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Miller and Hemingway*gl

Miller and Hemingway*



Henry Miller, his work embraced, which is to say swallowed in four or five weeks, and then re-read over another month or two, can sit in one's mind with all the palpability of a huge elm lying in your back yard. The nobility of the trunk is on the ground for you to examine, not to speak of the rich nightmare of the roots and crawlers. To read Miller in that short a period reopens the old question which is always too large: What is a man? Just as our uprooted elm would take on constellations of meaning as it lay in the yard, until finally it could be reminiscent of a battleship, or a host of caverns in Hieronymus Bosch, so might you be forced to ask: What the devil is a tree? Just so does Miller return us to the first question of humanism. What, finally, is a Man? Nothing is settled after all. We have been given the illusion that we know Miller, know every one of his vices, peccadilloes, hustles, horrors, cadges, gifts, flaws, and transcendent generosityes, are, yes, familiar with that man who is by his own description "confused, negligent, reckless, lusty, obscene, boisterous, thoughtful, scrupulous, lying, diabolically truthful . . . filled with wisdom and nonsense." Nonetheless, when we are done reading, we wonder if we know anything. It is not that he bears no relation to the Henry Miller who is the protagonist of his books. (That Henry Miller is, indeed, the ultimate definition of the word protagonist.) No, the real Henry Miller, which is to say, the corporeal protean Miller a few writers knew intimately and wrote about well, Anaïs Nin being the first, is not very different from his work, but more

* Excerpts adapted from *Genius and Lust*.

like a transparency laid over a drawing, copied, and then skewed a degree. He is just a little different from his work. But in that difference is all the mystery of his own personality, and the paradoxes of a great artist. And the failure. For it is impossible to talk of a great artist without speaking of failure. The greater they are, the more they do not fulfill their own idea of themselves. Dostoyevsky failed to write *The Life of a Great Sinner*, and Tolstoy never brought a religious metamorphosis to man. Miller was never able to come to focus on the one subject which cried out to him: D. H. Lawrence's old subject — what is to be said of love between a man and a woman? Miller saw that Lawrence had come to grips with the poetry of sex but none of the sewer gas. Miller would strike matches to the sewer gas, and set off literary explosions, but he never blew himself over to the other side of the divide. While nobody can be more poetic than Miller about fornication itself — two hundred beer-hall accordions might as well be pumping away as he describes the more heavenly engagements he has played — the writing becomes an evocation of some disembodied but divine cunt and what it is doing to him — his appreciation equal to the enjoyment of a great symphony, yet he still cannot write about fucking with love. (Of course, it is fair to ask, who can?) Miller nonetheless pounds away on the subject like a giant phallus trying to enter a tiny vagina — in the pounding is one simple question: How the hell do you get in?

Miller has not lacked for adulation. A small but accountable part of the literary world has regarded him as the greatest living American writer for the last four decades and indeed, as other American writers died, and Hemingway was there no longer, nor Faulkner and Fitzgerald, not Wolfe, not Steinbeck, nor Dos Passos, and Sinclair Lewis long gone, Dreiser dead and Farrell in partial obscurity, who else could one speak of as the great American author? Moreover, Miller provided his considerable qualifications. One had to go back to Melville to find a rhetoric that could prove as noble under full sail. Miller at his best wrote a prose more overpowering than Faulkner's — the good reader is revolved in a farrago of light with words heavy as velvet, brilliant as gems; eruptions of thought cover the page. You could be in the vortex of one of Turner's oceanic holocausts where the sun shines in the very center of the storm. No, there is nothing like Henry Miller when he gets rolling. Men with literary styles as full as Hawthorne's appear by comparison stripped of their rich language; one has to take the English language back to

Marlowe and Shakespeare before encountering a wealth of imagery equal in intensity.

Yet it can hardly be said that the American Establishment walks around today thinking of Henry Miller as our literary genius, or one of the symbols of human wealth in America. Born in 1891, he will be eighty-five by December 26 of 1976, an artist of incomparably larger dimensions than Robert Frost, yet who can conceive of a President inviting him to read from his work on Inauguration Day, no, the irony is that a number of good and intelligent politicians might even have a slight hesitation over whether it is Arthur Miller or Henry Miller being talked about. "Oh, yes, *Henry Miller*," they might say at last, "the guy who writes the dirty books."

Even in the literary world, however, Miller's reputation survives in a vacuum. It is not that he lacks influence. It is not even excessive to say that Henry Miller had influenced the style of half the good American poets and writers alive today: Would books as different as *Naked Lunch*, *Portnoy's Complaint*, *Fear of Flying*, and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* have been as well received (or as free in language) without the irrigation Henry Miller gave to American prose? Even a writer so removed in purpose from Miller as Saul Bellow shows a debt in *Augie March*. Miller has had his effect. Thirty years ago, young writers learned to write by reading him along with Hemingway and Faulkner, Wolfe and Fitzgerald. With the exception of Hemingway, he has had perhaps the largest stylistic influence of them all. Yet there is still that critical space. Miller has only been written about in terms of adulation or dismissal. One does not pick up literary reviews with articles entitled "Ernest Hemingway and Henry Miller — Their Paris Years," or "The Social Worlds of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Henry Miller," no comments on "The Apocalyptic Vision of Henry Miller and Thomas Wolfe as Reflected in Their Rhetoric." Nor is there bound to be a work titled "Henry Miller and the Beat Generation," or "Henry Miller and the Revolution of the Sixties." Young men do not feel they are dying inside because they cannot live the way Henry Miller once lived. Yet no American writer, not even Hemingway, necessarily came closer to the crazy bliss of being alone in a strange city with no money in your pocket, not much food in your stomach, and a hard-on beginning to stir, a "personal" hard-on (as one of Miller's characters nicely describes it).

The paradox therefore persists. It is a wonder. To read *Tropic of*

Cancer today is to take in his dimension. He is a greater writer than one thought. It is one of the few great novels of our American century, a revolution in style and consciousness equal to *The Sun Also Rises*. You cannot pass through the first twenty pages without knowing that a literary wonder is taking place — nobody has ever written in just this way before, nobody may ever write by this style so well again. A time and a place have come to focus in a writer's voice. It is like encountering an archaeological relic. Given enough such novels, the history of our century could never be lost: there would be enough points of reference.

It is close therefore to incomprehensible that a man whose literary career has been with us over forty years, an author who wrote one novel that may yet be considered equal to the best of Hemingway, and probably produced more than Thomas Wolfe day by day, and was better word for word, and purple passage for purple passage, a writer finally like a phenomenon, has somehow, with every large acceptance, and every respect, been nonetheless ignored and near to discarded.

We must assume there was something indigestible about Miller which went beyond his ideas. His condemnations are virtually comfortable to us today, yet he is not an author whose complexities are in harmony with our own. Hemingway and Fitzgerald may each have been outrageous pieces of psychic work, yet their personalities haunt us. Faulkner inspires our reverence and Wolfe our tenderest thoughts for literary genius. They are good to the memories we keep of our reading of them — they live with the security of old films. But Miller does not. He is a force, a value, a literary sage, and yet in the most peculiar sense he does not become more compatible with time — he is no better beloved today than twenty, thirty, or forty years ago — it is as if he is almost not an American author; yet nobody could be more American. So he evades our sense of classification. He does not become a personality, rather he maintains himself as an enigma.

The authors who live best in legend offer personalities we can comprehend like movie stars. Hemingway and Fitzgerald impinge on our psyche with the clarity of Bogart and Cagney. We comprehend them at once. Faulkner bears the same privileged relation to a literary Southerner as Olivier to the London theatre-goer. A grand and cultivated presence is enriching the marrow of your life. Nobody wishes to hear a bad story about Olivier or Faulkner.

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Henry Miller, however, exists in the same relation to legend that anti-matter shows to matter. His life is antipathetic to the idea of legend itself. Where he is complex, he is too complex — we do not feel the resonance of slowly dissolving mystery but the madness of too many knots; where he is simple, he is not attractive — his air is harsh. If he had remained the protagonist by which he first presented himself in *Tropic of Cancer* — the man with iron in his phallus, acid in his mind, and some kind of incomparable relentless freedom in his heart, that paradox of tough misery and keen happiness, that connoisseur of the spectrum of odors between good sewers and bad sewers, a noble rat gnawing on existence and impossible to kill, then he could indeed have been a legend, a species of Parisian Bogart or American Belmondo. Everybody would have wanted to meet this post-gangster, barbarian-genius. He would have been the American and heterosexual equivalent of Jean Genet. But that was not his desire. Paradoxically, he was too separate from his work.

In fact, he could never have been too near to the character he made of himself in *Tropic of Cancer*. One part never fits. It is obvious he must have been more charming than he pretends — how else account for all the free dinners he was invited to, the people he lived on, the whores who loved him? There had to be something angelic about him. Anaïs Nin when describing the apartment in Clichy that Miller kept with Alfred Perles made the point that Miller was the one tidying the joint. "Henry keeps house like a Dutch housekeeper. He is very neat and clean. No dirty dishes about. It is all monastic, really, with no trimmings, no decoration."* Where in all of *Tropic of Cancer* is this neat and charming man?

The novel must be more a fiction than a fact. Which, of course, is not to take away a particle of its worth. Perhaps it becomes even more valuable. After all, we do not write to recapture an experience, we write to come as close to it as we can. Sometimes we are not very close, and yet, paradoxically, are nearer than if we had a photograph. Not nearer necessarily to the verisimilitude of what happened, but to the mysterious reality of what can happen on a page. Oil paints do not create clouds but the image of clouds; a page of manuscript can only evoke that special kind of reality which lives on the skin of the writing paper, a rainbow on a soap bubble. Miller is

* *The Diary of Anaïs Nin (Vol. 1)* (New York: The Swallow Press and Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), p. 62.

forever accused of caricature by people who knew his characters, and any good reader knows enough about personality to sense how much he must be leaving out of his people. Yet, what a cumulative reality they give us. His characters make up a Paris more real than its paving stones until a reluctant wonder bursts upon us — no French writer, no matter how great, not Rabelais, nor Proust, not De Maupassant, Hugo, Huysmans, Zola or even Balzac, not even Céline, has made Paris more vivid to us. Whenever before has a foreigner described a country better than its native writers? For in *Tropic of Cancer* Miller succeeded in performing one high literary act: he created a tone in prose which caught the tone of a period and a place. If that main character in *Tropic of Cancer* named Henry Miller never existed in life, it hardly matters — he is the voice and spirit which existed at the time. The spirits of literature may be the nearest we come to historical truth.

For that matter, the great confessions of literature are apart from their authors. Augustine recollecting his sins is not the sinner but the pieties. Stendhal is not Julian Sorel, nor Kierkegaard the seducer. *On the Road* is close to Jack Kerouac, yet he gives a happier Kerouac than the one who died too soon. Proust was not his own narrator, even as homosexuality is not heterosexuality but another land, and if we take *The Sun Also Rises* as the purest example of a book whose protagonist created the precise air of a time and a place, even there we come to the realization that Hemingway at the time he wrote it could not have been equal to Jake Barnes — he had created a consciousness wiser, drier, purer, more classic, more sophisticated and more graceful than his own. He was still gauche in relation to his creation.

The difference between Hemingway and Miller is that Hemingway set out thereafter to grow into Jake Barnes and locked himself for better and worse, for enormous fame and eventual destruction, into that character who embodied the spirit of an age. Miller, following, had only to keep writing *Tropic of Cancer* over and over, refining his own personality to become less and less separate from his book, and he could have entered the American life of legend. But Henry, eight years older than Hemingway, yet arriving at publication eight years later, and so sixteen years older in 1934 than Hemingway was in 1926, chose to go in the opposite direction. He proceeded to move away from the first Henry Miller he had created. He did not wish to be a character but a soul — he would be various. He was.

The cruelest criticism ever delivered of Henry James is that he had a consciousness (and a style) so hermetic that his pen would have been paralyzed if one of his characters had ever entered a town house, removed his hat, and found a turd on his head (a matter we would hope of small moment to Tolstoy or to Dostoyevsky or to Stendhal). Hemingway would have been bothered more than he liked. Miller would have loved it. How did his host react to the shit? How did our host's wife? My God, the way she smacked her nostrils, you can be sure her thighs were in a lather.

In fact, Hemingway would have hated such a scene. He was trying to create a world where mood — which Hemingway saw as the staff of life — could be cultivated by the scrupulosity with which you kept mood aloft. Mood surviving through the excellence of your gravity, courage, and diction, that is to say, your manners.

Hemingway's dreams must have looked down the long vista of his future suicide. So he had a legitimate fear of chaos. He never wrote about the river — he contented himself with the quintessentially American aesthetic of writing about the camp he set up each night by the side of the river: That was the night we made camp at the foot of the cliffs just after the place where the rapids were bad.

Miller became the other half of literature, an *espontaneo* without fear of his end, a literary athlete at ease in air, earth, or water. I am the river, he was always ready to say, I am the rapids and the placids, I'm the froth and the scum and the twigs — what a roar as I go over the falls. Who gives a fart? Let others camp where they may. I am the river and there is nothing I can't swallow.

Hemingway's world was doomed to collapse so soon as the forces of the century pushed life into a technological tunnel; with Hemingway, mood could not survive grinding gears, surrealist manners — here's shit in your hat — static, but Miller took off at the place where Hemingway stopped. In *Tropic of Cancer* he was saying — and it is the force of the book — I am obliged to live where mood is in the meat grinder, so I know more about it. I know all of the spectrum that runs from good mood to bad mood, and can tell you — a stinking mood is better than no mood. Life has been designed to run in the stink.

Miller bounces in it. We read *Tropic of Cancer*, that book of horrors, and feel happy. It is because there is honor in the horror, and metaphor in the hideous. How, we cannot even begin to say. Maybe, mood is vastly more various, self-regenerative, hearty and sly than Hemingway ever guessed. Maybe mood is not a lavender

lady, but a barmaid. Without stoicism or good taste, or even a nose for the nicety of good guts under terrible pressure, Miller is still living closer to death than Hemingway, certainly he is closer if the sewer is nearer to our end than the wound.

History proved to be on Miller's side. Twentieth-century life was leaving the world of individual effort, liquor, and tragic wounds, for the big-city garbage can of bruises, migraines, static, mood chemicals, amnesia, absurd relations, and cancer. Down in the sewers of existence where the cancer was being cooked, Miller was cavorting. Look, he was forever saying, you do not have to die of this crud. You can breathe it, eat it, suck it, fuck it, and still bounce up for the next day. There is something inestimable in us if we can stand the smell. Considering where the world was going—right into the world wide sewer of the concentration camps—Miller may have had a message that gave more life than Hemingway.

Papa & Son



What characterizes every book about Hemingway I have read is the way his character remains out of focus. Even a writer with an edge as hard as Lillian Ross did not seem able to catch him properly in her famous *New Yorker* piece. Hemingway was there, but much too precise in his portrait, as if he had sat for one of those neo-realistic paintings where the pride of the artist is to make the subject look as if he has been photographed, not painted.

For contrast, there is Carlos Baker's monumental biography and it gives us an immense amount of day-to-day material somewhat modestly undigested. It is nonetheless an invaluable book which every ambitious biography to come will evaluate detail by detail, a necessary task, for Baker's book was written with a determinedly soft focus as if the author felt his literary mission was not so much to present the man as to cover every year of Hemingway's existence in the recollections of his friends.

There is also A. E. Hotchner's book which gives a portrait, and most readable it is, but askew. Hotchner is using a wide-angle lens; the very nostrils of the great man are distorted. Sadly we learn there is reason to believe the materials are transposed. A long and marvelously articulated speech which Hemingway makes once to Hotchner turns out in fact to have been taken from a letter. It is a minor literary peccadillo of the sort professional magazine writers

commit often, since their skills mature in a school that demands you tell your story fast and make it track (and a quotation from a letter comes off slower than a man talking), but such methods breed distortion with their speed.

