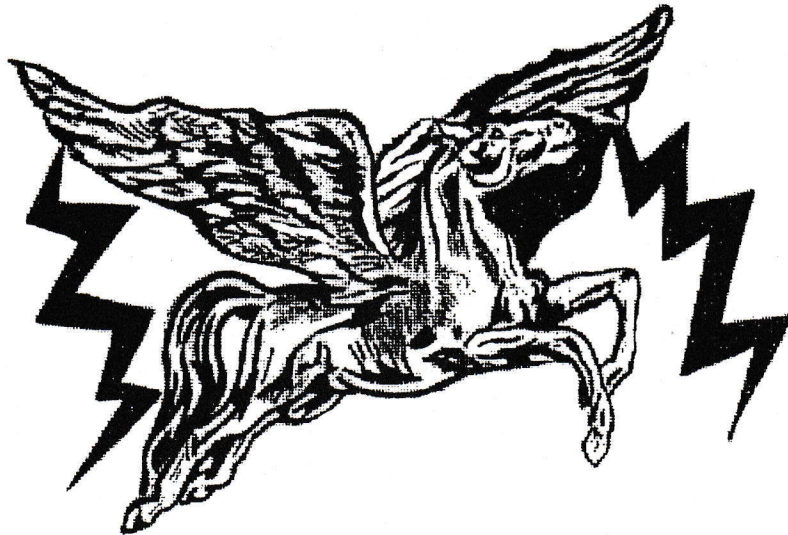
Buddy says, "How's it goin, Ginger?"

Ginger doesn't talk. She turns and focuses her eyes on Buddy. This is as much of a response as she ever gives.

Sally giggles.

Clump, clump, clump. Ginger goes out past the blanket and down the stairs. The clumping and jangling fade away.

I wonder for a while if I do want some dope. Buddy and Sally are sharing a joint. Might even be crack in it, for all I know. No. I don't want dope tonight. Tonight is for something else, I can feel it. I touch the money in my pocket. I can hear the TV but I can't see it from this position on the bed. They are switching around the channels, Oprah to Geraldo to a few new ones I don't know the names of. I have money in my pocket, I can do whatever I want tonight. What can I do? What in the world is there to do?



the instant i was born they  
dripped silver nitrate into  
my eyes. if they did  
it wrong it would  
blind me.if they did  
it right they would  
know if i had  
syphilis.after

that they cut  
a piece of my  
cock off.-to

this day i am  
very angry:-and

yes, i too have  
often wished to  
mistake myself for  
the sacrifice out  
of possibility;never

-touched soul alien  
to hand of man.but

i want you to know  
what kind of person  
you are allowed to  
have in me: -one

who sees across  
every face

a dirty wound



Photo Computer Art By Dean Snyder

DEAN SNYDER

**A LETTER TO MARKY**

MY MEDICATED FINGERS WALK SLOWLY  
IN NO PARTICULAR NEED TO DO ANYTHING  
AFTER THIS LONG SNOOZE  
BEFORE A DESIRE FOR DONUTS  
OVERCOMES MY CASUAL FEELINGS  
FOR COMMUNICATION  
FROM THIS DISCONNECTED  
CHEMICAL PROCESSING PLANT

I (AM) CALL(ED) DEAN  
BUT REALLY ONLY BY OTHERS

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY  
AND A 10 MG VALIUM NIGHT MAKES

I WAS GETTING TOWARD THE MANIAC POINT  
ON MY BI-POLAR MOOD SCALE  
SO RATHER THAN BITE THE HEADS OFF OF NAILS  
OR RIP OFF AN ARM OR LEG  
(MINE OR OTHERS)  
I THOUGHT SLEEP WAS INDICATED

I'VE BEEN HAVING A PARTICULARLY BAD TIME  
WITH MY DISEASE  
(NO, NOT THE ONE CALLED DEAN  
THE PARKINSON'S VARIETY)

TO COVER

AND IN FACT TO MAKE MENTAL HAY  
WHILE MY CHANGEABLE BRAIN SHINES,  
I TAKE MORE MEDS

WHICH:

- (1.) HELPS THE SYMPTOMS, AND
- (2.) (AS RECENTLY INFORMED)  
LEADS TO DELUSION AND PSYCHOSIS

NOW

DELUSION I WELCOME WITH OUT STRETCHED MENTAL ARMS, GIVEN  
THE STATE OF "REALITY"  
IF HAPPINESS IS ONLY A DELUSION,  
POUR IT ON