Now, we have here a book* written by a son about his father, written by a son who is not a professional writer as he is quick to tell you (although he can write interestingly enough — it may even be a book which will be read at one sitting by more than half the readers who pick it up). That is because it is unlike most books written by sons about great fathers. There is nothing slavish here. The son lies to the father, and the father pays him back, meanly; the son loves the father and the father loves him back, but in his own style, and it is remote enough for the son to hate him a little as well. If it is a portrait written in love, it is with all the sweets and sour of love. What characterizes love when not wholly blissful is how damnably sweet and sour it gets. It kills any man or woman if they have the bad luck to be deeply in love with a veritable son of a bitch, and every bad thing we have ever heard about Hemingway can find its echo in this book. You do not have to wonder when you are done why any number of men and women could know Hemingway well and hate him. Yet everything fine, noble, attractive, and splendid in the man comes in with its echo as well. For once, you can read a book about Hemingway and not have to decide whether you like him or not. He is there. By God, he exists. He is a father, good and bad by turns, even sensational and godawful on different days of the year, and his contradictions are now his unity, his dirty fighting and his love of craft come out of the same blood. We can feel the man present before us, and his complexes have now become no more than his moods. His pride and his evasions have become one man, his innocence and sophistication, his honesty and outsize snobbery, his romantic madness and inconceivably practical sense of how to be outrageously romantic, it all comes through as in no other book about Hemingway, and for the simplest reason — the father was real to the son. Whereas those of us who approach Hemingway from without have been in the position of trying to find the reality behind the legend, and that is an especially contemporary form of analysis which tends to come out wrong. Hemingway, when all is said, was a Midwestern boy seized by success and ripped out of every root, and

* *Papa* by Gregory H. Hemingway, M.D.

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My Friend, Jean Malaquais



I did not like this book* twenty years ago, and thought it disappointing. Since I had learned as much about writing from the author as from anyone alive, large demands were put upon the manuscript. Jean Malaquais was not only my good friend, perhaps even my best friend, but my mentor, more — he had had more influence upon my mind than anyone I ever knew from the time we had gotten well acquainted while he was translating *The Naked and the Dead* into French. Part of the friendship rested on his candor. He is hardly rich now, and he was poor then, as only a French intellectual who teaches an evening course at the New School can be bread-crust poor in New York, and he made no pretense — he was not in love with *The Naked and the Dead*. No, he was doing the translation because he needed the work. It proved a munificent sum. The publisher was giving him \$2,000, and in the course of the year, I added another \$1,000 out of shame. I had never seen a man work so hard at a job for which he did not have respect. In the year it took him to make that translation, he must have worked eight hours a day, five or six days a week; he was a perfectionist and a French stylist, and hated my prose in that book with much detailed justice: he would draw vectors across the pages to show how sloppily I had repeated words, or worse, *ideas* — how he detested anything slovenly in literature! He had, after all, fashioned the style of his own French prose out of the hungriest inner disciplines. Like Conrad, he was Polish, and also began to learn the language in which he would write

* (From an introduction to *The Joker*.)

only after he was out of his adolescence. Conceive of such hungry disciplines when he was a young emigrant from Warsaw who worked in French mines and came to clarify the literature of his new tongue by spending fourteen hours a day in the Bibliothèque Nationale in order to keep warm — it was cold on the winter streets of Paris in the years of the Depression — yes, learned his French by reading and writing in that library with all his imagination, ambitions and privations going into it, and took a post-graduate course in the hierarchical elegance of the tongue by being secretary to André Gide for a period, indeed met his future employer by composing a furious letter on the spur of reading a casual piece the author had done for a literary review.¹

In those pages, Gide had written that he sometimes wondered if poverty might not have deepened his art. We can imagine the irony with which he would surround so direct a sentimentality. Malaquais, however, pulled up the barbarism and shook it in the air. *You ought to get down on your knees and pray to that God you occasionally pretend to believe in that He has let you be a comfortable bourgeois so you can make your art.* Such was the note of the letter, a howl of ferocity torn right out of the bitterness of trying to write at the maximum of one's possible talents when there was no money in the pocket and no food in the belly. Gide wrote back to apologize. He confessed he had not been thinking of the situation of young writers like Malaquais for whom such words had to be naturally and justifiably intolerable, no, he feared he had been playing too inconsiderately with a conceit; he had wished to startle a number of his confreres who were overconcerned with their sensibility and so had been cushioning themselves against too much shock. He hoped to pose the possible stimulations of shock. But it had been unfeeling to ignore the situation of penniless young men like Malaquais and their sentiments on reading his words.² To the letter, Gide pinned a bill,

¹ I think it is worth printing Malaquais' corrections (by way of a recent letter) to a few of my biographical facts.

"The library was la bibliothèque Sainte-Genevieve, the only one in Paris that stayed open till 10 P.M. I'd remain there all day long (10-12 hours), often without a meal. At closing time I'd go to Les Halles where, with some luck, I'd be unloading crates of cackling poultry or frozen cabbage. Still, job or no job, I could always grab there an apple or a couple of carrots to keep the man alive."

² From Malaquais' letter: "Gide's piece, an excerpt from his *Journal* dated March 1935, appeared in the October issue of la Nouvelle Revue Française. I think it was December when I happened to read it. I had you a chance to look it up (cf. Justin O'Brien's transl., Knopf), I am sure you'd agree it was plain sentimental gibberish, and not in the least ironic. Idiocy was the price one had to pay for going along — even for a while — with the Stalinists."

something like ten pre-World War II francs. Let us say the sum might bring back twenty dollars' worth of groceries today. Malaquais tore up the money and mailed the scraps back to Gide. "Do not think," he wrote, "that you can buy a postage stamp for your soul. If you wish to do something for me, do something real, give me a job! Do not throw me crumbs!"

Now came another letter. Would Malaquais come and visit?³

"C'est toi, Malaquais?" asked Gide on the day he appeared.

"Oui, c'est moi. C'est toi, Gide?"

Could fifty years have gone by since a younger man had said "toi" to him? Still, it was the period of Gide's growing sympathy for the USSR. How characteristic to be intrigued, therefore, with a young Pole who was both an intellectual and a worker, not only a Marxist, but — perverse prize to esteem — a species of rare Marxist from some rarefied splinter group, the absolute antithesis, therefore, of all those Soviet bureaucrats with whom Gide was now trying to find tillable intellectual ground. All the more intoxicating to listen then to the concentrated polemic of a Marxist who was altogether anti-Soviet — that was in the grain for Gide. He could hardly move toward atheism without encouraging the friendship of every cleric he knew.

So began an intellectual relationship which would continue intermittently for years. If Gide was to absorb little of Marx from Malaquais (which may have been Gide's fault!) the new secretary was to learn a great deal about writing from the master.⁴ A decade and a half later during the winter and spring of 1949 while Malaquais was translating *The Naked and the Dead* and we became friends despite his aforesaid abomination of my writing (with which I secretly

³ *From Malaquais' letter:* "G. pinned to his letter a postal order for 100.00 francs (20.00 doll. is about right). I mailed it back, telling him he couldn't buy himself a piece of real estate in paradise at my expense. Not that I was beyond bribery. Had he sent 1,000.00 francs, I might have considered. But for 100.00 francs I'd rather have him stay in hell. That's when he wrote, would I come and visit."

⁴ *From Malaquais' letter:* "I was not G's secretary or otherwise in his pay. He did ask me from time to time to do this or that for him — read and comment upon the hundreds of letters (mostly insulting) he had received as a sequel to his two books on Russia; or he'd want me to put some order in his voluminous archives; or call on me at any odd hour for a game of chess; or drag me along the streets through lengthy aimless errands; or drop in my lap a manuscript of his and out of the corners of his eyes watch me as I sniffed over it, and so on. But there was never a question of employment or salary. Yet, it is true that he gave me a helping hand. He had me examined by his doctor, saw to it that I put on a few badly needed pounds of flesh, that I was taken care of when in the hospital, in short possibly kept me from spitting my lungs. And he supported me intermittently when I was writing my first book, and it was he who secured for Galy and myself the Mexican visa which saved our hides."

agreed — was I the first to think that *The Naked and the Dead* was a good novel in spite of its style?) I would be obliged in my turn to pick up Malaquais' literary precepts, live with them, wrestle with their intent, and even absorb one or two while hearing Gide's example cited so repeatedly during debates on style that I came to feel at last as if I knew him, or at least knew something of his taste and how his strictures were formed.

There was nothing slavish about Malaquais, least of all his mind. He was an intellectual sultan, still is, and so my ongoing education in the niceties of good writing was not a simple concert of homage to Gide — Malaquais had for his old employer the comfortable respect we offer a writer whose virtues are prominent but whose lacks are clear in our estimate. After any harangue by Malaquais designed to reduce my truculence toward elegance, severity, and restraint (which virtues were elevated through all of my friend's dialectic in order to purify the quality of *surprise* in one's work — a traditional Gallic presentation under the very shadow of the great literary chef, André G., himself) my mentor was also perfectly capable of saying in an aside, "Of course when it comes to an analysis of history, Gide is like a schoolboy. He has every gift for seizing the paradox of character — he is virtually the first to comprehend that character is paradox — but give him a social context and he will lose all instinct for the dialectic."

On reflection, it was true. Gide did not live with dialectic. His mind was singularly particular just where Malaquais' was marvelously abstract. Malaquais had the most powerful ability to move from any particular offered him into the Leviathan of his general theory — he was not a Marxist for nothing! — and trying to argue in his presence was analogous to being drawn with one's brain along a magnetic field of the intellect. Willy-nilly was one's mind reoriented along one Polish Frenchman's poles. Nothing vulgar or bullying about it. Malaquais loathed formula, propaganda, or any variety of thinking which deprived a situation of its nuance. So he was capable of advancing a new thesis, anticipating your objections, stating them with clarity (like Freud disarming his critics) and then would overtake his own verification of your position in the return swing of the dialectic. He would do this with such power that when he argued, the veins in his forehead would throb as though to demonstrate that the human head was obliged to be the natural site if not the very phallus of Mind. Malaquais would have at such times a remarkable resemblance to Picasso — the same noble vault of fore-

head and workingman's knob of a nose, same characterological determination of chin, same cleft. (Of course, Malaquais might detest the comparison. "What a stinker!" I heard him say once of Picasso.)⁵ Still, speaking of genius, I heard Malaquais give a lecture once at the New School. I never heard a better one. For fifty minutes he spoke (without a note) exploring into the recesses of a novelist's unique relation to his time — memory across the years suggests the lecture may have been on *Stendhal*, or was it *Proust*? — I only remember the sensation of feeling my intelligence conducted through exercises I might not ordinarily have been able to follow. He had the same intense application of energy upon a given point that one finds only in those few great athletes who bring absolute concentration to every instant of a contest and so reveal to you by their body movement some meanings of the sport. When Malaquais lectured, it was inconceivable that his mind and tongue could separate. To cerebrare was to speak. Once at a party, he went on for hours, dominated the conversation. When his wife later remonstrated, "Jean, you talked nine-tenths of the time," he grunted and said, "I had ten times as much to say." It was not arrogance. Merely his grim estimate of the proportions, grim because this small French Pole with his rugged face and mighty brow, his virile purchase on any question to come his way, this prodigy of debate, this behemoth of orality — he spoke out of the same gusto with which a good appetite devours steak — was a man locked in chains when it came to writing. No author ever had more to be grim about.

With no belief in karma, one might still have to postulate a phenomenon like reincarnation to explain the enormity of Malaquais' woes when he tried to write — only a soul paying in this life for outrages it had performed in another could pass through such suffering. So Malaquais may once have been Gilles de Rais. In the late Forties and the early Fifties when Jean was writing *The Joker*, just those years when I first came to know him well, he would sit at his desk for ten or twelve or fourteen hours a day, every day. It was his boast that he would not get up, not pace around, not break for a meal, no, he would sit, contemplate his page, and would write . . . to the tune of two or three hundred words a day. Two hundred words in ten hours! It is twenty words an hour, or a new word every three minutes. Can any torture be more horrifically designed for a man who

⁵ From Malaquais' letter: "Did I ever say of Picasso, 'What a stinker!'? If so, it must have been in relation to some concrete occasion, perhaps his drawing a 'dove of peace' in Stalin's honor."

could deliver an extempore lecture complete in thought, example, and syntax, a work of seven or eight thousand words in less than an hour, to be reduced now, down now, with a pen in his hand, to twenty words in sixty minutes? The culture of the past must have sat on his mind like Gibraltar. How could he dare to write about anything? Given his profound contempt for authors who rushed to place their shoddy artifacts into that small temple where only a few perfect works ought to be installed, how presume to add to the excrementa? So this flame-thrower of a mind (when free at its own unrecorded speech) was now confined to one burning wire which sought to drill a tiny hole into the rock of his weighty regard for the value of literature. A man who sat twelve hours at his desk in meditation might have enjoyed such a life even with no more than two hundred words a day, but Malaquais, like many an author before him, labored in depression and whole fatigue. "Yes," he said once, "if you want to do good work, you must *pisser le sang*," and he must have pissed the blood of every disappearing ambition into the hours he chained himself to that desk. What an effort! Over two years, then three years of just such work, slowly *The Joker* bored its little hole into the great rock of his resistance to himself, and Malaquais emerged at last with this novel.

2.

I was aghast when I read it. So much had happened in his life. He had escaped from the Germans after being a prisoner of war, then as a man without a passport had slipped out of Occupied France, only to become metamorphosized into a Jew again, obliged still to hide from the Nazis in Cadiz, while haunting visa factories like a character in *The Consul*, then a penniless émigré living by his wits in Venezuela and Mexico for the rest of the war. He had also been a movie-script writer with respectable credits and an award winner of a major literary prize, the Prix Renaudot, as well as the post-war author of a major novel, *Planete Sans Visa*, and a much-lauded war diary, an ideologist, a romantic, a Marxist, a man with a charmingly demonic wife as well as a critic with every elevated instinct for the kill. He had now written a book so empty of the novelistic riches of

his life, that I was in a fury as I read. I had wanted something I was not receiving. *The Joker* seemed bizarre and unlovable — a tract on the bureaucratic horrors of the future written in a nineteenth-century style, an inconglomerate, an *incondominium* of Kafka, *Alice in Wonderland*, some TV afternoon laugh-snort, and *Mission Impossible*. I thought it indigestible; worse, some of the dialogue was guaranteed to grate your teeth. Perhaps it was the fault of the translation I suggested in desperation. No, it was a fine translation, Malaquais insisted. He had worked closely with the translator, a most intelligent woman.

What was one to do with passages like this?

"I'm called Bomba," he said, "and she's called Kouka. What's your name?"

I took his hand absent-mindedly and said nothing. He had a grip of iron.

"You're a oner," he said.

A radio was blasting away on the mantel of a dummy fireplace. Mistress Kouka unstopped one of my jars and plunged her nose into it with delight.

"Oner, punner," she said.

No, Malaquais liked it fine. Nothing wrong with, "You're a oner."

It was obvious this intellectual conquistador had no feeling for the little rhapsodies of the English tongue. I told him what I thought of his book — he had hardly been gentle in his earlier turn on *The Naked and the Dead* and *Barbary Shore* whose imperfections were left forever mortal to me by his critique. What unconscious anger must have been stored in my own reactions; with what an unwitting hostility I must have gone through his pages. The recognition that Malaquais was not one of the world's greatest living writers exploded in me a critical response akin in judgment to a slave rebellion. I was obviously trying to forge my escape from all influence; Malaquais took it like a master. Indeed, it was his turn; if I had been one attentive student through every severity he visited on my work, so he absorbed everything I had to say on the faults of *The Joker*, listened with a half-smile on his face, that painful touch of merri-ment we feel when good friends are an abyss of agreement apart, and shook his head gloomily from time to time as if it were all too possible that what I had to say might even be true.

Still, he always recovered the private heat of that private and indispensable arrogance which had enabled him to drill the wire into the rock. No, he would always finish by saying, it was a modest book and doubtless had its serious flaws; *quand même*, it had its irreducible little value — he thought finally there was something to it. That was to prove a small consolation in the face of his ongoing poverty, and the modest reception when it came out, its even more modest sale, hardcover for a couple of thousand and no paperback, its quick disappearance. Even in France, where the reviews were good, the book did little.

None of that could have offered him much, and in fact he has not published another novel over all these twenty years — perhaps we keep writing fiction until the pressure of everything in the scheme of things which does not desire novels squeezes us back. It could be said that civilization will enter hell when no more good novels are written and the hum of the TV set is the only resonance in our ear — certain enough, at any rate, a novelist feels that void of substance in his soul (which saints refer to as hell) about the time all urge to write a novel has deserted him. Just as it is the human fate to die, so it may be the novelist's fate to stop writing novels — it comes finally out of the baggage of disappointment in one's life, a species of cumulative nothingness, and Malaquais' fictional talents have indeed been silent.*

Still, it was also part of the character, part of the dignity of a master, that my intense dislike of *The Joker* never affected our friendship, in fact may have improved it, for in coming to revere him less and comprehend him a little more, I came also to understand that he was made of the noble material from which the best friendships are formed.

For he was utterly without rancor at my dislike of his work, and it was a soup of good marrow for any friendship to know that the intensity of the critical standard he imposed on others was applicable to himself. Literary criticism had to exist for itself. This is what this good Marxist, full of his own paradox, proceeded to teach me: that there were more important things than vanity or self-expression. One of them was art. Critical standards were the praetorian guard of that most perishable majesty, art. It is, as an original insight, equal to the claim that one has discovered the wheel, but then every artist

* He has published a book: "Kierkegaard: Faith and Paradox" which must surely be one of the most extraordinary studies ever done on the Dane. Unfortunately it has not been translated from French to English.

may have to discover this wheel for himself, and I never knew another writer who was as impersonal about his own work and the work of others, friends or enemies, than Malaquais. If we are buddies we must naturally be ready to die for one another on the barricade, was his unspoken premise, but do not ever ask me to approve of a literary performance I cannot respect. Could anything be less American than to be ready to die for friends if they do not agree with you?

It is the last of my debts to Malaquais and far from the smallest. For whenever I cannot write with ease, whenever the weight of the stone I drag up the ramp of my own pyramid becomes onerous, and I wish for any other occupation than the heavy hours of a writer, the example of my good friend Jean is before me, and I bow my head and go to work again. "Start to pity yourself," says the little voice within, "and you will end up working as hard as Malaquais." How many friends can one count on to set examples for a life?

Narcissism



June Edith Smith, Henry Miller's second wife, became a figure of obsessive importance in his work. Seen first as Mara in *Tropic of Cancer*, she is called Mona in his trilogy, *The Rosy Crucifixion*, and that novel covers exhaustively (through sixteen hundred pages) the day-to-day movement of their five years together in New York. If the first book, *Sexus*, was begun in 1940 it was not finished until 1945, and *Plexus* took from 1947 to 1949. *Nexus*, the final volume, was not even started until 1952 nor done before 1959. Close to twenty years is spent on this magnum opus! Of course, he has written other books in the same time, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, *The Time of the Assassins*, *The Books in My Life*, *Big Sur* and *the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*, but he is not far from seventy when he is done. The mysteries of his relation with June-Mara-Mona have so beguiled him that he has spent thirty-six obsessive years first living with her, then writing about her, and he never succeeds, never quite, in making her real to us, that is, novelistically real, like Anna Karenina or Emma Bovary. Instead, she hovers in that tricky space between the actual and the fictional where everything is just out of focus. Indeed, Anaïs Nin in one page of her diary succeeds in making the lady as vivid as Miller ever can. (Yet, no more real.)

Henry came to Louveciennes with June. As June walked toward me from the darkness of the garden into the light of the door, I saw for the first time the most beautiful woman on earth. A startlingly white face, burning black eyes, a face so alive I felt it would consume itself before my eyes. Years ago I tried to imagine

a true beauty; I created in my mind an image of just such a woman. I had never seen her until last night. Yet I knew long ago the phosphorescent color of her skin, her huntress profile, the evenness of her teeth. She is bizarre, fantastic, nervous, like someone in a high fever. Her beauty drowned me. As I sat before her, I felt I would do anything she asked of me. Henry suddenly faded. She was color and brilliance and strangeness. By the end of the evening I had extricated myself from her power. She killed my admiration by her talk. Her talk. The enormous ego, false, weak, posturing. She lacks the courage of her personality, which is sensual, heavy with experience. Her role alone preoccupies her. She invents drama in which she always stars. I am sure she creates genuine dramas, genuine chaos and whirlpools of feelings, but I feel that her share in it is a pose. That night, in spite of my response to her, she sought to be whatever she felt I wanted her to be. She is an actress every moment. I cannot grasp the core of June.

By the end of the evening I felt as Henry did, fascinated with the face and body which promises so much, but hating her invented self which hides the true one.

Curious! If we fix on Miller's mind rather than June's beauty, Nin could be giving a description of Henry's talent: *startling, burning, phosphorescent, bizarre, fantastic, nervous, in a high fever*, full of *color, brilliance*, and *strangeness*, but possessed of an *enormous ego, false, weak, posturing*, and finally *lacking the courage of (its) personality*, leaving behind *chaos and whirlpools of feelings*. Yet it may be all a *pose*. One *cannot grasp* the core of Henry Miller, and one can come near to *hating* (his) *invented self which hides the true one*.

It works. If one is to judge Miller's talent by the vices of his mind, the result is not unequal to the flaws in June's beauty. No wonder they spend seven years together. It is a relation which proves compulsive yet is stripped of roots; as emotional as blood but as insecure as emotion itself. She will take him a long way in seven years from the hard-nosed Brooklyn hard-on he pictured himself to be when they met. More enterprising than he, wiser about the world, a better hustler, she convinces him to quit work and try to write while she makes their living. If ever there is an inner movement in his life, it is here. We are witness to his first metamorphosis. He changes from a promoter of bad debts and riotous Brooklyn nights, to a faithful and tortured young writer helplessly in love with a voluptuous woman

whose maddening lack of center leads him into an awareness of his own lack of identity. He comes to discover all those modern themes that revolve around the difficulty of discovering oneself. Soon he will dive into the pit of recognizing that there may not be any geological fundament in the psyche that we can call identity. Like June, he will have to re-create himself each morning. Soon, he realizes he has been doing it all his life. He has never had to look back in moral guilt because whatever act he committed yesterday could be looked in the eye today. The man who did it was no longer himself. In the act of doing it, he had become another man, free to go in a new direction. It could be 180 degrees away from yesterday's attempt. Tomorrow he may be close again to the man he was day before yesterday, but it will never be the same. Since he has a life full of adventure, mishaps, and constant lack of funds, since June brings in their living as irregularly as changes in the weather, so there is no nicety to his liberation. Miller's new psychic life is more like a scab-back scampering upfield on a punt return. He can lose ten yards as easily as gain them. And his head is forever ringing from the last concussion.

His confusion, however, is great; his passivity feels pervasive. He has changed from a stand-up hallway-fucker to an indolent husband-pimp. His wife is having the adventures. He is home doing the writing, sometimes the cooking. The wife is a consummate liar, and makes money off men to the tune of hundred-dollar bills dropped in from the sky, never tells him how, a woman even more changeable than himself, and vastly more bisexual — their love will crash finally when she brings home a girl to live with them, and becomes hooked on the girl. Sixteen hundred pages of *The Rosy Crucifixion* will founder on Miller's inability to penetrate these bisexual depths, or even come near them. He was brought up by a moral code that taught love was attached to the living room; one's family was one's house. The living room carpet was one's rock. Now he floats in a fluid as limitless as amniotic fluid. He has no limbs and his feet are over his head, his eyes smell sounds and his nose feels colors, he is in the confusion of living with a woman even more unpredictable than himself. He will not use the word, it is not in the vein of his literary blood, but our present temperament can have less difficulty in seeing him as a narcissist awash in the uncategorizability of such experience.

Let us look at the word with fresh interest, however. It is too sim-

ple to think of the narcissist as someone in love with himself. One can detest oneself intimately and still be a narcissist. What characterizes narcissism best is that the fundamental relationship is with oneself. That same to-and-fro of love and hate which mates feel for one another is experienced within the self. A special kind of insanity always underwrites the narcissist, therefore. The inner dialogue almost never ceases. Each half of oneself is forever scrutinizing the other. Two narcissists in love are not like two lovers who may feel a visceral need holding them together. Narcissists, rather, are linked up into themselves. They do not attach to each other so much as they approach like crystals brought into communication. They have a passionate affair to the degree that each makes it possible for the other to resonate more fully than when alone. Two narcissists might live together for fifty years in every appearance of matrimonial solidity (although it probably helps if money is present) but essentially, no matter how considerate they may be to one another, the mutual courtesies come more from the decision to be *loving* rather than issuing forth from a love which will express itself whether one wishes it or not. The narcissistic relation insists that the mate be good for one's own resonance. In the profoundest sense, one narcissist is never ready to die for the other. It is not love we encounter so much as fine tuning. Small wonder that the coming together of narcissists is the natural matrimony of the Stereo Century. Small wonder that Henry Miller, the last great American pioneer, is first to boff and bang his way across this last psychological frontier, there first with the most. No love in literature is so long recounted as his sixteen-hundred-page affair and marriage and separation from Mona. *The Rosy Crucifixion* becomes a literary cake as large as the Himalayas. Across half at least of its sixteen hundred pages are peaks and avenues and haunches and battlements and aretes and basins and summits and valleys of writing so good one shakes one's head. Pity the poor aspiring mediocrity of a writer who reads Miller without protection — he will never write another word if he has any decency left. Pity for that matter the good writer. At times Miller is too good.

Yet *The Rosy Crucifixion* is one of the monumental failures in the history of the novel. For those sixteen hundred pages, Miller knocks on the door of ultimate meaning, and it never opens a crack. By the end he is where he was at the beginning, at least so far as sexual satori is concerned. I-got-laid-and-it-was-wondrous is the

opening theme of the book. By the end not one new philosophical connection has been laid onto that first lay. Miller and the reader know no more of the wonders beneath the first wonder.

An obvious critical impulse is to decide the work is too long. But on examination it cannot be cut. Rather, as it stands, it is too fragmentary. Perhaps it should be a novel of four thousand pages. What Miller has bogged into (precisely because he is the first American to make the attempt) is the uncharted negotiations of the psyche when two narcissists take the vow of love. Yet it is finally his own true novelistic terrain. He has always eschewed politics as a literary subject (he merely issues calumnies against it). He has also been indifferent to the finicky if invaluable literary task of trying to place people in society, indeed, he never really writes about society except through metaphor. Since he is a great writer, however, his metaphors can occasionally draw the whole of society over one's brain like an incubus. He does this with his vision of the Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company and the unforgettable metaphor in *Tropic of Cancer* when Miller and Van Norden are exhaustedly fucking a worn-out whore like men standing up in the trenches.

His preference, however, is to create his literary world through the dreams and myths that are appropriate to his use. That has to be a perfumed and farty literary game unless there is real novelistic meat on each mythic tendon. So Miller naturally goes to sex for his meat. He is not a social writer, but a sexual writer. Even Lawrence never let go of the idea that through sex he could delineate society; Miller, however, went further. Sex, he assumed, was a natural literary field for the novel, as clear and free and open to a landgrab as any social panorama. One could capture the sex-life of two people in all its profundity and have quite as much to say about the cosmos as any literary plot laid out the other way with its bankers and beggars, ladies and whores, clerks and killers. The real novel, went Miller's assumption, could short-circuit society. Give it to us by way of a cunt impaled on a cock.

That is a herculean assumption. Because you need the phallus of Hercules to bring it off (and conceivably the brain of Einstein). A writer works with what he is given, and in Miller's case, for cosmic blast-off, he had a narcissistic cunt on a narcissistic cock and thirty-six years of bewilderment from the day of meeting his love to the hour he finished writing of her. She was so *changeable* went his everlasting lament.

It is hard enough for a man twisting a pencil through the traps and loops of his handwriting to get a character onto an empty page, but to create someone who shifts all the time! As soon teach one's spine to wind like a snake. The narcissist is always playing roles. If there is any character more difficult for an author to create than a writer more talented than himself, it must be a great actor. We do not even begin to comprehend the psychology of actors. Yet the narcissist not being obliged to conform to the severe discipline of the stage or the camera, is, in effect, on the measure of complexity, a great actor without a stage, a Hamlet without a sea of faces to listen to what is nobler.

The narcissist suffers from too much inner dialogue. The eye of one's consciousness is forever looking at one's own action. Yet — let us try to keep the notion clear — a narcissist is not self-absorbed so much as one self is immersed in studying the other. The narcissist is the scientist and the experiment in one. Other people exist, have value to the narcissist because of their particular ability to arouse one role or another in oneself. And are valued for that. May even be loved for that. Of course, they are loved as an actor loves his audience.

Since the amount of stimulation we can offer ourselves is obviously limited, the underlying problem of the narcissist is boredom. So there are feverish, even violent, attempts to shift the given. One must alter that drear context in which one half of the self is forever examining the stale presence of the other. That is one reason why narcissists are forever falling in and out of love, jobs, places, and addictions. Promiscuity is the opportunity to try a new role. The vanity gained from a one-night stand is an antidote to claustrophobia. That is, if the gamble of the one-night stand turns out well! Miller complains bitterly of June's lack of center, her incapacity to tell the truth or even recognize it. "I want the key," he says once to Anaïs Nin, "the key to the lies." Blind to himself — does not every artist have to live in partial and self-induced blindness, or he could never find a foundation for his effort? — Miller does not want to recognize that the key may be simple. Every day is a scenario for June. On the best of days she creates a life into which she can fit for a few hours. She can feel real love and real hate for strangers, and thereby leave the circle of her self-absorption. Through scenarios, she can arrive in an hour at depths of emotion other people voyage toward for years. Of course, the scenario once concluded, so, too, is

the love for the day. The passing actor she played with is again a stranger. It is useless to speak of whether she loves or does not love Miller. It depends on whether he is in her scenario that day. So it is also useless to speak of her lies. They are no more real to her than yesterday's role. It is today's scenario that is her truth and her life. That is her liberty from the prison cell of the narcissist.

Of course, it is not all that bad. Part of Miller's continuing literary obsession with June is due to the variety of her roles. Each, after all, offers its new role for Miller. He does play opposite the leading lady. If one day he is a detective, and the next, a criminal, that keeps interest in one's personality alive.

Narcissists, after all, induce emotion in one another through their minds. It is not their flesh which is aroused so much as the vibrancy of the role. Their relations are at once more electric and more empty, more perfect and more hollow. But the hollow seems never to fill, experience is poured into no vessels of the psyche, but seems to drain away. So, narcissism may be a true disease, a biological displacement of the natural impulse to develop oneself by the lessons of one's experience, which could bear the same relation to love that onanism does to copulation, or cancer to the natural growth of tissue. Can we come a little nearer to the recognition that there may be a base beneath all disease, an ultimate disease, a psychosomatic doom, so to speak, against which all the other illnesses, colds, fevers, infections, and deteriorations are bulwarks to protect us against a worse fate? Which is none other than that irreversible revolt of the flesh or the mind into cancer or insanity. That is psychosomatic doom — to follow the growth of the flesh or the mind into hideous anomaly. But if that is the case, how can we not suppose that for the narcissist — always so aware that something is wrong within — there is a constant unconscious terror: his or her isolation, if unrelieved, will end in one arm or the other of the ultimate disease.

The paradox is that no love can prove so intense, therefore, as the love of two narcissists for each other. So much depends on it. Each — the paradox turns upon itself — is capable of offering deliverance to the other. To the degree that they tune each other superbly well, they begin to create what before had been impossible — they begin to acquire the skills that enable them to enter the world. (For it is not love of the self, but dread of the world outside the self, which is the seed of narcissism.) Narcissists can end, therefore, by having a real need of each other. That is, of course, hardly

the characteristic relation. The love of most narcissists tends to become comic. Seen from the outside, their suffering manages to be equaled only by the rapidity with which they recover from suffering.

The reality, of course, is considerably more painful. Given the delicacy of every narcissist, and the timidity which created their detachment, we can see again that the intensity of their relations is for good cause with themselves. For their own self-protection, they need an excess of control over external events. (Not too removed in analogy is that excess of control which technology is forever trying to exact from nature.)

To the degree, however, that narcissism is an affliction of the talented, the stakes are not small, and the victims are playing a serious game right in the midst of their scenarios. For if one can break out of the penitentiary of self-absorption, then there may be artistic wonders to achieve.

Miller could have been playing, therefore, for the highest stakes. He had the energy, the vision, the talent, and the outrageous individuality to have some chance of becoming the greatest writer in America's history, a figure equal to Shakespeare. (For Americans.) Of course, to invoke such contrasts is to mock them. A writer cannot live too seriously with the idea that he will or will not beat Tolstoy — he has rather some sense of a huge and not impossible literary destiny in the reverberations of his own ambition; he feels his talent, perhaps, as a trust; so he sees his loves as evil when they balk him. He is living, after all, with his own secret plot. He knows that a writer of the largest dimension can alter the nerves and marrow of a nation; no one, in fact, can measure what collective loss would have come to English people if Shakespeare had failed to write. (Or, for that matter, conceive how the South would be subtly less interesting without Faulkner.)

In those seven years with June, Miller was shaping the talent with which he would go out into the world. It is part of the total ambiguity of narcissism (despite the ten thousand intimate details he offers of his life) that we do not know by the end of *The Rosy Crucifixion* whether she breathed a greater life into his talent or exploited him. We do not know whether Miller if he had never met Mona could have become something like equal to Shakespeare and capable of writing about tyrants and tycoons (instead, repetitively, of his own liberation) or — we are left wide open — the contrary is the true

us to her first public reception. Prophets of Baal, praise Kael! We had obviously no ordinary hour of cinema to contemplate.