BUT PSYCHOSIS IS SCARY

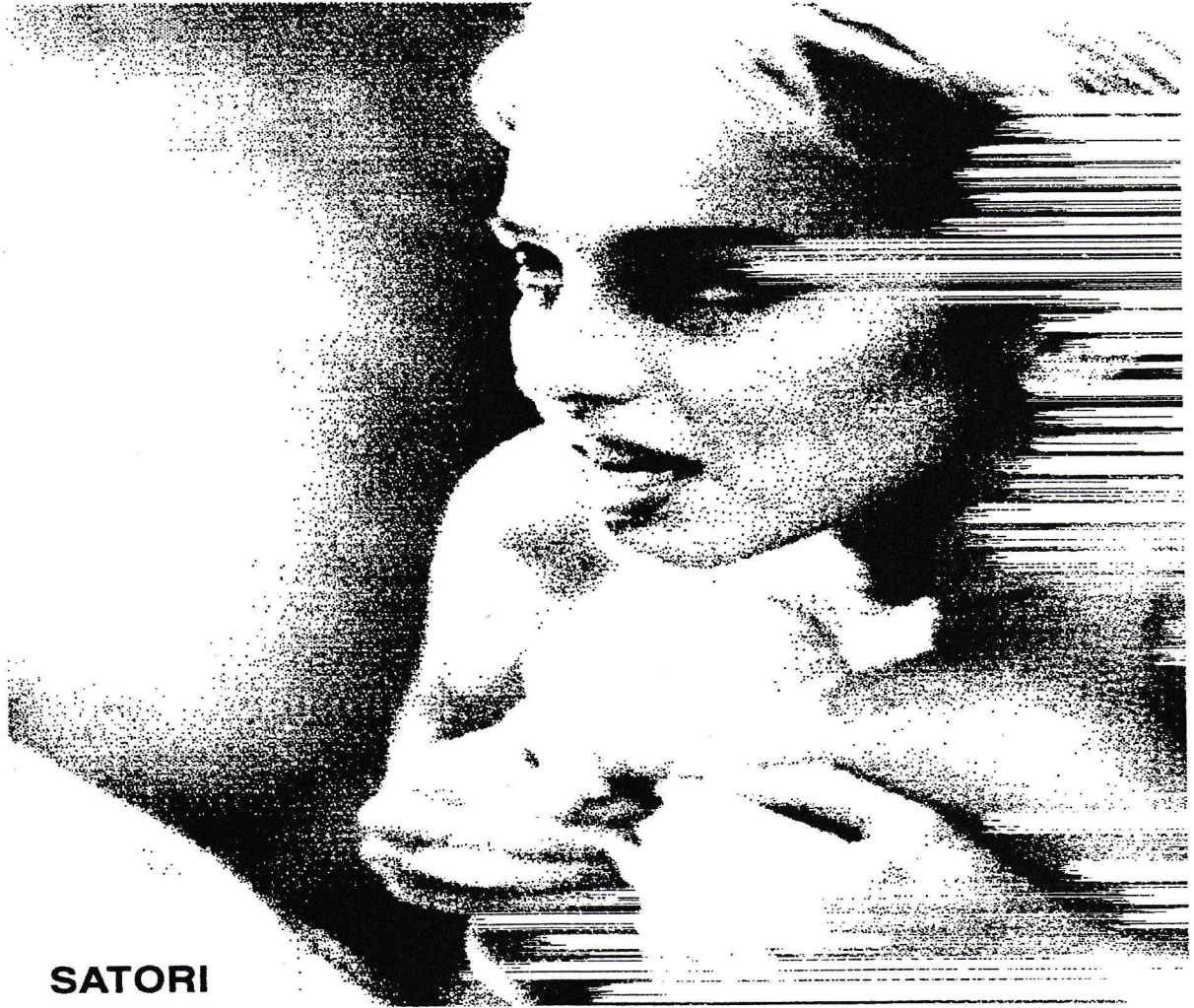
I'VE WORKED FOR YEARS WITH PSYCHOTIC PATIENTS  
IN MANY STATE HOSPITALS,  
AND I CAN TELL YOU THAT THERE IS NOTHING SCARIER

THE SCARIEST MONSTER  
IN THE MOST FRIGHTENING FILM IN THE WORLD  
WOULD SHIT THEIR PROVERBIAL PANTS  
IF EXPERIENCING REAL PSYCHOSIS

SO,

WHEN IN TIMES OF TROUBLE,  
UNLIKE PATTI SMITH'S MOTHER MARY  
COMING TO HER,  
I GO FOR A LITTLE GREEN VISIT  
(10 MG),  
PUT ON THE HEADPHONES,  
& DANCE  
UNTIL THE 30 MINUTES NEEDED  
BEFORE SLEEP

I HOPE THIS ANSWERS YOUR INITIAL QUESTION, "HOW ARE YOU?"  
D.S.



**SATORI**

Photo Computer Art By Dean Snyder

RICHARD CHASE

WORD UP

Cobra,Cobra,Cobra. Yo Papi, whachoo need?

The doorways lean into your ear,  
Holding one easy way to die.  
Like old friends licking at your memory.  
Lecherous salesmen of cityshackle delight.

Cobra,Cobra,Cobra.

The hooded eyes complicit  
With quicksand trust.  
Taste me - taste me,  
Oh powderhead, waste me.

Poison,Poison, I got tha Poison.

Under the bridge, hog screeching sirens,  
And sinuous spiraling lights  
Splash this night of ice  
Into a loopy stutterstep.  
Well-advanced highs regurgitate  
The Cobra's bobbing head.

Cobra,Cobra,Cobra.

The cops are doing better stuff.  
It's out there on their sleeves.  
Duck down, snort it up, no paraphernalia.  
It's all Stripes,Stripes,Stripes.  
Stripes are dope - get ahead, get ya stripes

Cobra,Cobra,Cobra.

Oh you unnamed miracle - evanescent - shining  
Glorious god or goddess - soul instructor  
Magic Cobra cousin to the Bullying Buddha, Joking Jesus  
Malicious Mary Magnum Mohammed, visit these ruins.

Cobra,Cobra,Cobra.

I'm talking Cobra beyond these stoops,  
Beyond these eyeballs frozen to a crystal prism,  
Without a clue which view is the way out.

Cobra,Cobra,Cobra.

Yo, Home, shake something else, something different.  
Shake a word loose into the cooker.  
It'll stay there till you use it.  
Make the word a tiny one a weak one.  
Unable to make a block or get up the stoop  
Weak from non-use. Give it exercise.  
Which word? Figure it out.  
Go through every word you know until your guts go silent.

Light it up - Cobra,Cobra,Cobra - Dance.

DAVID HUBERMAN

### BACON AND BLINTZES

"Give me a plate of cheese blintzes, some crisp bacon and a chocolate egg cream" I announced to the waitress in some Lower East Side Polish eatery. "And don't forget the sour cream." They always forget to bring me the sour cream and always bring me apple sauce. I hate apple sauce. The waitress doesn't blink an eye at my order. Money's hard to come by in this town and she wanted her tip. She wouldn't dare say that bacon and blintzes didn't go together. But there's always somebody who has to put their two cents in where it doesn't belong, and in this case, it's the guy sitting next to me. An old gray-haired geezer. He smelled like garlic sour pickles.

"What do you have against apple sauce!" he growls at me.

"Now look," I say, "It's none of your business, but if you want to know, I associate apple sauce with death."

"With death?" he says, puzzled.

"Yeah, death. Only two types of people eat apple sauce: people coming into this life and people going out of this life. Most people who eat apple sauce at my age have five years left -- tops."

"But it's good for digestion" he says.

"That's a lot of phooey" I say. "Another American Medical Association myth to bring in the bucks. When you have to eat apple sauce, it means you can't take it no more, it means you'll never be a contender in the boxing ring of life. It means ulcers, hemorrhoids, swollen prostates, too much gas, too much acid, too much stress. It means your boss is getting to you, that you can't get it up for the old lady; it means that your kids became serial killers instead of serious accountants; it means backaches, muscle spasms, goobers sticking out of your nose, listening to John Denver records every night, watching "I Love Lucy" reruns on cable -- or if you don't have cable, those fake television preachers. It means having no teeth and wearing dentures, going to see movies like "The Prince Of Tides," reading romance novels with no fucking in them. It means not even thinking of your dick other than to piss with it. It means a six-foot wooden box, it means the cold, cold ground....Hey buddy, where ya going? -- What a spoilsport! Hey, waitress! What about my order of bacon and blintzes, and don't forget the sour cream!"

### PSYCHO TV SHOWS

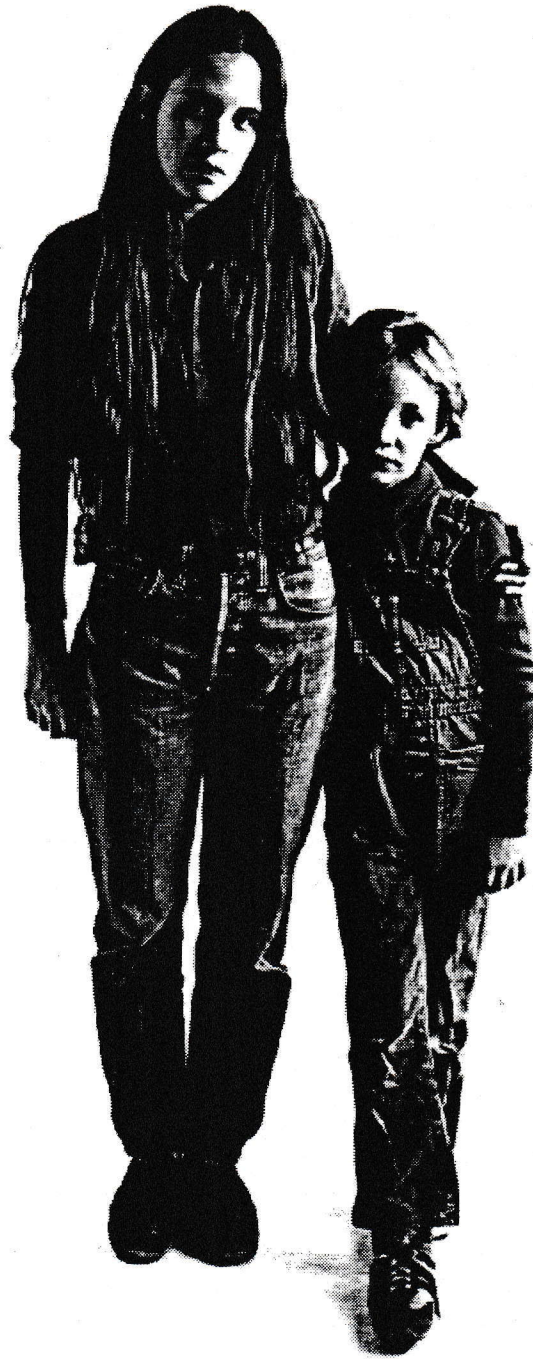
**"WE ARE NOW TAKING OVER YOUR T.V. SCREEN. YOU HAVE JUST ENTERED THE OUTER LIMITS!"**

"Martha!! Shut that shit off! I HATE those psycho T.V. shows. Yeah, "we're taking over your television sets." Gimme a break -- Time-Warner took over a long time ago! It beats me, Martha, that we pay \$30 a month for that damned cable television, and most of the stuff they show is that psycho garbage. "Twilight Zone," "Outer Limits," "Hitchhiker," "One Step Beyond" -- I hated those shows when you could see them for free! Now ya gotta pay for them. Alfred Hitchcock: Now he was the only one who had something to him. He knew how to make that psycho stuff work. When he presented his T.V. show, I actually got terrified; it was art when he did it. But he's dead and everything else that followed is a buncha shit.

-- Look, Martha, I'll go to the video store and rent us some good old-fashioned Westerns."

"That's a very good idea, son -- and don't forget to pick up some light bulbs for the motel lobby. But, **Norman**, don't ever call me by my maiden name again! It's Mother Dearest to you! You sniveling, wretched, cowardly, stupid jerk. Where's my riding crop? Where's those clothes hangers? **N O R M A N !!!**

I WAS A TEENAGE WELFARE MOM.



IT WAS ME THAT CAUSED THE DEFICIT AND YOU LET  
ME GET AWAY WITH IT! (IT WAS NOT DESERT STORM,  
THE S AND L BAILOUT OR REDUCED TAXES FOR THE RICH)  
**LOOK—SEE FOR YOURSELF!**

KATHERINE ARNOLDI

Seventeen

We are not seeing ourselves here.