Now, a half year later, the movie is history, has all the palpability of the historic. Something just discernible has already happened to humankind as a result of it, or at least to that audience who are coming in to the Translux to see it. They are a crew. They have unexpected homogeneity for a movie audience, compose, indeed, so thin a sociological slice of the New York and suburban sausage that you cannot be sure your own ticket isn't what was left for the toothpick, while the rest of the house has been bought at a bite. At the least, there is the same sense of aesthetic oppression one feels at a play when the house is filled with a theater party. So, too, is the audience at *Tango* an infarct of middle-class anal majesties — if Freud hadn't given us the clue, a reader of faces could decide all on his own that there had to be some social connection between sex, shit, power, violence, and money. But these middle-class faces have advanced their historical inch from the last time one has seen them. They are this much closer now to late Romans.

Whether matrons or young matrons, men or boys, they are *swingers*. The males have wife-swapper mustaches, the women are department-store boutique. It is as if everything recently and incongruously idealistic in the middle class has been used up in the years of resistance to the Vietnamese War — now, bring on the Caribbean. Amazing! In America, even the Jews have come to look like the French middle class, which is to say that the egocentricity of the Fascist mouth is on the national face. Perhaps it is the five-dollar admission, but this audience has an obvious obsession with sex as the confirmed core of a wealthy life. It is enough to make one ashamed of one's own obsession (although where would one delineate the difference?). Maybe it is that this audience, still in March, is suntanned, or at the least made up to look suntanned. The red and orange of their skins will match the famous "all uterine" colors — so termed by the set designer — of the interiors in *Last Tango*.

In the minute before the theater lights are down, what a tension is in the house. One might as well be in the crowd just before an important fight commences. It is years since one has watched a movie begin with such anticipation. And the tension holds as the projection starts. We see Brando and Schneider pass each other in

the street. Since we have all been informed — by *Time* no less — we know they are going to take carnal occupation of each other, and very soon. The audience watches with anxiety as if it is also going to be in the act with someone new, and the heart (and for some, the bowels) shows a tremor between earthquake and expectation. Maria Schneider is so sexual a presence. None of the photographs has prepared anybody for this. Rare actresses, just a few, have flesh appeal. You feel as if you can touch them on the screen. Schneider has nose appeal — you can smell her. She is every eighteen-year-old in a mini-skirt and a maxi-coat who ever promenaded down Fifth Avenue in the inner arrogance that proclaims, "My cunt is my chariot."

We have no more than a few minutes to wait. She goes to look at an apartment for rent, Brando is already there. They have passed in the street, and by a telephone booth; now they are in an empty room. Abruptly Brando cashes the check Stanley Kowalski wrote for us twenty-five years ago — he fucks the heroine standing up. It solves the old snicker of how do you do it in a telephone booth? — he rips her panties open. In our new line of *New Yorker*-approved superlatives, it can be said that the cry of the fabric is the most thrilling sound to be heard in World Culture since the four opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth.¹ It is, in fact, a hell of a sound, small, but as precise as the flash of a match above a pile of combustibles, a way for the director to say, "As you may already have guessed from the way I established my opening, I am very good at movie making, and I have a superb pair, Brando and Schneider — they are sexual heavyweights. Now I place my director's promise upon the material: you are going to be in for a grave and wondrous experience. We are going to get to the bottom of a man and a woman."

So intimates Bertolucci across the silence of that room, as Brando and Schneider, fully dressed, lurch, grab, connect, hump, scream, and are done in less than a minute, their orgasms coming on top of one another like trash cans tumbling down a hill. They fall to the floor, and fall apart. It is as if a hand grenade has gone off in their entrails. A marvelous scene, good as a passionate kiss in real life, then not so good because there has been no shot of Brando going up Schneider, and since the audience has been watching in all the som-

¹ John Simon, as predictable in his critical reactions as a headwaiter, naturally thought *Last Tango* was part of the riff-raff. Since it is Simon's temper to ignore details, he not only does not hear the panties tearing (some ears reside in the music of the spheres) but announces that Schneider, beastly abomination, is wearing none.

ber awe one would bring to the first row of a medical theater, it is like seeing an operation without the entrance of the surgeon's knife.

One can go to any hard-core film and see fifty phalluses going in and out of as many vaginas in four hours (if anyone can be found who stayed four hours). There is a monumental abstractedness about hard core. It is as if the more a player can function sexually before a camera, the less he is capable of offering any other expression. Finally, the sexual organs show more character than the actors' faces. One can read something of the working conditions of a life in some young girl's old and irritated cunt, one can even see triumphs of the human spirit — old and badly burned labia which still come to glisten with new life, capital! There are phalluses in porno whose distended veins speak of the integrity of the hardworking heart, but there is so little specific content in the faces! Hard core lulls after it excites, and finally it puts the brain to sleep.

But Brando's real cock up Schneider's real vagina would have brought the history of film one huge march closer to the ultimate experience it has promised since its inception (which is to re-embody life). One can even see how on opening night at the Film Festival, it did not matter so much. Not fully prepared for what was to come, the simulated sex must have quivered like real sex the first time out. Since then we have been told the movie is great, so we are prepared to resist greatness, and have read in *Time* that Schneider said, "We were never screwing on stage. I never felt any sexual attraction for him . . . he's almost fifty you know, and" — she runs her hand from her torso to her midriff, 'he's only beautiful to here!'"

So one watches differently. Yes, they *are* simulating. Yes, there is something slightly unnatural in the way they come and fall apart. It is too stylized, as if paying a few subtle respects to Kabuki. The real need for the real cock of Brando into the depths of the real actress might have been for those less exceptional times which would follow the film long after it opened and the reaction had set in.

Since *Tango* is, however, the first major film with a respectable budget, a superbly skilled young director, an altogether accomplished cameraman, and a great actor who is ready to do more than dabble in improvisation, indeed will enter heavily into such near to untried movie science, so the laws of improvisation are before us, and the first law to recognize is that it is next to impossible to build on too false a base. The real problem in movie improvisation is to

find some ending that is true to what has gone before and yet is sufficiently untrue to enable the actors to get out alive.

We will come back to that. It is, however, hardly time to let go of our synopsis. Real or simulated, opening night or months later, we know after five minutes that, at the least, we are in for a thoroughgoing study of a man and a woman, and the examination will be close. Brando rents the empty apartment; they will visit each other there every day. His name is Paul, hers is Jeanne, but they are not to learn each other's names yet. They are not to tell one another such things, he informs her. "We don't need names here . . . we're going to forget everything we knew. . . . Everything outside this place is bullshit."

They are going to search for pleasure. We are back in the existential confrontation of the century. Two people are going to fuck in a room until they arrive at a transcendent recognition or some death of themselves. We are dealing not with a plot but with a theme that is open range for a hundred films. Indeed we are face to face with the fundamental structure of porno — the difference is that we have a director who by the measure of porno is Eisenstein, and actors who are as gods. So the film takes up the simplest and richest of structures. To make love in an empty apartment, then return to a separate life. It is like every clandestine affair the audience has ever had, only more so — no names! Every personal demon will be scourged in the sex — one will obliterate the past! That is the huge sanction of anonymity. It is equal to a new life.

What powerful biographical details we learn, however, on the instant they part. Paul's wife is a suicide. Just the night before, she has killed herself with a razor in a bathtub; the bathroom is before us, red as an abattoir. A sobbing chambermaid cleans it while she speaks in fear to Paul. It is not even certain whether the wife is a suicide or he has killed her — that is almost not the point. It is the bloody death suspended above his life like a bleeding amputated existence — it is with that crimson torso before his eyes that he will make love on the following days.

Jeanne, in her turn, is about to be married to a young TV director. She is the star in a videofilm he is making about French youth. She pouts, torments her fiancé, delights in herself, delights in the special idiocy of men. She can cuckold her young director to the roots of his eyes. She also delights in the violation she will make of her own bourgeois roots. In this TV film she makes within the

movie she presents her biography to her fiancé's camera: she is the daughter of a dead Army officer who was sufficiently racist to teach his dog to detect Arabs by smell. So she is well brought up — there are glimpses of a suburban villa on a small walled estate — it is nothing less than the concentrated family honor of the French Army she will surrender when Brando proceeds a little later to bugger her.

These separate backgrounds divide the film as neatly between biography and fornication as those trick highball glasses which present a drawing of a man or a woman wearing clothes on the outside of the tumbler and nude on the inside. Each time Brando and Schneider leave the room we learn more of their lives beyond the room; each time they come together, we are ready to go further. In addition, as if to enrich his theme for students of film, Bertolucci offers touches from the history of French cinema. The life preserver in *Atalante* appears by way of homage to Vigo, and Jean-Pierre Léaud of *The 400 Blows* is the TV director, the boy now fully grown. Something of the brooding echo of *Le Jour Se Lève* and Arletty is also with us, that somber memory of Jean Gabin wandering along the wet docks in the dawn, waiting for the police to pick him up after he has murdered his beloved. It is as if we are to think not only of this film but of other sexual tragedies French cinema has brought us, until the sight of each gray and silent Paris street is ready to evoke the lost sound of the *Bal musette* and the sad near-silent wash of the Seine. Nowhere as in Paris can doomed lovers succeed in passing sorrow, drop by drop, through the blood of the audience's heart.

Yet as the film progresses with every skill in evidence, while Brando gives a performance that is unforgettable (and Schneider shows every promise of becoming a major star), as the historic buggeries and reamings are delivered, and the language breaks through barriers not even yet erected — no general of censorship could know the armies of obscenity were so near! — as these shocks multiply, and lust goes up the steps to love, something bizarre happens to the film. It fails to explode. It is a warehouse of dynamite and yet something goes wrong with the blow-up.

One leaves the theater bewildered. A fuse was never ignited. But where was it set? One looks to retrace the line of the story.

So we return to Paul trying to rise out of the bloody horizon of his wife's death. We even have some instinctive comprehension of

how he must degrade his beautiful closet-fuck, indeed we are even given the precise detail that he will grease her ass with butter before he buggers her family pride. A scene or two later, he tricks forth her fear of him by dangling a dead rat which he offers to eat. "I'll save the asshole for you," he tells her. "Rat's asshole with mayonnaise."² (The audience roars — Brando knows audiences.) She is standing before him in a white wedding gown — she has run away from a TV camera crew that was getting ready to film her pop wedding. She has rushed to the apartment in the rain. Now shivering, but recovered from her fear, she tells him she has fallen in love with somebody. He tells her to take a hot bath, or she'll catch pneumonia, die, and all he'll get is "to fuck the dead rat."

No, she protests, she's in love.

"In ten years," says Brando looking at her big breasts, "you're going to be playing soccer with your tits." But the thought of the other lover is grinding away at him. "Is he a good fucker?"

"Magnificent."

"You know, you're a jerk. 'Cause the best fucking you're going to get is right here in this apartment."

No, no, she tells him, the lover is wonderful, a mystery . . . different.

"A local pimp?"

"He could be. He looks it."

She will never, he tells her, be able to find love until she goes "right up into the ass of death." He is one lover who is not afraid of metaphor. "Right up his ass — till you find a womb of fear. And then maybe you'll be able to find him."

"But I've found this man," says Jeanne. Metaphor has continued long enough for her. "He's you. You're that man."

In the old scripted films, such a phrase was plucked with a movie composer's chord. But this is improvisation. Brando's instant response is to tell her to get a scissors and cut the fingernails on her right hand. Two fingers will do. Put those fingers up his ass.

"Quoi?"

"Put your fingers up my ass, are you deaf? Go on."

No, he is not too sentimental. Love is never flowers, but farts and flowers. Plus every superlative test. So we see Brando's face before us — it is that tragic angelic mask of incommunicable anguish

² Dialogue from *Last Tango in Paris* was not entirely written in advance, but was in part an improvisation. In other words, a small but important part of the screenplay has in effect been written by Brando.

which has spoken to us across the years of his uncharted heroic depths. Now he is entering that gladiator's fundament again, and before us and before millions of faces yet to come she will be his surrogate bugger, real or simulated. What an entrance into the final images of history! He speaks to us with her body behind him, and her fingers just conceivably up him. "I'm going to get a pig," are the words which come out of his tragic face, "and I'm going to have a pig fuck you," — yes, the touch on his hole has broken open one gorgon of a fantasy — "and I want the pig to vomit in your face. And I want you to swallow the vomit. You going to do that for me?"

"Yeah."

"Huh?"

"Yeah!"

"And I want the pig to die while," — a profound pause — "while you're fucking him. And then you have to go behind, and I want you to smell the dying farts of the pig. Are you going to do that for me?"

"Yes, and more than that. And worse than before."

He has plighted a troth. In our year of the twentieth century how could we ever contract for love with less than five hundred pounds of pig shit? With his courage to give himself away, we finally can recognize the tragedy of his expression across these twenty-five years. That expression has been locked into the impossibility of ever communicating such a set of private thoughts through his beggar's art as an actor. Yet he has just done it. He is probably the only actor in the world who could have done it. He is taking the shit that is in him and leaving it on us. How the audience loves it. They have come to be covered. The world is not polluted for nothing. There is some profound twentieth-century malfunction in the elimination of waste. And Brando is on to it. A stroke of genius to have made a speech like that. Over and over, he is saying in this film that one only arrives at love by springing out of the shit in oneself.

So he seeks to void his eternal waste over the wife's suicide. He sits by her laid-out corpse in a grim hotel room, curses her, weeps, proceeds to wipe off the undertaker's lipstick, broods on her lover (who lives upstairs in the hotel), and goes through some bend of the obscure, for now, off-stage, he proceeds to remove his furniture from the new apartment. We realize this as we see Jeanne in the empty rooms. Paul has disappeared. He has ordered her to march into the farts of the pig for nothing. So she calls her TV director to

look at the empty apartment — should they rent it? The profound practicality of the French bourgeoisie is squatting upon us. She appreciates the value of a few memories to offer sauce for her lean marriage. But the TV director must smell this old cooking for he takes off abruptly after telling her he will look for a better apartment.

Suddenly Brando is before her again on the street. Has he been waiting for her to appear? He looks rejuvenated. "It's over," she tells him. "It's over," he replies. "Then it begins again." He is in love with her. He reveals his biography, his dead wife, his unromantic details. "I've got a prostate like an Idaho potato but I'm still a good stick man. . . . I suppose if I hadn't met you I'd probably settle for a hard chair and a hemorrhoid." They move on to a hall, some near mythical species of tango palace where a dance contest is taking place. They get drunk and go on the floor. Brando goes in for a squalid parody of the tango. When they're removed by the judges, he flashes his bare ass.

Now they sit down again and abruptly the love affair is terminated. Like that! She is bored with him. Something has happened. We do not know what. Is she a bourgeoisie repelled by his flop-house? Or did his defacement of the tango injure some final nerve of upper French deportment? Too small a motive. Must we decide that sex without a mask is no longer love, or conclude upon reflection that no mask is more congenial to passion than to be without a name in the bed of a strange lover?

There are ten reasons why her love could end, but we know none of them. She merely wants to be rid of him. Deliver me from a fifty-year-old, may even be her only cry.

She tries to flee. He follows. He follows her on the Métro and all the way to her home. He climbs the spiraling stairs as she mounts in the slow elevator, he rams into her mother's apartment with her, breathless, chewing gum, leering. Now he is all cock. He is the memory of every good fuck he has given her. "This is the title shot, baby. We're going all the way."

She takes out her father's army pistol and shoots him. He murmurs, "Our children, our children, our children will remember . . ." and staggers out to the balcony, looks at the Paris morning, takes out his chewing gum, fixes it carefully to the underside of the iron railing in a move that is pure broth of Brando — culture is a goat turd on the bust of Goethe — and dies. The angel with the tragic face slips off the screen. And proud Maria Schneider is suddenly and

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most unbelievably reduced to a twat copping a plea. "I don't know who he is," she mutters in her mind to the oncoming *flics*, "he followed me in the street, he tried to rape me, he is insane. I do not know his name. I do not know who he is. He wanted to rape me."

The film ends. The questions begin. We have been treated to more cinematic breakthrough than any film — at the least — since *I Am Curious, Yellow*. In fact we have gone much further. It is hard to think of any film that has taken a larger step. Yet if this is "the most powerful erotic film ever made" then sex is as Ex-Lax to the lady. For we have been given a bath in shit with no reward. The film, for all its power, has turned inside out by the end. We have been asked to follow two serious and more or less desperate lovers as they go through the locks of lust and defecation, through some modern species of homegrown cancer cure, if you will, and have put up with their modern depths — shit on the face of the beloved and find love! — only to discover a peculiar extortion in the aesthetic. We have been taken on this tour down to the prostate big as an Idaho potato only to recognize that we never did get into an exploration of the catacombs of love, passion, infancy, sodomy, tenderness, and the breaking of emotional ice, instead only wandered from one onanist's oasis to another.

It is, however, a movie that has declared itself, by the power of its opening, as equal in experience to a great fuck, and so the measure of its success or failure is by the same sexual aesthetic. Rarely has a film's value depended so much on the power or lack of power of its ending, even as a fuck that is full of promise is ready to be pinched by a poor end. So, in *Tango*, there is no gathering of forces for the conclusion, no whirling of sexual destinies (in this case, the audience and the actors) into the same funnel of becoming, no flying out of the senses in pursuit of a new vision, no, just the full charge into a blank wall, a masturbator's spasm — came for the wrong reason and on the wrong thought — and one is thrown back, shattered, too ubiquitously electrified, and full of criticism for the immediate past. Now the recollected flaws of the film eat at the pleasure, even as the failed orgasm of a passionate act will call the character of the passion into question.

So the walk out of the theater is with anger. The film has been in reach of the greatness Kael has been talking about, but the achievement has only been partial. Like all executions less divine than their

conception *Tango* will give rise to mutations that are obliged to explore into dead ends. More aesthetic pollution to come! The performance by Brando has been unique, historic, without compare — it is just possible, however, that ~~it~~ ^{it} has gone entirely in the wrong direction. He has been like a lover who keeps telling consummate dirty jokes until the ravaged dawn when the girl will say, "Did you come to sing or to screw?" He has come with great honor and dignity and exceptional courage to bare his soul. But in a solo. We are being given a fuck film without the fuck. It is like a Western without the horses.

Now the subtle sense of displacement that has hung over the movie is clear. There has been no particular high passion loose. Brando is so magnetic an actor, Schneider is so attractive, and the scenes are so intimate that we assume there is sexual glue between their parts, but it is our libido which has been boiling that glue and not the holy vibration of the actors on the screen. If Kael has had a sexual liberation with *Tango*, her libido is not alone — the audience is also getting their kicks — by digging the snots of the celebrated. (Liberation for the Silent Majority may be not to attend a fuck but hear dirty jokes.) So the real thrill of *Tango* for \$5.00 audiences becomes the peephole Brando offers us on Brando. They are there to hear a world-famous actor say in reply to "What strong arms you have,"

"The better to squeeze a fart out of you."

"What long nails you have."

"The better to scratch your ass with."

"Oh, what a lot of fur you have."

"The better to let your crabs hide in."

"Oh, what a long tongue you have."

"The better to stick in your rear, my dear."

"What's this for?"

"That's your happiness and my ha-penis."

Pandemonium of pleasure in the house. Who wants to watch an act of love when the ghost of Lenny Bruce is back? The crowd's joy is that a national celebrity is being obscene on screen. To measure the media magnetism of such an act, ask yourself how many hundreds of miles you might drive to hear Richard Nixon speak a line like: "We're just taking a flying fuck at a rolling doughnut," or "I went to the University of the Congo; studied whale fucking." Only liberal unregenerates would be so progressive as to say they would

not drive a mile. No, one could start mass migrations if Nixon were to give Brando's pig-and-vomit address to the test of love.

Let us recognize the phenomenon. It would be so surrealistic an act, we could not pass Nixon by. Surrealism has become our objective correlative. A private glimpse of the great becomes the alchemy of the media, the fool's gold of the century of communication. In the age of television we know everything about the great but how they fart — the ass wind is, ergo, our trade wind. It is part of Brando's genius to recognize that the real interest of audiences is not in having him portray the tender passages and murderous storms of an unruly passion between a man and a woman, it is rather to be given a glimpse of his kinks. His kinks offer sympathetic vibration to their kinks. The affirmation of passion is that we rise from the swamps of our diapers — by whatever torturous route — to the cock and the cunt; it is the acme of the decadent to go from the first explosive bout of love in *Tango* down to the trimmed fingernails up his rectum.

Then follows the murder. Except it does not follow. It has been placed there from the beginning as the required ending in Bertolucci's mind, it has already been written into the screenplay first prepared with Trintignant and Dominique Sanda in mind. But complications and cast changes occurred. Sanda was pregnant, et cetera. Brando appeared, and Schneider was found. Yet the old ending is still there. Since it did not grow convincingly out of the material in the original script, it appears, after Brando's improvisation, to be fortuitous altogether.

In the original screenplay, the dialogue is so general and the characters so vague that one has to assume Trintignant, Sanda, and Bertolucci planned to give us something extraordinary precisely by overcoming their pedestrian script. It is as if Bertolucci purposely left out whole trunklines of plot in order to discover them in the film. Only it was Brando who came along rather than Trintignant to make a particular character out of a general role, to "superimpose" — in accordance with Bertolucci's desire — his own character as Marlon Brando, as well as something of his life, and a good bit of his private obsessions. As he did that, however, the film moved away from whatever logic the script had originally possessed. For example, in the pre-Brando treatment, we would have been obliged to listen to the following:

LEON (alias Paul): I make you die, you make me die, we're two murderers, each other's. But who succeeds in realizing this is twice the murderer. And that's the biggest pleasure: watching you die, watching you come out of yourself, white-eyed, writhing, gasping, screaming so loud that it seems like the last time.

Oo la la! We are listening to a French intellectual. It is for good cause that Bertolucci wants to superimpose Brando's personality. Anything is preferable to Leon. And Brando most certainly obliterates this mouthy analysis, creates instead a character who is half noble and half a lout, an overlay drawn on transparent paper over his own image. Paul is an American, ex-boxer, ex-actor, ex-foreign correspondent, ex-adventurer, and now with the death of his wife, ex-gigolo. He is that character and yet he is Brando even more. He is indeed so much like Brando that he does not quite fit the part of Paul — he talks just a little too much, and is a hint too distinguished to be the proprietor of a cheap flophouse at the age of fifty — let us say that at the least Paul is close enough to the magnetic field of Marlon for an audience to be unable to comprehend why Jeanne would be repelled if he has a flophouse. Who cares, if it is Marlon who invites you to live in a flophouse? On the other hand, he is also being Marlon the Difficult, Marlon the Indian from the Underworld, Marlon the shade of the alienated, Marlon the young star who when asked on his first trip to Hollywood what he would like in the way of personal attention and private creature comfort, points to the nerve-jangled pet he has brought with him and says, "Get my monkey fucked."

Yes, he is studying whale-pronging in the Congo. He is the raucous out-of-phase voice of the prairie. Afterwards, contemplating the failure, we realize he has been shutting Schneider off. Like a master boxer with a hundred tricks, he has been out-acting her (with all his miser's hoard of actor's lore), has been stealing scenes from her while she is nude and he is fully dressed, what virtuosity! But it is unfair. She is brimming to let go. She wants to give the young performance of her life and he is tapping her out of position here, tricking her there — long after it is over we realize he does not want the fight of the century, but a home town decision. He did not come to fuck but to shit. To defecate into the open-mouthed wonders of his audience and take his cancer cure in public. It is the fastest way! Grease up the kinks and bring in the pigs. We'd take a

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stockyard of pigs if he would get into what the movie is about, but he is off on the greatest solo of his life and artists as young as Schneider and Bertolucci are hardly going to be able to stop him.

So he is our greatest actor, our noblest actor, and he is also our national lout. Could it be otherwise in America? Yet a huge rage stirs. He is so great. Can he not be even greater and go the bottom of every fine actor's terror — which is to let go of the tricks that ring the person and enter the true arena of improvisation? It is there that the future of the film may exist, but we won't find out until a great actor makes the all-out effort.

But now we are back to the core of the failure in *Last Tango*. It is down in the difficulty of improvisation, in the recognition that improvisation which is anything less than the whole of a film is next to no improvisation. It has diminished from the dish to a spice that has been added to the dish (usually incorrectly). Bertolucci is a superb young director, adventurous, steeped in film culture, blessed with cinematic grace. He gives us a movie with high ambition, considerable risk, and a sense of the past. Yet he plows into the worst trap of improvisation — it is the simple refusal of film makers to come to grips with the implacable logic of the problem. One does not add improvisation to a script that is already written and with an ending that is locked up. No matter how agreeable the particular results may be, it is still the entrance of tokenism into aesthetics: "You blacks may work in this corporation, and are free to express yourselves provided you don't do anything a responsible white employee won't do." Stay true to the script. It reduces improvisation to a free play period in the middle of a strict curriculum.

The fundamental demand upon improvisation is that it begin with the film itself, which is to say that the idea for the film and the style of improvisation ought to come out of the same thought. From the beginning, improvisation must live in the premise rather than be added to it. The notion is not easy to grasp, and in fact is elusive. It may even be helpful to step away from *Tango* long enough to look at another example of possible improvisation. An indulgence is asked of the reader — to think about another kind of film altogether, a distracting hitch to the argument, but it may not be possible to bring focus to improvisation until we have other models before us.

So the following and imaginary film is offered: Orson Welles to play Churchill while Burton or Olivier does Beaverbrook in the week of Dunkirk. Let us assume we have the great good fortune to

find these actors at the height of their powers, and have for *auteur* a film maker who is also a brilliant historian. To these beginnings, he adds a company of intelligent English actors and gives them the same historical material to study in order to provide a common denominator to everyone's knowledge. At this point the *auteur* and the company agree upon a few premises of plot. The *auteur* will offer specific situations. It will help if the episodes are sufficiently charged for the actors to lose their fear first of improvisation — which is that they must make up their lines.

Then a narrative action can begin to emerge out of the interplay of the characters, in much the way a good party turns out differently from the expectations of the hostess, and yet will develop out of her original conception. With a script, actors try to convince the writer, if he is present, to improve their lines — with improvisation they must work upon their wits. Why assume that the wits of this company of intelligent English actors will have less knowledge of manner and history than an overextended script writer trying to work up his remote conception of what Churchill and Beaverbrook might have been alike? Why not assume Welles and Burton have a better idea? Are they not more likely to contain instinctive knowledge in their ambulating meat? Isn't the company, in its steeping as good British actors into their own history, able to reveal to us more of what such a week might have been like than any but the most inspired effort by a screenwriter?

We all contain the culture of our country in our unused acting skills. While Clark Gable could probably not have done an improvisation to save himself, since he had no working habits for that whatsoever, the suspicion still exists that Gable, if he had been able to permit himself, could have offered a few revelations on the life of Dwight D. Eisenhower, especially since Ike seems to have spent a good part of his life imitating Gable's voice. If violence can release love, improvisation can loose the unused culture of a film artist.

The argument is conceivably splendid, but we are talking about *historical* improvisation where the end is still known, and it is the details that are paramount. How simple (and intense) by comparison become the problems of doing a full improvisation for *Tango*. There we are given a fundamental situation, a spoiled girl about to be married, a distraught man whose wife is a suicide. The man and the girl are in the room to make love. We are back at the same beginning. But we can no longer project ahead! If the actors feel noth-

ing for one another sexually, as Schneider has indicated in several interviews was the case for Brando and herself — she may even have been telling the truth — then no exciting improvisation is possible on sexual lines. (The improvisation would have to work on the consequences of a lack of attraction.) Actors do not have to feel great passion for one another in order to give a *frisson* to the audience, but enough attraction must exist to provide a live coal for improvisation to blow upon. Without some kernel of reality to an improvisation only a monster can continue to offer interesting lines. Once some little attraction is present, there is nothing exceptional about the continuation of the process. Most of us, given the umbilical relation of sex and drama, pump our psychic bellows on many a sensual spark, but then most affairs are, to one degree or another, improvisations, which is to say genuine in some part of their feeling and nicely acted for the rest. What separates professional actors from all of us amateur masses with our animal instinct for dissembling, our everyday acting, is the ability of the professional to take a small emotion in improvisation and go a long distance with it. In a scripted piece of work, some professionals need no relation to the other actor at all, they can, as Monroe once said, “wipe them out” and substitute another face. But improvisation depends on a continuing life since it exists in the no-man’s-land between acting and uncalculated response, it is a *special* psychic state, at its best more real than the life to which one afterward returns, and so a special form of insanity. All acting is a corollary of insanity, but working from a script offers a highly controlled means of departing from one’s own personality in order to enter another. (As well as the formal power to return.)

What makes improvisation fertile, luminous, frightening, and finally *wiggy* enough for a professional like Gable to shun its practice is that the actor is doing two things at once — playing at a fictitious role, while using real feelings, which then begin to serve (rather than the safety of the script) to stimulate him into successive new feelings and responses, until he is in danger of pushing into emotional terrain that is too far out of his control.

If we now examine *Tango* against this perspective, the risks (once there is real sexual attraction between the man and the woman) have to multiply. They are after all not simply playing themselves, but have rather inserted themselves into highly charged creatures, a

violent man with a blood-filled horizon and a spoiled middle-class girl with buried tyrannies. How, as they continue this improvisation, can they avoid falling in love, or coming to hate one another? With good film actors, there is even every real danger that the presence of the camera crew will inflame them further since in every thespian is an orgiast screaming to get out.

So murder is the first dramatic reality between two such lovers in a continuing film of improvisation. They progress toward an end that is frighteningly open. The man may kill the woman, or the woman the man. For, as actors, they have also to face the shame of walking quietly away from one another, a small disaster when one is trying to build intensity, for such a quiet ending is equal to a lack of inspiration, a cowardice before the potential violence of the other. Improvisation is profoundly wicked when it works, it ups the ante, charges all dramatic potential, looks for collision. Yet what a dimension of dramatic exploration is also offered. For the actors can even fall in love, can truly fall in love, can go through a rite of passage together and so reach some locked crypt of the heart precisely because they have been photographed fucking together from every angle, and still — perhaps it is thereby — have found some private reserve of intimacy no one else can touch. Let the world watch. It is not near.

So the true improvisation that *Tango* called for should have moved forward each day on the actors' experience of the day before; it would thereby have offered more aesthetic excitement. Because of its danger! There is a very small line in the last recognitions of the psyche between real bullets in a gun, and blanks. The madness of improvisation is such, the intensities of the will become such, that one hardly dares to fire a blank at the other actor. What if he or she is so carried away by excitement that they will refuse to fall? Bring on the real bullet, then. Bite on it.

Of course, literal murder is hardly the inevitable denouement in improvisation. But it is in the private design of each actor's paranoia. Pushed further together in improvisation than actors have gone before, who knows what literal risks might finally have been taken. That is probably why Brando chose to play a buffoon at a very high level and thereby also chose to put Schneider down. Finally we laugh at those full and lovely tits which will be good only for playing soccer (and she will choose to lose thirty pounds after the film is done — a whole loss of thirty pounds of pulchritude). Brando with

his immense paranoia (it is hardly unjustified) may have concluded like many an adventurous artist before him that he was adventuring far enough. No need for more.

Still he lost an opportunity for his immense talent. If he has been our first actor for decades, it is because he has given us, from the season he arrived in *Streetcar*, a greater sense of improvisation out of the lines of a script than any other professional actor. Sometimes he seemed the only player alive who knew how to suggest that he was about to say something more valuable than what he did say. It gave him force. The lines other people had written for him came out of his mouth like the final compromise life had offered for five better thoughts. He seemed to have a charged subtext. It was as if, whenever requested in other films to say script lines so bad as, "I make you die, you make me die, we're two murderers, each other's," the subtext — the emotion of the words he was using behind the words — became, "I want the pig to vomit in your face." That was what gave an unruly, all but uncontrolled, and smoldering air of menace to all he did.

Now, in *Tango*, he had nothing beneath the script, for his previous subtext was the script. So he appeared to us as a man orating, not improvising. But then a long speech can hardly be an improvisation if its line of action is able to go nowhere but back into the prearranged structures of the plot. It is like the aside of a politician before he returns to that prepared text the press already has in their hands. So our interest moved away from the possibilities of the film and was spent on the man himself, his nobility and his loudness. But his nature was finally a less interesting question than it should have been, and weeks would go by before one could forgive Bertolucci for the aesthetic cacophony of the end.

Still, one could forgive. For, finally, Bertolucci has given us a failure worth a hundred films like *The Godfather*. Regardless of all its solos, failed majesties, and off-the-mark horrors, even as a highly imperfect adventure, it is still the best adventure in film to be seen in this pullulating year. And it will open an abyss for Bertolucci. The rest of his life must now be an improvisation. Doubtless he is bold enough to live with that. For he begins *Last Tango* with Brando muttering two words one can hardly hear. They are: Fuck God.