We are seeing ourselves in magazines with our jean buttons open, our hair long and straight. We are seeing ourselves looking up at the camera, lying back on steps that lead up to a building we are supposed to know about.

We are walking on cobblestones.

We are wearing geometry.

We are lying on our elbows with rippled hair that begins a rippled desert. We are on our tippy-toes, our knees; we are licking our fingers, popsicles. We need MOISTURE.

We are seventeen.

For now we are working at Perry Rubber, at Burger King, at Sam's Steakhouse. For now we are needing a muffler, a box of Tide, to pay the hospital.

We are out on the stoop, thinking about the future, our future.

Pizzas from a box do not taste so good anymore. Lemonade from a can has gone up.

We are trying not to show.

Who we are are all women. We are all women in a warehouse room. We are wearing hairnets. We are wearing face masks. Covered in talc, we are a hundred, maybe more. Who we are are the inspectors. We are a roomful of inspectors. We are a roomful of inspectors under the florescent lights.

We are a roomful of inspectors thump-pooshing our air buttons, blowing up our rubber gloves, looking for pinholes, defects. We are all women. We do not know why there are no men.

We are beginning to show.

Our water is supposed to break. We do not know what that means. Your water breaks, then you go to the hospital.

We are carrying trays of food through double doors. On one side everything is carpet, cool, candlelight, white tablecloths, red napkins, the clink of glasses, the muffled sound of ice shaking. On the other everything is dropping, clanging, steel surface, slippery tile, plates of steakbones, steam, comfort, warmth.

All things are full of labor, our mothers say. We are the girls that are beginning to show. Our mother are at work. Our fathers we have not yet met. When the sun sets the boys will be snow under the streetlights; when the sun rises, we will watch the fire hydrant water fall. We are the girls that you must see. We are on the out skirts of town, walking by the side of the road, standing in line. We are leaning on the porch with New York in our eyes, with Canton, Ohio, with Huntsville, Arkansas, San Pedro, Guatamala, Delhi there. We are the ones the men want to rock like a horse when we are a whirl of dust, when we are too young. We are in the cane with no way out, in the warehouse room, back there under the bed, hiding.

We will take our diaper bags out. It is necessary for us to crawl across the railroad tracks, to hit the top of our heads, to make a bigger graph, a longer curve. A hundred of us thump-pooshing our air buttons, with clouds above the florescent lights, with varicose veins to hide. Not for one moment are we not smiling, are we not polite, do we not commiserate.

Counting is not something that is done to us. We count the days until this, the hours until that. It is 11:49, 11:50, 3:24, 3:29, six months from a G.E.D., almost closing time.

We are not seeing ourselves here. If we are walking by the side of the road, pushing a stroller, it is just because the bus was late. We cannot get one more pink slip. If you see us in line it is because we are thinking ahead, past the end of the line, way up front. We are seeing ourselves in the future, wearing something different than what we have on just now, in a place of our own.

We are not seeing ourselves here at the end of the line, explaining that our heat has been turned off, that we might need some help. We are not seeing ourselves being told that we make too much, but that if we do not get our heat back on by next week, she is sorry, but she will have to put our children in foster care.

We are still seeing ourselves in magazines. We want to be discussing date rape in a circle of girls from the dorm. We want to be on assignment in Brazil, in Paris, in Sarejevo. We want to be discussing the health care system, giving input. We want to have our picture taken in front of our paintings; we want to take our shirts off in the park, to read our poetry up there at the mike.

Every page is something we want to see ourselves being. We are turning page after page, looking back and forth. There are boots and flannel, leather and dresses with flowers. What we are really looking for is ourselves. We are turning pages, looking at the background for a teething ring, a box of Pampers, a child running up behind with arms outstretched, hungry. We are not seeing teenagers who are mothers. There are no mothers at all. There are none of us that are part of the collective, setting up installations, chipping in for the lights, the set. It is not us there getting the tattoo, having something pierced, walking with the man with the baggy pants and the crew cut, living in the loft with the man who is also a sculptor who is also in the band. We do not see any factory workers, no one with a hairnet on, a face mask, no one in a roomful of one hundred women thump-pooshing our air buttons, trying to make quota. No one with an apron, a tray of drinks, no one in a hat from Burger King. No one like we are. We are still looking front to back. We have to be honest, to face up. We are not seeing ourselves here.



AFFECTED

She knew of four of her friends and a sister that had the virus. Her sister was the first to tell her; until then she thought nothing of the virus. She knew it was a sexually transmitted disease. When her sister told her, she had come apart. It was the first time in many she would be visiting her in the hospital.

She couldn't help but to think about the times that they had together. The fights they had growing up. The times they cried together, when her sister had her first child. She thought of them never growing old together. But for the most part there were the fear and the pain. The pain of her sister dying. The pain of never seeing her aging. And the fear of watching her die. She knew her sister drank a little and sometimes sniffed cocaine; also her boyfriend was an I.V. drug user. During the first year of finding out her sister had the disease, she found out about her friends. They were all close friends of hers. Three of them were also I.V. drug abusers. They were at many times getting high together. So she had no other choice but to go and get tested.

That was one of the hardest times of her life. Her sister and two friends were in the hospital then. When she went she found out it was confidential and she also had to get AIDS counseling. After taking the test, for the next three weeks she found out as much as possible about the H.I.V. and AIDS virus. She had to take a hard and honest look at her life. She had also an alcohol and drug problem. She was having unprotected sex. When it was time to go get the results, she went alone. When the test came back negative, she thanked God. The virus was killing her friends and family. She is as much affected as they were infected. The next step for her was to go to the Minority Task Force on AIDS and volunteer. There she learned a great deal about the disease. She also learned how to do out-reach. She went to the orientation meetings where she learned how to educate people about AIDS, and she got help for her alcohol and drug problem.

The hardest times are when one of them goes into the hospital. She feels so helpless and powerless. There is nothing she can do for them but pray. Watching them waste away to an image of their former selves is hard.

The deaths coming one right after the other.



MARIA OLDS

**I BET YOU NEVER:**

Walked up the side of a mountain.  
Through a village of tall grass, over a small pond, with  
The sun beaming on your body, sweat dripping off your head,  
Insects biting you all over your back,  
Just to get to the top.  
After six to eight hours you finally get there.  
And oh what a sight  
You can see half the world it seems.  
So green and beautiful.  
The sky so blue.  
You feel like you just climbed your way to heaven.

MY NIGHT WITH CAMILLE PAGLIA

The invitation shows Glenn in his blond wig and housewife dress. Camille Paglia stands on his right. *You are invited to the opening party for The Interview Video With Glenda Orgasm And Camille Paglia*. Wowee! I can finally meet her. An idol. An anti-feminist with brains and endocrines. A fast talker who refuses to buy into the "we're all victims" or "sex is bad" lines. Camille Paglia, a smart tough woman who takes shit from all sides and flings it back.

Glenn invites me because I had a small part in an earlier video called CAT FIGHTS. That one he produced with Kristine Martin, a dominatrix with an MFA. I appear for a few seconds with *punk provocateur* subtitled over my Adam's apple.

The party's gonna be in a week, upstairs at USA, a Times Square disco noted for its patrons with shag haircuts and chewing gum. I don't care. I'd brace a hundred Trans Ams to meet this woman.

Immediately, I start rehearsing the line I'll use when I'm introduced.

"Hi," I'll say, "My name is Mykel Board. I've always wanted to meet you because I've been compared to you more than any other living person except Rush Limbaugh."

She'll laugh. Then we'll sit at a little table in the corner and discuss date rape. As the evening ends, I'll invite her to my apartment to look at my back issues of *On Our Backs*.

When the big night finally arrives, I wear my *Girls Against Women* t-shirt and take the subway to the disco. Once there, I push through the teens bunching in front, waving twenty dollar bills. I flash my invitation at the male model standing in the doorway. He unclips the velvet rope and lets me pass. I then exchange the invitation for a red ticket and go into the club. On the first floor, girls with long fingernails slip down a spiral slide to the dance floor. Next to the coat check, is a stairway. I take the stairs. Up and up, I climb, hiking to the second most appealing aspect of the night: *an open bar*.

The staircase ends in a dark room. Loud house/disco music booms from the wall speakers. After my eyes adjust, I realize I'm the oldest one there. Also, I'm one among the myriad of genders that makes humanity so unique. Many of the boys wear blue Levis, their t-shirts slightly less designed to show their breasts. A few of either gender wore dresses. There is a bar in the back with TV screens over it. Now the screens are blank, later they'll show the interview video.

Camille, in the distance, is surrounded by a mix of them all. Two big black men, with tree trunk arms and downtown haircuts, stand on either side of her. They never talk to her, but constantly survey the crowd.

Camille leans with her back against the bar. Her eyes are half closed. She smiles and nods as people come up to her. Even though I've rehearsed my line so well, I don't have the guts to just walk up and introduce myself. Instead, I claw through the crowd to have a free beer. Next to the bar stands Kristine.

The MFA aspect of her personality loses itself in her loosely tied trenchcoat. It would be somewhat conservative if it didn't hang open enough to see what's underneath. And that's not much: only a white pushup bra and panties. On her feet: blue & white polka dot pumps (open toes, 5" heels). The stockings, white are held up with black garters -- of course.

"Mykel" she screams, stumbling towards me. "Let me buy you a drink."

"I thought it was an open bar," I say

"It is! It is!" she answers. Then she turns to the bartender. "Champagne for Mykel -- and Sheryl!" Kristine gestures toward the beautiful Afro-Philadelphian to her right.

Sheryl wears severely cut-off cut-offs and a t-shirt that says *Girls Against Women*. She's curating a *The Other Side of Feminism* video festival for the New

Museum on Broadway. I ask her about the festival. "Is it anti-feminist?"

"It's all gonna be funny movies. Satire, slapstick, stuff to laugh at," she says. "Of course, it's anti-feminist."

I slug down my champagne and set down the plastic glass, fascinated by the black woman.

"More champagne for Mykel and Sheryl!" yells Kristine. The bartender, obviously a friend, trots right over and refills our glasses.

I glance over at Glenn who now stands next to Camille. His blond wig tilts slightly forward as he gestures about something. Camille braces herself with both arms behind her against the bar. Her feet push out in front of her, gradually sliding farther and farther away.

Sheryl sees me looking and asks, "Have you met Camille yet?"

"No," I answer, "I want to. I've been rehearsing this meeting line for a week. She's one of my idols!"

"But first another drink!" shouts Kristine. "More champagne for Mykel and Sheryl!"

As we drink, Kristine talks about Ms. Paglia.

"She hates me," she says. "She thinks I only want her body. Annie Sprinkle wrote to her that she should sleep with me. Now she just thinks I just want to fuck her. It's not true! I love her mind!"

I look toward the topic of our conversation. Camille now sits directly on the bar, propping herself on one elbow. In one hand she has a glass filled with yellow liquid. The other drapes over the shoulder of a young woman wearing a long black dress.

"Hey isn't that Sandra?" asks the film curator.

"Who's . . .?" I didn't have time to complete the question. Sheryl runs through the crowd around Camille.

"Sandra!" shouts Sheryl.