The unmanageable in oneself must now offer advice. If Bertolucci is going to fuck God, let him really give the fuck. Then we may all

know a little more of what God is willing or unwilling to forgive. That is, unless God is old and has indeed forgot, and we are merely out on a sea of human anality, a collective Faust deprived of Mephisto and turning to shit. The choice, of course, is small. Willy-nilly, we push on in every art and every technology toward the re-embodiment of the creation. It is doubtless a venture more demented than coupling with the pig, but it is our venture, our white whale, and by it or with it shall we be seduced. On to the Congo with sex, technology, and the inflamed lividities of human will.

The Faith of Graffiti



1.

Journalism is chores. Journalism is bondage unless you can see yourself as a private eye inquiring into the mysteries of a new phenomenon. Then you may even become an Aesthetic Investigator ready to take up your role in the twentieth-century mystery play. Aesthetic Investigator! Make the name A-I for this is about graffiti.

A-I is talking to CAY 161. That is the famous Cay from 161st Street, there at the beginning with TAKI 183 and JUNIOR 161, as famous in the world of wall and subway graffiti as Giotto may have been when his name first circulated through the circuits of those workshops that led from Masaccio through Piero della Francesca to Botticelli, Michelangelo, Leonardo and Raphael. Whew! In such company Cay loses his name, although he will not necessarily see it that way. He has the power of his own belief. If the modern mind has moved from Giotto who could find beatitude in a beheading as well as the beginnings of perspective in the flight of angels across the bowl of a golden sky, if we have mounted the high road of the Renaissance into Raphael's celebration of the True, the Good and the Beautiful in each succulent three-dimensionality of the gluteus maximus on out to our own vales and washes in Rothko and Ellsworth Kelly, why so, too, have we also moved from the celebration to the name, traveled from men and women who wrested a degree of independence from Church and God down now to the twentieth-century certainty that life is an image.

A couple of stories:

The first is a Jewish joke. Perhaps it is *the* Jewish joke. Two grandmothers meet. One is pushing a baby carriage. "Oh," says the other, "what a beautiful grandchild you have." "That's nothing," says the first, reaching for her pocketbook. "Wait'll I show you her picture!"

The second seems apocryphal. Willem de Kooning gives a pastel to Robert Rauschenberg who takes it home and promptly erases it. Next he signs his name to the erasure. Then he sells it. Can it be that Rauschenberg is saying, "The artist has as much right to print money as the financier?" Yes, Rauschenberg is giving us small art right here and much instruction. Authority imprinted upon emptiness is money. And the ego is capital convertible to currency by the use of the name. Ah, the undiscovered links of production and distribution in the psychic economy of the ego! For six and a half centuries we have been moving from the discovery of humanity into the circulation of the name, advancing out of some primitive obeisance to dread so complete that painting once lay inert on the field of two dimensions (as if the medieval eye was not ready to wander). Then art dared to rise into that Renaissance liberation from anxiety. The painterly capacity entered the space-perspective of volume and depth. Now, with graffiti we are back in the prison of two dimensions once more. Or is it the one dimension of the name — the art-form screaming through space on a unilinear subway line?

Something of all this is in the mind of our Aesthetic Investigator as he sits in a bedroom on West 161st Street in Washington Heights and talks to CAY 161 and JUNIOR 161 and LI'L FLAME and LURK. They talk about the name. He has agreed to do a centerpiece for a book of photographs on graffiti by Jon Naar, has agreed to do it on the instant (in a Los Angeles hotel room) that he has seen it. The splendid pictures and his undiscovered thoughts on the subject leap together. There is something to find in these pictures, thinks A-I, some process he can all but name. The intellectual hedonism of an elusive theme is laid out before him. So, yes, he accepts. And discovers weeks later that his book has already been given a title. It is *Watching My Name Go By*. He explains to the pained but sympathetic ears of his collaborators that an author needs his own title.

Besides, there is a practical reason. Certain literary men cannot afford titles like *Watching My Name Go By*. Norman Mailer may be first in such a category. One should not be able to conceive of one's bad reviews before writing a word.

But then he also does not like *Watching My Name Go By* for its own forthright meaning. These young graffiti writers do not use their own name. They adopt one. It is like a logo. Moxie or Socono, Tang, Whirlpool, Duz. The kids bear a not quite definable relation to their product. It is not MY NAME but THE NAME. Watching The Name Go By. He still does not like it. Yet every graffiti writer refers to the word. Even in newspaper accounts, it is the term heard most often. "I have put my name," says Super Kool to David Shirey of the *Times*, "all over the place. There ain't nowhere I go I can't see it. I sometimes go on Sunday to Seventh Avenue 86th Street and just spend the whole day" — yes, he literally says it — "watching my name go by." But then they all use it. JAPAN I, being interviewed by Jon Naar and A-I in a subway, grins as a station cop passes and scrutinizes him. He is clean. There is no spray can on him today. Otherwise he would run, not grin. Japan says, with full evaluation of his work, "You have to put in the hours to add up the names. You have to get your name around." Since he is small and could hardly oppose too many who might choose to borrow his own immortal JAPAN I, he merely snorts in answer to the question of what he would do if someone else took up his name and used it. "I would still get the class," he remarks.

Whether it is one's own interviews or others, the word which prevails is always the name. MIKE 171 informs *New York Magazine*, "There are kids all over town with bags of paint waiting to *hit* their names." A bona-fide clue. An object is hit with your name, yes, and in the ghetto, a hit equals a kill. "You must kill a thing," said D. H. Lawrence once, "to know it satisfactorily." (But then who else could have said it?) You hit your name and maybe something in the whole scheme of the system gives a death rattle. For now your name is over their name, over the subway manufacturer, the Transit Authority, the city administration. Your presence is on their presence, your alias hangs over their scene. There is a pleasurable sense of depth to the elusiveness of the meaning.

So he sits with Cay and Junior and the others in the bedroom of Junior's parents and asks them about the name. It is a sweet meeting. He has been traveling for all of a wet and icy snowbound Sunday afternoon through the monumental drabs of South Bronx and Washington Heights, so much like the old gray apartment house ranks of Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn near where he grew up, a trip back across three generations. The Puerto Ricans in this apartment may not be so different from the poor ambitious families of relatives

his mother would speak of visiting on the Lower East Side when she came as a child up from the Jersey shore to visit. So little has changed. Still the-smell-of-cooking-in-the-walls, a single word, and the black-pocked green stucco of the halls, those dark pits in the plaster speaking of the very acne of apartment house poverty. In the apartment, entering by the kitchen, down through the small living room and past the dark bedrooms in a file off the hall, all the shades drawn, a glimpse has been had of the television working like a votive light in some poor slum church chapel (one damp fire in the rain-forest) while the father in shorts sleeps on the sofa, and the women congregate — the kitchen is near. The windows are stained glass, sheets of red and yellow plastic pasted to the glass — the view must be on an air shaft. No light in this gray and late winter day. It is all the darkness of that gloom which sits in the very center of slum existence, that amalgam of worry and dread, heavy as buckets of oil, the true wages of the working class, with all that attendant fever for the attractions of crime, the grinding entrapments of having lost to the law — lawyers' fees, bondsmen, probation officers, all of it.

Yet now there is also a sense of protection in the air. The mood is not without its reverence: CAY 161 has the face of a martyr. He looks as if he has been flung face first against a wall, as if indeed a mighty hand has picked him up and hurled him through the side of a stone house. He is big, seventeen, and almost six feet tall, once good-looking and may yet be good-looking again, but now it is as if he has been drawn by a comic strip artist, for his features express the stars, comets, exclamation points, and straight-out dislocation of eyes and nose and mouth that accompanies any hero in a comic strip when he runs into a collision. SOCK! ZAM! POW! CAY 161, driving a stolen van, fleeing the cops in an old-fashioned New York street chase, has gone off the road on a turn, "and right on 161st Street where he was born and raised, he hit a hydrant, turned over a few times, and wound up inside a furniture store. . . . When the police looked inside the car," — description by José Torres in the *N.Y. Post* — "Cay lay motionless in the driver's seat, and another youth, a passenger, sprawled unconscious outside, hurled from the car by the impact." The friend had a broken leg, and Cay had part of his brain taken out in a seven-hour operation. The doctor gave warning. He might survive. As a vegetable. For two months he did not make a move. Now, six months later, Cay is able to talk, he can move. His lips are controlled on one side of his face but slack on the other — he speaks as if he has had a stroke. He moves in the same fashion. Cer-

tain gestures are agile, others come up half-paralyzed and top-heavy, as if he will fall on his face at the first false step. So his friends are his witness. They surround him, offer the whole reverence of their whole alertness to every move he makes. There is all the elegance of good manners in the way they try to conceal that he is different from the others.

But Cay is happy now. He is in Junior's house, JUNIOR 161, his best friend. They used to go out writing together for years, both tall, a twin legend — when one stands on the other's shoulders, the name goes up higher on the wall than for anyone else. True bond of friendship: they will each write the other's name, a sacramental interchange. Junior has a lean body, that indolent ghetto languor which speaks of presence. "I move slow, man," says the body, "and that is why you watch me. Because when I move fast, you got to watch out." He is well dressed, ghetto style — a white turtleneck sweater, white pants, a white felt hat, white sneakers, nothing more. Later he will step out like this into the winter streets. You got to meet the eye of the beholder with class. Freezing is for plants.

A-I interviews them. Yes, they started three years ago and would hit four or five names a day. Junior liked to work at least an hour a day. So go the questions: Cay liked to use red marker, Junior blue. Hundreds of masterpieces to their credit. Yes, Junior's greatest masterpiece is in the tunnel where the track descends from 125th Street to 116th Street. There, high on the wall, is JUNIOR 161 in letters six feet high. "You want to get your name in a place where people don't know how you could do it, how you could get up to there. You got to make them think." It is the peril of the position which calls. Junior frowns on the later artists who have come after Cay and himself. The talk these days is of SLY and STAY HIGH, PHASE 2, BAMA, SNAKE, and STITCH. The article by Richard Goldstein in *New York* (March 26, 1973) has offered a nomenclature for the styles, Broadway, Brooklyn and Bronx, disquisitions on bubble and platform letters. Perhaps his source is BAMA, who has said to another reporter in his full articulate speaking style, "Bronx style is bubble letters, and Brooklyn style is script with lots of flourishes and arrows. It's a style all by itself. Broadway style, these long slim letters, was brought here from Philadelphia by a guy named Topcat. Queens style is very difficult, very hard to read."

Junior is contemptuous of this. The new forms have wiped out respect for the old utilitarian lettering. If Cay likes the work of STAY HIGH, Junior is impressed by none. "That's just fanciness,"

he says of the new. "How're you going to get your name around doing all that fancy stuff?"

Cay speaks into this with his deep, strangled, and wholly existential voice — he cannot be certain any sound he utters will come out as he thinks. "Everybody tries to catch up to us," he says.

"You have to put in the hours?"

A profound nod.

Of course, he is not doing it any longer. Nor is Junior. Even before the accident, both had lost interest. On the one hand, the police were getting tough, the beatings when you were caught were worse, the legal penalties higher, the supplies of paint getting to be monitored, and on the other hand something had happened to the process itself. Too many names had grown — a jungle of ego creepers.

A-I queries them about the prominence of the name. He hesitates how to pose the question — he fears confidence will be lost if he asks straight-out. "What is the meaning of the name?" but, indeed, he does not have to — Cay speaks up on what it means to watch the name go by. "The name," says Cay, in a full voice, Delphic in its unexpected resonance — as if the idol of a temple had just chosen to break into sound — "The name," says Cay, "is the *faith* of graffiti."

It is quite a remark. He wonders if Cay knows what he has said. "The name," repeats Cay, "is the *faith*." He is in no doubt of the depth of what he has said. His eyes fix on A-I, his look is severe. Abruptly, he declares that the proper title is "The Faith of Graffiti." So it is.

A Sunday afternoon has come to its end. A-I walks downstairs with Junior, Cay, Lurk and Li'l Flame, and is shown modest examples of their writing on the apartment house walls. Cay has also used another name. At times he has called himself THE PRAYER 161. They say goodbye in the hall. Cay shows A-I the latest 161st Street sequence of thumb-up finger-curved handshakes. The pistol-pointed forefinger and upraised thumb of one man touch the thumb and forefinger of the other in a quick little cat's cradle. Cay's fingers are surprisingly deft. Then he and Junior spar a bit, half-comic for he lurches, but with the incisive tenderness of the ghetto, as if his moves also say, "Size don't come in packages. A cripple keeps the menace." It is agreeable to watch. As he attempts to spar, Cay is actually moving better than he has all day.

The name is the faith of graffiti. Was it true that the only writing which did not gut one's health lay in those questions whose answers were not known from the start? A-I still had no more than a clue to

graffiti. Were the answers to be found in the long war of the will against the power of taboo? Who could know when one of the gods would turn in sleep as images were drawn? Was that a thought in the head of the first savage to put the silhouette of an animal on the wall of a cave? If so, the earliest painting had been not two dimensions but one — one, like graffiti — the hand pushing forward into the terror of future punishment. Only later would come an easier faith that the Lord might be on the side of the artist.

2.

No, size doesn't come in packages, and the graffiti writers had been all heights and all shapes, even all the ages from twelve to twenty-four. They had written masterpieces in letters six feet high on the side of walls and subway cars, and had scribbled furtive little toys, which is to say small names without style, sometimes just initials. There was panic in the act for you wrote with an eye over your shoulder for oncoming authority. The Transit Authority cops would beat you if they caught you, or drag you to court, or both. The judge, donning the robes of Solomon, would condemn the early prisoners to clean the cars and subway stations of the names. HITLER 2 (reputed to be so innocent of his predecessor that he only knew Hitler 1 had a very big rep!) was caught, and passed on the word of his humiliation. Cleaning the cars, he had been obliged to erase the work of others. All proportions kept, it may in simple pain of heart have been not altogether unequal to condemning Cézanne to wipe out the works of Van Gogh.

So there was real fear of being caught. Pain and humiliation were implacable dues, and not all graffiti artists showed equal grace under such pressure. Some wrote like cowards, timidly, furtively, jerkily. "Man," was the condemnation of the peers, "you got a messed-up handwriting." Others laid one cool flowering of paint upon another, and this was only after having passed through all the existential stations of the criminal act, even to first *inventing* the paint, which was of course the word for stealing the stuff from the stores. But then, an invention is the creation of something which did not exist before — like a working spray can in your hand. (Indeed, if Plato's Ideal exists, and the universe is first a set of forms, then what is any invention but a theft from the given universal Ideal?)

There was always art in a criminal act — no crime could ever be as automatic as a production process — but graffiti writers were opposite to criminals since they were living through the stages of the crime in order to commit an artistic act — what a doubling of intensity when the artist not only steals the cans but tries for the colors he wants, not only the marker and the color, but steal them in double amounts so you don't run out in the middle of a masterpiece. What a knowledge of cops' habits is called for when any Black or Puerto Rican adolescent with a big paper bag is bound to be examined by a Transit cop if he goes into the wrong station. So after his paint has been invented a writer has to decide by which subway entrance it is to be transported, and once his trip is completed back to the station which is the capital of his turf, he still has to find the nook where he can warehouse his goods for a few hours. To attempt to take the paint out of the station is to get caught. To try to bring it back to the station is worse. Six or seven kids entering a subway in Harlem, Washington Heights, or the South Bronx are going to be searched by Transit cops for cans. So they stash it, mill around the station for a time painting nothing, they are, after all, often in the subways — to the degree they are not chased, it is a natural clubhouse, virtually a country club for the sociability of it all — and when the cops are out of sight, and a train is coming in, they whip out their stash of paint from its hiding place, conceal it on their bodies, and in all the wrappings of oversize ragamuffin fatigues, get on the cars to ride to the end of the line where in some deserted midnight yard they will find their natural canvas which is of course that metal wall of a subway car ready to reverberate into all the egos on all the metal of New York, what an echo that New York metal will give into the slapped-silly senses of every child-psyche who grew up in New York, yes, metal as a surface on which to paint is even better than stone.

But it is hardly so quick or automatic as that. If they are to leave the station at the end of the line, there is foreign turf to traverse which guarantees no safe passage, and always the problem of finding your way into the yards.

In the A-train yard at 207th Street, the unofficial entrance was around a fence that projected out over a cliff and dropped into the water of the Harlem River. You went out one side of that fence on a narrow ledge, out over the water, and back the other side of the fence into the yards "where the wagons," writes Richard Goldstein, "are sitting like silent whales."

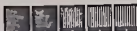
We may pick our behemoth — whales and dinosaurs, elephants folded in sleep. At night, the walls of cars sit there possessed of soul — you are not just writing your name but trafficking with the iron spirit of the vehicle now resting. What a presence. What a consecutive set of iron sleeping beasts down all the corrals of the yard, and the graffiti writers stealthy as the near-to-silent sound of their movements working up and down the line of cars, some darting in to squiggle a little toy of a name on twenty cars — their nerve has no larger surge — others embarking on their first or their hundred-and-first masterpiece, daring the full enterprise of an hour of living with this tension after all the other hours of waiting (once they had come into the yard) for the telepathic disturbance of their entrance to settle, waiting for the guards patrolling the lines of track to grow somnolent and descend into the early morning pall of the watchman. Sometimes the graffiti writers would set out from their own turf at dark, yet not begin to paint until two in the morning, hiding for hours in the surest corners of the yard or in and under the trains. What a quintessential marriage of cool and style to write your name in giant separate living letters, large as animals, lithe as snakes, mysterious as Arabic and Chinese curls of alphabet, and to do it in the heart of a winter night when the hands are frozen and only the heart is hot with fear. No wonder the best of the graffiti writers, those mountains of heavy masterpiece production, STAY HIGH, PHASE 2, STAR III, get the respect, call it the glory, that they are known, famous and luminous as a rock star. It is their year. Nothing automatic about writing a masterpiece on a subway car. "I was scared," said Japan, "all the time I did it." And sitting in the station at 158th and St. Nicholas Avenue, watching the trains go by, talking between each wave of subway sound, he is tiny in size, his dark eyes as alert as any small and hungry animal who eats in a garden at night and does not know where the householder with his varmint gun may be waiting.

Now, as Japan speaks, his eyes never failing to miss the collection of names, hieroglyphs, symbols, stars, crowns, ribbons, masterpieces and toys on every passing car, there is a sadness in his mood. The city has mounted a massive campaign. There was a period in the middle when it looked as if graffiti would take over the world, when a movement that began as the expression of tropical peoples living in a monotonous iron-gray and dull brown brick environment, surrounded by asphalt, concrete, and clangor, had erupted to

save the sensuous flesh of their inheritance from a macadamization of the psyche, save the blank city wall of their unfed brain by painting the wall over with the giant trees and petty plants of a tropical rain-forest. Like such a jungle, every plant, large and small, spoke to one another, lived in the profusion *and* harmony of a forest. No one wrote over another name, no one was obscene — for that would have smashed the harmony. A communion took place over the city in this plant growth of names until every institutional wall, fixed or moving, every modern new school which looked like a brand-new factory, every old slum warehouse, every standing billboard, every huckstering poster, and the halls of every high-rise low-rent housing projects which looked like a prison (and all did) were covered by a foliage of graffiti that grew seven or eight feet tall, even twelve feet high in those choice places worth the effort for one to stand on another, ah, if it had gone on, this entire city of blank architectural high-rise horrors would have been covered with paint. Graffiti writers might have become mountaineers with pitons for the ascent of high-rise high-cost swinger-single apartments in the East Sixties and Seventies. The look of New York, and then the world, might have been transformed, and the interlapping of names and colors, those wavelets of ego forever reverberating upon one another, could have risen like a flood to cover the monstrosities of abstract empty techno-architectural twentieth-century walls where no design ever predominated over the most profitable (and ergo most monotonous) construction ratio implicit in a twenty-million-dollar bill.

The kids painted with less than this in view, no doubt. Sufficient in the graffiti-proliferating years of the early Seventies to paint the front door of every subway car they could find. The ecstasy of the roller coaster would dive down their chest if they were ever waiting in a station when a twelve-car train came stampeding in and their name, HONDO, WILDCAT, SABU or LOLLIPOP, was on the *front!* Yes, the graffiti had not only the feel and all the super-powered whoosh and impact of all the bubble letters in all the mad comic strips, but the *zoom*, the *aghr*, and the *abhr* of screeching rails, the fast motion of subways roaring into stations, the comic strips come to life. So it was probably not a movement designed to cover the world so much as the excrescence of an excrescence. Slum populations chilled on one side by the bleakness of modern design, and brain-cooked on the other by comic strips and TV ads with zooming letters, even brain-cooked by politicians whose ego is a vir-

tue — I am here to help my nation — brained by the big beautiful numbers on the yard markers on football fields, by the whip of the capital letters in the names of the products, and gut-picked by the sound of rock and soul screaming up into the voodoo of the firmament with the shriek of the performer's insides coiling like neon letters in the blue satanic light, yes, all the excrescence of the highways and the fluorescent wonderlands of every Las Vegas sign frying through the Iowa and New Jersey night, all the stomach-tightening nitty-gritty of trying to learn how to spell was in the writing, every assault on the psyche as the trains came slamming in. Maybe it was no more than a movement which looked to take some of the excrescence left within and paint it out upon the world, no more than a species of collective therapy of grace exhibited under pressure in which they never dreamed of painting over the blank and empty modern world, but the authority of the city reacted as if the city itself might be in greater peril from graffiti than from drugs, and a war had gone on, more and more implacable on the side of the authority with every legal and psychological weedkiller on full employ until the graffiti of New York was defoliated, cicatrized, Vietnamized. Now, as A-I sat in the station with Jon Naar and Japan and they watched the trains go by, aesthetic blight was on the cars. Few masterpieces remained. The windows were gray and smeared. The cars looked dull red or tarnished aluminum — their recent coat of paint remover having also stripped all polish from the manufacturer's surface. New subway cars looked like old cars. Only the ghost-outline of former masterpieces still remained. The kids were broken. The movement seemed over. Even the paint could no longer be invented. Now the cans set out for display were empty, the misdemeanors were being upped to felony, the fines were severe, the mood was vindictive. Two hideous accidents had occurred. One boy had been killed beneath a subway car, and another had been close to fatally burned by an inflammable spray can catching a spark, yes, a horror was on the movement and transit patrols moved through the yards and plugged the entrances. The white monoliths of the high-rise were safe. And the subways were dingier than they had ever been. The impulse of the jungle to cover the walled tombs of technology had been broken. Was there a clue to graffiti in the opposite passion to look upon monotony and call it health? As A-I walked the streets with Jon Naar, they passed a sign: DON'T POLLUTE — KEEP THE CITY CLEAN. "That sign," the photographer murmured, "is a form of pollution itself."

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3.

Since the metaphor of plant life had climbed all over his discussion of graffiti he went with profit to the Museum of Modern Art for it confirmed the botanical notion with which he began: that if subway graffiti had not come into existence, some artist might have found it necessary to invent, for it was in the chain of such evolution. Art had been rolling down the fall-line from Cézanne to Frank Stella, from Gauguin to Mathieu. On such a map, subway graffiti was an alluvial delta, the mud-caked mouth of a hundred painterly streams. If the obvious objection was that you might interview a thousand Black and Puerto Rican kids who rushed to write their name without having ever seen a modern painting, the answer, not quite as obvious, was that plants spoke to plants.

Famous plant-man Backster, attaching the electrodes of his polygraph to a philodendron one night, wonders in the wake of this passing impulse how to test the plant for some emotional reaction. Abruptly, a current courses through the philodendron at the horror of this thought. (When Backster cuts or burns the leaf, however, the polygraph registers little: now, the plant is numb. Its sensitivity seems to be its life, its suffering an abstention from life.) By the new logic of the experiment, plants must be a natural species of wireless. (What, indeed, did Picasso teach us if not that every form offers up its own scream when it is torn?) Radio is then no more than a prosthetic leg of communication, whereas plants speak to plants, and are aware of the death of animals on the other side of the hill. Some artists might even swear they have known this from the beginning, for they would see themselves as stimulants who inject perception into the blind vision of the century. (And like a junkie, does the century move into apathy from the superbrilliance of its injections?)

Still, when it comes to a matter of who might influence the writers of graffiti, one is not obliged to speak only of neon signs, comic strips and TV products, one has the other right to think the kids are enriched by all art which offers the eye a resemblance to graffiti. Which might enable us then to talk of Jackson Pollock and the abstract graffiti of his confluences and meanderings, of Stuart Davis' dramatization of print as a presence that grows in swollen proportion to its size, even include Hans Hofmann's *Memoria in Aeter-*

num where those red and yellow rectangles float like statements of a name over indistinct washes beneath, or Matisse's blue and green *Dance*. (Matisse's limbs wind onto one another like the ivy-creeper calligraphies of New York graffiti.) So might one refer to work which speaks of ghetto emotion in any place, of Siqueiros' *Echo of a Scream*, or Van Gogh's *Starry Night*. If the family histories of the most messed-up families have all the garbage-can chaos of de Kooning's *Woman*, no wonder the subway writers prided themselves on style and éclat — "you got a messed-up handwriting" being the final term of critical kill.

But on reflection, was A-I trying to slip in some old piety on the distribution of art down from the museums through media to the masses? — these subway children may never have seen *Memoria in Aeternum* at the head of the stairs at MOMA, but it filtered through to them by way of advertising artists. Fell crap! Rather say art begot art, and the migrations were no one's business. For if plants were telepathic, then humans lived in a psychic sea where all the forms of art also passed through the marketplace of the dreamer in his sleep, and every part of society spoke to every other part, if only with a curse.

So he had the happy thought during his visit to the Modern Art to decide that some paintings might be, by whatever measure, *on the air* — leave it to the engineers of some future techno-coven to try to determine the precise migrations of Miró's *Plate 8 from Series One, 1953*, "*The Family*" into the head of an espontaneo with a spray can looking over his shoulder for the black mother in a uniform who will beat his own black blue.

4.

Like a good reporter he goes to see the Mayor. It is ten days to Christmas and the last two weeks of the Lindsay administration on that Saturday morning he has his appointment to visit, nearly a week from the previous Sunday when he talked to Junior and Cay. Again the weather is iron-gray and cold. At Gracie Mansion, the wind is driving in from the East River, and the front porch looks across its modest private lawn to the Triboro Bridge in the north. (To the west apartment houses rise like the sheer face of Yosemite.)

It is not a large lawn in front of the Mayor's residence nor even a large house. Old white Gracie Mansion might be no exceptional residence on any wealthy road in Portland, Oregon or Portland, Maine — there is even a basketball hoop on a backboard not far from the front door, a political touch dating from recent years when the Knicks became the most consistently successful team in New York — yet with all its limited grandeur, Gracie Mansion is still one fine Federalist of a house (built in 1799) and if the spirit of an age could have been captured by a radio, then where better to measure this magic mean if not in the proportions of the Mansion's living room and dining room? They speak in their harmony of some perfect period of Arcadian balance between the early frontier being settled to the West and the new sense of democratic government forging itself in the state capitals of the East. How better to characterize the decorum, substance, grace, and calm center of such architecture if not to think that the spirit and style of the *prose* of the American Constitution is also in it (even to the hint of boredom in prose and buildings both), yet, why not precisely these high ceilings, paucity of curves, and all the implicit checks and balances of the right angle? Lindsay, it may be said, is at home in such surroundings. They seem built to his frame. Only a tall lean man could look well-proportioned in so *enlightened* a set of rooms. Nothing like a Gothic arch is present to suggest any mad irreconcilable opposites of God and man, no Corinthian columns to resonate with praetorian tyrannies (and orgies at the top), nor any small and slanted ceilings to speak of craft and husbandry, just government here in Federal style without the intervention of Satan or Jehovah (and next to nothing of Christ), just a fundament of Wasp genius, a building style to state that man could live without faith if things were calm enough. Perhaps the economy of balance is the true god of the Wasp.

His appointment is at eleven, but it is an unusual morning for the Lindsay family since they have been up until five the night before at a farewell party given the Mayor to honor the eight years of his administration. Lindsay has worked as hard as any man in New York for eight years, and can afford the luxury of being hungover before a reporter this Saturday morning. What a nice relaxation. Lindsay chuckles at the memory of each unexpected rejoinder of party dialogue and laughs at the expression on Tom Morgan's face, press secretary to the Mayor, a tall man with a dark brush mustache who recapitulates in the sardonic gloom of his hungover eyes the

incandescence of all those good drinks at that good party. Watching them all, studying Lindsay's face with its patrician features so endowed with every purchase on the meaning of handsome that he could be not only a movie star but there at the front, right ahead of Burt Lancaster and Steve McQueen, on a par with Robert Redford, and hardly a millimeter of profile behind Paul Newman, it occurs indeed that no movie star could be more convincing than Lindsay if it came to playing some very important American politician in the quiet American years from 1800 to 1825. Even his eroded teeth — Lindsay's one failing feature — speak with authenticity of the bad teeth of those English ruling classes who became the American ruling classes in that Federalist era one hundred and seventy years ago. So sitting in such a dining room, and a little later adjourned to a living room with Lindsay and Morgan to bring up the subject of his interview, he is thinking that Gracie Mansion never had a Mayor nearly so perfectly suited to itself; if there were some divine renting agency in the halls of karma, then come soon or late the post of Mayor of New York would have had to be found for John Vliet Lindsay or the house would feel unfulfilled.

For Lindsay, however, the question may have been whether an ambitious man had ever come to power at a time less promising for himself. He had labored in his two terms, innovated and negotiated, explored, tinkered, tampered, and shifted the base of every municipal machine of government upon which he could work his cadres. He had built a constituency in the ghetto. Mailer-Breslin running for the mayoralty in '69 also ran into one argument over and over in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Harlem and the South Bronx. It was, "What do we want with you? Lindsay's our man." Lindsay had walked the streets in summer riots, and held some kind of line for decontrol, which is to say, local control, in the ghetto schools. That had taken political courage. Yet make him no saint! He had also worked with the most powerful real estate interests in the city. No question that in his eight years, the ugliest architecture in the history of New York had also gone up. The new flat tops of the skyline now left New York as undistinguished in much of its appearance as Cleveland or Dallas. It is possible Lindsay had bought ghetto relief at the price of aesthetic stultification. Call it desecration. The view of New York's offices and high-rise apartments proved sacrilegious to the mood of any living eye — Wasp balance had done it again.

Still, with all this effort, New Yorkers hated him. For every intolerable reason, first of which was his defense of the ghettos. "If I

wanted a nigger for Mayor, I'd have voted for a nigger," said every archetype of a cab driver to any tourist who would listen. And yet this Federalist movie star, this hard-working mayor for ghetto rights, had been the first and most implacable enemy of subway graffiti. So there was a feather falling through the mood when he told Lindsay and Morgan why he had come.

But A-I had his speech. If he thought the Mayor had done an honorable job, and was prepared to say so, he still could not comprehend how a man who worked so hard to enter the spirit of ghetto conditions had been nonetheless so implacable in his reaction to graffiti. "Insecure cowards," Lindsay had called the kids. "A dirty shame." Others in his administration offered civic blasts: "graffiti pigs," "thoughtless and irresponsible behavior." It was surprising. While the management of a city required you to keep it clean — where would a mayor hide if he could not get the garbage out? — there was a difference between political necessity and the fury of this reaction. How could he call the kids cowards? Why the venom? It seemed personal.

Lindsay grinned. He had heard enough preambles from reporters to know when an interview was manageable. "Well, yes," he said, "I did get hot under the collar, and I suppose if we had to go through it again, I would hope to lose my temper a little less, but you have no idea what a blow that graffiti was to us." He shook his head at the memory. "You see, we had gone to such work, such ends, to get those new subway cars in. It meant so much to people here in the city to get a ride for instance in one of the new air-conditioned cars. On a hot summer day their mood would pick up when they had the luck to catch one. And you know, that was work. It's hard to get anything done here. You stretch budgets, and try to reason people into activities they don't necessarily want to take up on their own. We were proud of those subway cars. It took a lot of talking to a lot of committees to get that accomplished."

Morgan nodded. "And then," Lindsay said, "the kids started to deface them."

A-I put his demurrer. "Deface," after all, was the core of the argument. Some people might think subway graffiti was art. He suggested in passing Claes Oldenburg's classic remark, "... You're standing there in the station, everything is gray and gloomy and all of a sudden one of those graffiti trains slides in and brightens the place like a big bouquet from Latin America."

Lindsay smiled as if recalling the screams, moans, epithets, and

agonized squawks of every bright college intellectual on his staff when Oldenburg's quote first came riding in. Grand division in the Establishment! Aesthetic schism! "Yes, we remember that quote," Lindsay's grin seemed to say. He had the most curious quality of personality. One did not know if he were secretly more or less decent than his personality. While the personality itself was decent enough, it was also patently not the man, nor, unhappily for him, characteristic at all of New York. He seemed now like a Westerner, full of probity, rawhide and something buried in the personality, a man you might not get to know at all even after a night of drinking together. He wasn't in the least like Richard Nixon except to share one quality. Lindsay was out of focus. He had always been out of focus. Part of his political trouble.