"Sheryl" shouts Sandra.

The woman who has been under the arm of Ms. Paglia now breaks away and embraces the black directress. Camille nearly slides off the bartop reaching for her parting partner.

After a few minutes of discussion, Sheryl comes back over to me. "That was Sandra," she says, "She was in my first movie. I made it when we were both in college. She was a lot butcher then. Now she's Camille Paglia's girlfriend! Imagine that!"

I look over and see that Camille has regained a bit of composure. She still sits on the bar but now she's more upright. The now three quarters empty drink in one hand, and the other again draped over Sandra's shoulder.

"I don't think Camille likes me very much, either," says Sheryl. "She wasn't very friendly."

Considering the state of unfriendliness, I decide to make my move before there is even more tension. Kristine gets me another glass of champagne to fortify myself before the introduction.

I squeeze my way up to Glenn, who is now surrounded by a little crowd himself. I tug on the side of his housedress.

"Introduce me," I whisper, "I wanna at least meet her before one of us passes out."

"Sure Mykel," he says, "in a minute."

Sheryl leaves her spot at the bar to walk up behind me. I don't see her. Glenn is introducing me to Ms. Paglia.

"Camille," says Glenn, "this is Mykel Board. He was in the *Cat Fights* video."

Camille extends a limp hand, looking over my head at the approaching Sheryl.

"I've always wanted to meet you," I tell her, "because I've been compared to you more than any other living person except Rush Limbaugh."

My delivery is flawless.

"That's nice," she says addressing the top of my head. "How do you *really* know her?" she yells over me. "And what kind of film was that anyway?"

Sheryl freezes. "It was a student film," she yells, "Just an arty . . ."

The disco music suddenly gets louder and the TV screens over the bar come alive. It's the video. Glenn, in the same dress, wearing the same wig, interviews Camille in front of a fountain someplace. The video sound is off. *Super Model* discos through the speakers.

There is a scream. It's not a scream of horror or joy, but one of complete frustration. The hubbubbing crowd immediately shuts up. Silently the various cross-fashionettes turn toward the screamer. It's Kristine.

Her trenchcoat is undone. The skin between her bra and panties glistens with sweat. She stomps her high heels up and down. Pow! Pow! Pow! She barely keeps her balance between her stomps.

"I'm getting out of here!" she yells. "I can't take it."

She points to Glenn.

"That boy was practically a Communist. I taught him everything he knows about anti-Feminism and the evils of PC-ness. Now, he's the star and they're ignoring me. Just 'cause I'm a woman!"

She pushes through the stunned crowd toward the exit. Sheryl follows Kristine. I follow the dazzling Sheryl. We end up at *The Boy Bar* on St. Marks Place.

The cab ride is a blur. I guess I'm a bit sensitive to champagne. The tall skinny boy at the door knows Kristine. He lets us in without question or cover charge. Kristine also knows the bartender.

"Champagne for Mykel and Sheryl!" she says. It's getting difficult to stand.

We go downstairs to the dance floor. During brief periods when my eyes are focused I see a big stage. It's half lit, as if the crowd expects a performer to appear. One does. It's not what they expect.

It's Kristine. She jumps on stage and starts shaking her hips. The trenchcoat slips from her shoulders. The boys on the floor quit what they're doing and watch. Kristine moves those special parts that girls move. Dollar bills soon flap greenily from the sides of her underpants. By now, the champagne catches up with me. I crumple against a wall. The next I know, I'm home, in bed, not feeling too well.

The next day I call Sheryl.

"I talked to Sandra," she tells me, "I called her this morning, but Camille answered the phone. It wasn't easy to get through to her."

"That's ok," I say, "I wasn't interested in talking about Camille anyway. What are *you* doing tonight?"

CAMILLE WHO? THE SAGA OF PAGLIA

Move over, Leona Hemsley, and welcome the new "Queen of Mean." But unlike you, Camille Paglia wears the title like a badge of honor. For her being offensive truly is the best defense, is the smartest way to hide the fact that beneath a vitriolic, albeit viruotic, garbling of factual confetti, she is neither original nor particularly interesting.

Paglia, with all her invective and venom, her interest in discos, rock concerts, football games, and drag queens, still squints myopically through rose-tinted academic spectacles, her vision bounded squarely by the sheltered ivory towers she so adamantly disdains. Paglia is an apostle of the trendy, a closet demagogue, who takes the metaphor of myth and religious experience as literal reality. One of her favorite "factual sources" is Fraser's Golden Bough. She even brags in Sex, Art, and American Culture that what separates her from contemporary academicians is that her "time-frame is so vast compared to that of people in English departments." When she "thinks about anything (she is) thinking about a 10,000-year time span..." (p. 257). Besides the fact that debating the issue of women's sexual power using the example of Helen of Troy--or Cleopatra for that matter--makes about as much sense as Dan Quale debating the issue of single parenthood with Murphy Brown, a fictional TV character, one wonders about her sources of information for about (giving her the benefit of the doubt) 5,000 years of her enlightened perspective--a time span which even predates Buddha and Confucius and written language by a few thousand years.

If reading Camille Paglia's Sexual Personae is an exercise in exasperation and self-control, reading her collection of essays, Sex, Art, and American Culture, is an exercise in masochism. The first volume in her "great opus," Sexual Personae is full of speculation, half-truths, and downright fiction. Rather than being an outlaw, an outsider, she is, in fact, a representative of the ultimately fashionable in current philosophy, she is a spokeswoman for the academic post-modern cliché--a combination of Nietzsche, Freud, the Marquis de Sade, flavored with a little Frazer and Jung, heavily influenced by Harold Bloom and odds and ends, bits and pieces of other thinkers brought in when necessary to prove her point.

Paglia is the quintessential theoretician, the consummate observer, picking a piece here, a bit there in a crazy quilt of speculation, paranoia and hyperbole in a kind of absurdist intellectual mix-and-match. She relies heavily on the ideas of Sigmund Freud--particularly his views on women--in works like Civilization and Its Discontents in which he declares that "...women soon come into opposition to civilization and display their retarding and restraining influence... The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable. ...the woman finds herself forced into the background by the claims of civilization and she adopts a hostile attitude towards it." (p. 59) This is the kind of theorizing that allows Paglia to state that: "Male lust...is the energizing factor in culture. Men are the reality principle. They created the world we live in and the luxuries we enjoy. When women cut themselves off from men, they sink backward into psychological and spiritual stagnancy." (SAAC, p.24) Male testosterone has given us culture and civilization and male homosexuality is particularly potent because "Every gay man is recapitulating that civilization-forging movement away from the mother" while lesbianism is bad not only because it doesn't partake in this "progressive," "risky" forging but "seeking a lost state of blissful union with the mother, is cozy, regressive, and...too often intellectually enervating, tending toward the inert." (SAAC, pp.23,24)

Paglia envisions herself a reconstructed Queen of the Night. Resplendent in a black dress studded with stars, handcuffs, the moon and chains, she promulgates the excitement of S&M, (in theory she rushes to assure us) the glories of hot sex, (although now she implies she is celibate, a state she declares when some of the best

work of writers and thinkers is done.) She bemoans the paucity of much of academia (right on there), but what does she recommend? "...I think we should go back to demanding mastery of fact and even rote memory... I think rote learning is one way you train your mind. It's almost like weight training, in the physical sense." (p. 279) What Paglia is, in reality, behind the bravado and the rhetoric, is patriarchy's ultimate attack dog. The perfect male surrogate to lay out the perimeters of women's reality.

For Paglia women have seldom created anything culturally worthwhile. "Sappho and Emily Dickinson are the only woman geniuses in poetic history." (p. 203) Although the title of her book Sexual Persona has as a subtitle "Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson" and a picture of the two women on the cover, she actually only devotes two out of twenty-four chapter titles to real women--Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson. All the other chapters are devoted to how men deal with feminine topics--e.g. "Return of the Great Mother: Rousseau vs. Sade." The best she can do is place the powerful Paglian woman in an adversarial position important enough to make man create culture to defend himself from her power. But what Paglia is actually doing is playing on the backlash against the women's movement to make herself famous, setting up a "straw woman" on which to unleash her hyperactive hyperbole. Without feminism she wouldn't have an axe, or a set of teeth, to grind.

Paglia "blames" feminism for every important advance we have made in this country from Black Studies programs, multiculturalism, to rape crisis clinics, to the gay liberation movement. Would it were so! Paglia is such a fierce proponent of a return to the Sixties, but where was she? Did she ever leave the sanctity of her college dorm room where she listened religiously to the Rolling Stones to do anything but wander out on the streets looking for an "angry (sexual) fix?" The Sixties was more than LSD, rock and roll, and rebellion in her women's dormitory. Never once when she mentions her Sixties generation does she ever mention the fact of the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, the struggles for national liberation of African Americans and Latinos and Native Americans, Asian Americans, and on and on. The gay liberation movement was a result of the Stonewall rebellion. The Black and Women's Studies programs were the result of the struggle of African American and women students. People crossing the borders of race and gender and class fought together against the war in Vietnam and the neo-colonialism "at home and abroad." While Camille Paglia was shadow boxing in her college dorm listening to the Rolling Stones on her phonograph, the Sixties took place unnoticed by her.

Paglia accuses feminists of whining, but Sex, Art, and American Culture is just one big whine. It is indicative of her own egocentric, pugilistic view of history that Paglia thinks feminists thought up issues like wife-beating and date rape. In one of her more outrageous essays she calls most wife abuse a construction of white middle-class feminists who, if they understood working class passion, would realize that what they think of as abuse is really hot sex. A statement which is seconded only by her pronouncing that "Everyone who preached free love in the Sixties is responsible for AIDS." (p.254)

The real question is why is someone like Paglia so popular, particularly with an opus like Sexual Persona that almost no one could read through. Paglia's popularity lies, regardless of what she believes, not in her arguments, as spurious as they are in her books, but in the image she portrays--superficially brash, iconoclastic, and rebellious--a woman with attitude. She is a perfect representative of an era where debates are prize fights, the winning blow is what counts--fact, logic, and coherence being of secondary importance. More than anything else she is a reflection of the general "remote control" mentality of our generation--she is easy to leaf through, picking out the juicy repartee and bitchiness; she presents herself as the consummate rebel, her rebellion as alluring and as superficial as a posed portrait in the fashion magazines she loves so much. She is all appearance and no substance--a true icon of our age.

The importance of Paglia is that she is a grotesque caricature of our own folly, our rigid categorizing of classes of people we don't wish to hear from or be associated with even if we are them--because make no mistake, no matter how she puts them down, her appeal is to the middle class. Paglia trades on our willingness to follow anyone who says the right words, gives us a few strokes in the right places, and gives us a good, entertaining performance, no matter how shallow and stupid it might be.

Contrary to Paglia's contention that we're living "a sad and totalitarian life...with no literature and no art and nothing but these sermonizing lessons that we must learn!" (SAAC, p. 289) we are in the middle of a cultural renaissance in this country that gathered its energy precisely from the National Liberation Struggles, the counter-culture, and the Civil Rights Movement she so cavalierly disdains to mention.

The truth is that Paglia doesn't give a shit about women, she is pandering to men and to women's fear of being cut off from men (read: establishment power). If there was an anthem from the Sixties to be emulated, it is not The Rolling Stones' "Under My Thumb," it is Dylan's "The Times They Are A'Changing."



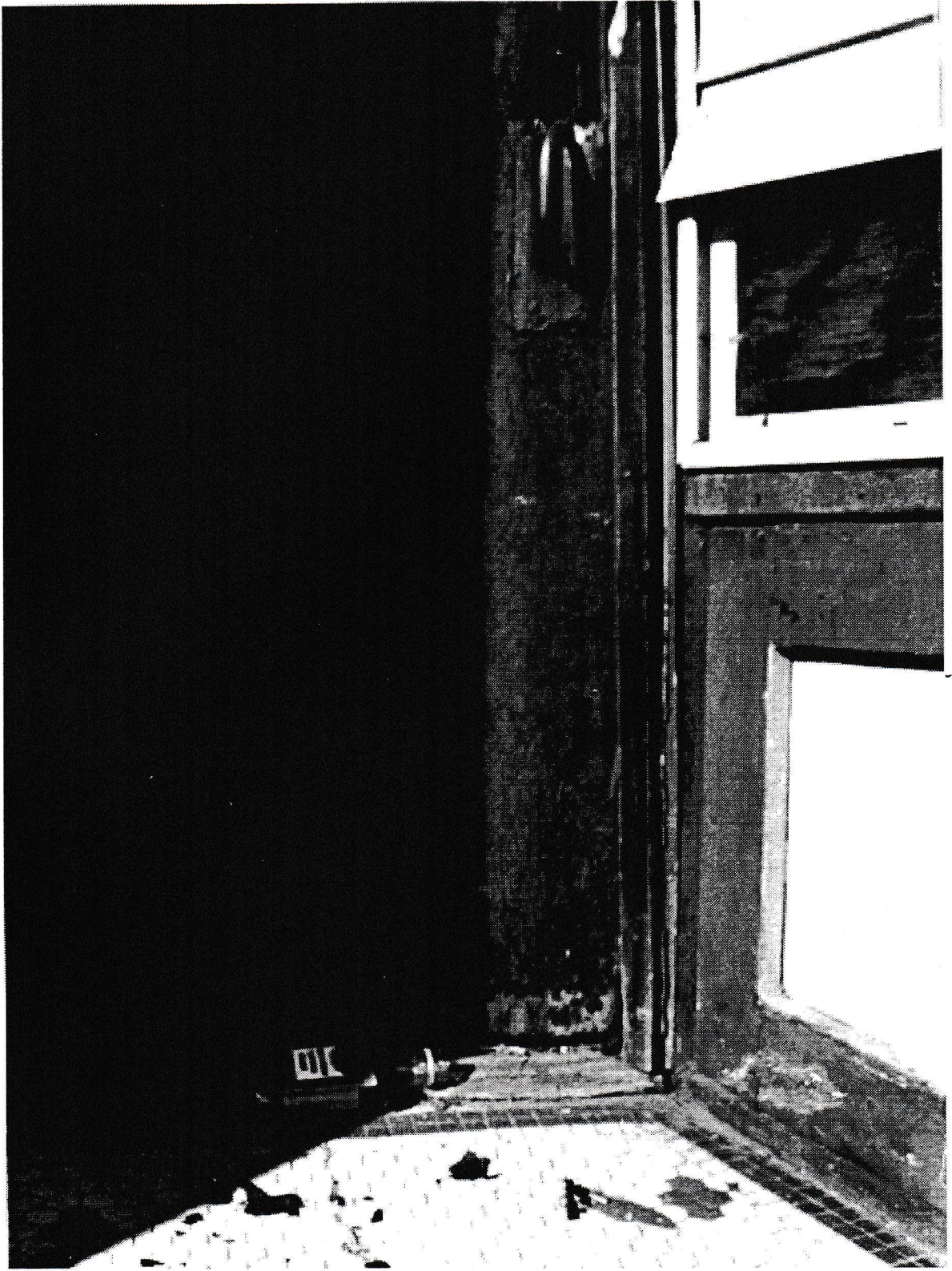


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# *Table of Contents*

J.D. Rage .....	2
JAN SCHMIDT .....	3
Photo by J. D. Rage .....	6
SUSAN SHERMAN .....	7
CHARLENE CAMBRIDGE.....	9
RONNIE SWAIN-GALICKI .....	10
JENNIFER BLOWDRYER .....	11
KEN DIMAGGIO .....	12
Photo by Ken DiMaggio .....	16
J.D. RAGE.....	17
BOB HART .....	20
BRUCE WEBER.....	21
BOB WYKA .....	23
Photo By Arthur Rivers .....	24
CHANTAY JONES.....	25
EAK EDUARDO ARROCHA.....	26
Ptr Kozlowski .....	27
g. a. bonati .....	28
STEVE FRIED .....	29
SID BRANCH .....	30
will inman .....	31
Photo of will inman by LaVerne Harrell Clark .....	31
HAL SIROWITZ .....	33
JAN SCHMIDT .....	34
p. skiff .....	37
Photo Computer Art By Dean Snyder .....	38
DEAN SNYDER .....	39
Photo Computer Art By Dean Snyder .....	41
RICHARD CHASE .....	42
DAVID HUBERMAN .....	43
KATHERINE ARNOLDI .....	44
MARIA OLDS .....	47
MYKEL BOARD.....	49
SUSAN SHERMAN .....	52
Photo by J.D. Rage .....	55
Table of Contents .....	56
Photo By Ken DiMaggio .....	57

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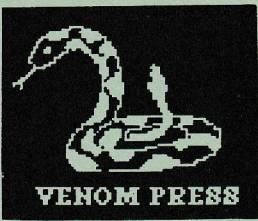
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