Well, Lindsay suggested, they had never really wondered whether it was anything but defacement. "People would come into new cars and suddenly they'd see them all marked up, covered inside and out, and it depressed people terribly. You know, we have to be a kind of nerve center to the city. Reports came in from everywhere. This graffiti was profoundly depressing — it truly hurt people's moods. The life would go out of everybody when they saw the cars defaced, they felt it was defacement, no question of that. And we kept hearing one request over and over, 'Can't you do something about it?' Then, too, we had our own pride in these matters. You know, you get to feel after you've put through a new municipal building that it's yours in some way. As Mayor I'd get as angry when a city building got marked up as if I owned it personally. Oh, it's easier to talk about it now, but I must say it was hard at times not to blow up."

"Actually," Morgan observed, "the Mayor would go around calming some of us down. 'Remember,' he would tell us, 'they're only kids.'"

Yes, in the framework of that time in the Summer of '71 and the Winter and Spring of '72 when Lindsay was looking to get the Democratic nomination for President, what an upset to his fortunes, what a vermin of catastrophe that these writings had sprouted like weeds all over the misery of Fun City, a new monkey of unmanageables to sit on Lindsay's overloaded political back. He must have sensed the presidency draining away from him as the months went by, the graffiti grew, and the millions of tourists who passed through the city brought the word out to the rest of the nation: "Filth is sprouting on the walls."

Of course, where was the tourist who could distinguish between men's-room and subway graffiti? Who was going to dare to look long enough to see that it was a name and not an obscene thought in the writing. Today, just before he had come to Gracie Mansion, he had stopped in the lavatory of a York Avenue bar for a minute, and there on the john wall was drawn a pure old-fashioned piece of smut graffiti. A balloon of dialogue issued out of a girl's mouth. No art in the lettering, no style. "Did you know," said her balloon, "that your clit is in your ass?" Some lost shred of fecal communion now nailed to the wall. Was there a public comfort station in America which did not have a dozen such insights, "Suck me," "Fuck you"? That was what people expected to see on the subways. They assumed the full mad explosive shithouse of America was now erupting in their faces. So they did not look but rode in the cars with their heads down, and brought the news out to the rest of America that Lindsay could not keep the city clean. No wonder he called it a dirty shame. And labeled the aplomb of the graffiti writers cowardice. That was his attempt to soothe the terror in the heart of every subway citizen who looked at the graffiti and put his head down so his eye would not meet any eye that might be connected to a hand which held a knife, yes, that was one side of the fear, and the other was fear of the insane graffiti writer in the self. For what filth would burst out of every civilized office worker in New York if ever *they* started to write on moving public walls, my god, the feces to spread and the blood to spray, yes, the good voting citizen of New York would know that the violent ward at Bellevue was opening its door to him on the day he would take a spray can to a subway. So, New York citizenry saw all the children as mad — and therefore saw madness, instability, and horror in the New York transit. No wonder Lindsay had gone to war against graffiti. The city would tolerate junk, graft, insanities of traffic, mugging, every petty crime of the street, and every major pollution, but it could not accept a towering rain-forest of graffiti on all the forty-story walls. Yes, build a wall and balance a disease. For the blank wall of the new architecture was a deadening agent to balance the growing violence beneath. (Could it be said that the monotony of modern architecture increased all over the world in direct relation to the volcanic disturbances of each society it would contain?) Plastic above, dynamite below.

In the face of such questions the interview was effectively over. They chatted for a while, and got up to say goodbye. On the way out, A-I noticed there was a Rauschenberg on the wall.

Lindsay, in his courtesy, walked with him to the gate. Wearing a blue windbreaker he looked in the gray outdoor light like a veteran big league ballplayer, tall, weathered, knowledgeable. They took leave not uncordially, and he complimented the Mayor on eight good years, even meant it.

"I wish I had the talent to write," Lindsay said in parting. Was that a politician's gift? A-I pulled back the reply that he wished he could have been Mayor.

Outside the fence, a policeman was standing with a drawn gun. It was a simple measure of the times: be forever ready at the Gracie gate.

And indeed a ten-year-old boy on roller skates cried aloud, "That's him, that's him, that's the Mayor," and promptly took out a cap pistol and fired a number of bang-bangs at the back of John Lindsay going back into his house.

For a while, A-I walked, and had a little fantasy of how impossible it would have proved if the miracle worked and he had been elected in the campaign of 1969. What would he have done about graffiti? Would he have tried to explain its virtues to the people of New York — and laughed in all the pain of absolute political failure. The answer was simple — nobody like himself would ever be elected Mayor until the people agreed bad architecture was as poisonous as bad food. No, graffiti as a political phenomenon had small hope for life. His faith in the value of the question would have to explore in another place. Did the final difficulty lie in the meaning of graffiti as art? There the inquiry might become as incomprehensible as the motives of the most advanced artists. On then to the rim of the enigma, to the Sea of Vortices where the meanings whirl with no meaning.

5.

Years ago, so much as twenty years ago, A-I had conceived of a story he was finally not to write, for he lost his comprehension of it. A rich young artist in New York in the early Fifties, bursting to go beyond Abstract Expressionism, began to rent billboards on which he sketched huge, ill-defined (never say they were sloppy) works in paint chosen to run easily and flake quickly. The rains distorted the

lines, made gullies of the forms, automobile exhausts laid down a patina, and comets of flying birds crusted the disappearing surface with their impasto. By the time fifty such billboards had been finished — a prodigious year for the painter — the vogue was on. His show was an event. They transported the billboards by trailer-truck and broke the front wall of the gallery to get the art objects inside. It was the biggest one-man exhibition in New York that year. At its conclusion, two art critics were arguing whether such species of work still belonged to art.

"You're mad," cried one, "it is not art, it is never art."

"No," said the other, "I think it's valid."

So would the story end. Its title, *Validity*. But before he had written a word he made the mistake of telling it to a young Abstract Expressionist whose work he liked. "Of course it's valid," said the painter, eyes shining with the project. "I'd do it myself if I could afford the billboards."

The story was never written. He had assumed he was proposing a satire, but it was evident he had no insight into how painters were ready to think. Some process had entered art and he could not discern it out.

Let us go back to the pastel by de Kooning which Rauschenberg erased. The details, when further inquiry is made, are less impromptu. Rauschenberg first informed de Kooning of what he would do, and de Kooning agreed. The work, when sold, bore the inscription "A drawing from Willem de Kooning erased by Robert Rauschenberg." Both artists are now proposing something more than that the artist has the same right as the financier to print money, they may even be saying that the meat and marrow of art, the painterly core, the life of the pigment, and the world of technique with which hands lay on that pigment are convertible to something other. The ambiguity of meaning in the twentieth century, the hollow in the heart of faith, has become such an obsessional hole that art may have to be converted into intellectual transactions. It is as if we are looking for stuff, any stuff with which to stuff the hole, and will convert every value into packing for this purpose. For there is no doubt that in erasing the pastel and selling it, art has been diminished but our knowledge of society is certainly enriched. An aesthetic artifact has been converted into a sociological artifact. It is not the painting that intrigues us now but the lividities of art fashion which made the transaction possible in the first place. Something rabid is loose in the century. Maybe we are not convert-

ing art into some comprehension of social process, but rather are using art to choke the hole, as if society has become so hopeless, which is to say so twisted in knots of faithless ideological spaghetti, that the glee is in strangling the victims.

But take the example further. Let us imagine a show at the Guggenheim. It will be like many we have seen. Let us make it a plausible modern one-man show. Nothing will be exhibited but computer read-out sheets from a statistical operation. Hundreds of such sheets tacked to the wall. Somewhat irregularly. Attempts at neatness will be contradicted by a confusion in the style of placing them on the wall of the Guggenheim as it spirals up the ramp. Checkerboards alternate with ascending bands, then cul-de-sacs, paper stapled up every way.

We try to digest the aesthetic experience. Of what do the computer read-out sheets consist? What is the subject of their inquiry? we ask. And what is the motive of the artist? Is he telling us something about the order and disorder of the mind in relation to a technological world? Has he presented us with an ongoing composition of exceptional cunning? Is it possible he even has set the problem for the computer himself? Maybe the endless numbers on these computer sheets reflect some analogue to the tension of major themes in his brain. Do we then have here an arithmetical display whose relation to art is as complex as *Finnegans Wake* to literature?

Bullshit, responds the painter. The computer sheets were selected at random. Because the artist did not even wish to bear an unconscious responsibility for the selection, he chose an acquaintance with whom he shared no great psychic identity to pick up the computer sheets for him. Neither he nor the acquaintance ever inquired into the subject of the statistical problem, and he never took a look at what was brought back. Rather, he spoke to the janitor at the Guggenheim by telephone and told him to tack up the pages any way at all. The checkerboards and bands and cul-de-sacs of stapled paper were merely a reflection of the personnel: the janitor worked with two assistants. One was neat, the other drunk. And the painter never came to see the show. The show was the fact that people came, studied the walls, lived for an uncertain hour in the Guggenheim and went out again, their minds exercised by a question that not only had no answer, but may not even have been a question. The artist had done his best to have no intent. Not unless his intent was to demonstrate that most of the experience of viewing a painting is the context of the museum itself. We are next to one of John

Cage's compositions in silence. Art has been saying with more and more intensity: The nature of the painting has become less interesting than the relation of painting to society — we can even erase Rauschenberg's erasure. Get the artist out of it altogether, and it is still art. The world is turning inside out.

What step is left to take? Only one. A show that offers no object at all. The last reference to painting or sculpture is the wall on which something can be hung, or the floor on which a piece can sit. That must now disappear. The art-piece enters the artist: the work can only be experienced within his psyche.

From the *New York Times*, September 2, 1973, by Peter Plagens:

a marksman-friend shot Chris Burden in the upper left arm with a .22 long-jacket before an audience of 12 intimates. He (Burden) figured on a graze wound with a Band-Aid slapped on afterward, but it "felt like a truck hit my arm at 80 miles per hour"; he went to the hospital, nauseous, and filed the requisite police report ("accident").

Plagens goes on to describe other "pieces." Burden chooses situations for their possibility of danger, pain, humiliation, or boredom. There is:

"Movie on the Way Down," in which Burden, hanging by his heels, nude, six feet off a gym floor with a movie camera in his hands, is summarily chopped loose.

The movie is presumably taken on the way down (is it filmed in slow motion?) and he ends with a cut lip. There are other pieces where he rockets flaming matches "at his nude supine wife" or sets ablaze two 16-foot wooden crosses on Laguna Canyon Road at 2 A.M. — "the intended audience for that piece," says Burden, "was the one guy driving down the road who saw it first." Ah, Los Angeles! For "Endurance/real time," he 1) stays in a locker for five days, 2) does 1600 tours of a gallery on his bicycle and 3) remains in bed for three weeks and a day. He also pretends to be a dead man lying under a tarpaulin on the street and is arrested by the police for creating a traffic hazard. He gets a hung jury at his trial and the case is dismissed but "one of the nine votes for conviction, a stewardess, told Burden if she ever saw him under a tarp again, she'd run over him herself." He even does a study in the shift of identity. For "I Became a Secret Hippie," Burden cuts his hair short and dresses in

FBI clothes. "If you want to be a heavy artist nowadays," Plagens, reporting on Burden, concludes, "you have to do something unpleasant to your body, because everything *else* has been done. . . . [Burden] may be a product of art-world art history — backed into some untenable masochistic corner because all the other novelty territory has been claimed."

At the least, Burden is fulfilling the dictum of Jean Malaquais that once there are enough artists in the world, the work of art will become the artist himself. Burden is refining his personality. Through existential tests. Burden is not exploring his technique, but his vibrations. The situations he chooses are, as Plagens describes, "edgy." They have nothing remotely resembling a boundary until they are done. In "Movie on the Way Down," Burden can hardly know if he will cut his lip or break his neck, feel a live instant on the descent or some dull anxiety. When he shoots lighted matches at his nude wife the areas defined are empty before the action begins. Given every variable from Women's Liberation to the sadomasochistic tales of Wilhelm Stekel, Burden can know in advance only that a psycho-dramatic enterprise will be commenced. But where it may end, and what everybody might feel — will the matches burn her skin? — will the marriage be fortified or scorched? — no, there is no confidence which question is going to offer an answer. Perhaps he is not refining his personality so much as attempting to clear a space in his psyche free of dread. But isn't that the fundamental operation of the primitive at the dawn of civilization, the establishment of the ego? For what is the human ego but a clearing in the forest of the psyche free of dread? Money, held in one's hand, is free of time. Cash has no past; its future is assignable. It is powerful and empty. So, too, is the ego. It bears the same relation to the psyche as cash bears to the security or comfort of the body. The ego is virtually separate from the psyche even as money is still separate from every organic communicating logic of nature.

We are back to the cave man and his cave painting. His hand draws the outline of the animal in defiance of those gods who watch him. Burden is smashing his nose on the floor or displaying his wife in defiance of the last gods of conventional art. They are that audience remnant of a once-leviathan bourgeois culture. They still trickle out to see Happenings, the desire of the middle class to preserve its last religion: the world of the artist, palette, museum and gallery wall. Middle-class passion is to appreciate the work of art.

But art may be the little ball rolling off the table. Perhaps art now

signifies some unheard reverberation from the subterranean obsession of us all: Is civilization coming to an end? Is society burning? Is the day of the cave man returning? Has our search for ego which was once so routine — a useful (somewhat heartless) ego to be fashioned for a useful (if heartless) society — now gone past the measure of our experience so that we no longer try to construct a control center at the core of the mind, but plunge instead into absurdities which offer us that curious calm we find in the art of the absurd, even as the cave man, defying his gods, discovered he was not always dead on the next day.

But we are at the possible end of civilization, and tribal impulses start up across the world. The descending line of the isolated artist goes down from Michelangelo all the way to Shoot. But Chris Burden is finally more comfortable to us than the writers of graffiti. For Burden is the last insult from the hippie children of the middle class to the bourgeois art-patron who is their spiritual parent, but graffiti speaks of a new civilization where barbarism is stirring at the roots.

If at the beginning of Western painting, man was small and God was large; if, in the Renaissance, man was mysteriously large in his relation to God; now, in our times man has disappeared into God. He is mass-man without identity, and he is God. He is all the schizophrenia of the powerless and all-powerful in one psyche.

As we lose our senses in the static of the oncoming universal machine, so does our need to exercise the ego take on elephantiasistical proportions. Graffiti is the expression of a ghetto that is near to the plague, for civilization is now closed off from the ghetto. Too huge are the obstacles to any natural development of a civilized man. In the ghetto it is almost impossible to find some quiet identity. No, in the environment of the slum, the courage to display yourself is your only capital, and in the streets crime is the only productive process that converts such capital to the modern powers of the world, ego and money. Art is not peace but war, and form is the record of that war.

Yet there is a mystery still. From which combat came these curious letters of graffiti, with their Chinese and Arabic calligraphies? Out of what connection to the past did these lights and touches of flame become so much like the Hebrew alphabet where the form of the letter itself was worshipped as a manifest of the Lord? No, it is not enough to think of the childlike desire to see one's name ride by in letters large enough to scream your ego across the city, no, it is almost as if we must go back into some more primeval sense of exis-

tence. If our name is enormous to us, it is also not real — as if we have come from other places than the name, and lived in other lives.

Perhaps that is the unheard echo of graffiti, the vibration of that profound discomfort it arouses. Can the unheard music of its proclamation and/or its mess, the rapt intent seething of its foliage, be the herald of some oncoming apocalypse less and less far away, and so graffiti lingers on our subway door as a memento of all the lives ever lived, sounding now like the bugles of gathering armies across the unseen ridge.

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A Harlot High and Low. . . . gl

A Harlot High and Low

There are no answers. There are only questions.
— Jean Malaquais

A Harlot High and Low was the English title given to *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, one of Balzac's best novels. The book was concerned as much with secret police as with the prostitutes who passed through its pages, but then whores and political agents made a fair association for Balzac. The harlot, after all, inhabited the world of *as if*. You paid your money and the harlot acted for a little while — when she was a good harlot — *as if* she loved you, and that was a more mysterious proposition than one would think, for it is always mysterious to play a role. It is equal in a sense to living under cover. At her best, the harlot was a different embodiment of a fantasy for each client, and at those moments of existence most intense for herself, the role she assumed became more real than the reality of her profession.

A harlot high and low. The pores of society breathe a new metaphor — the enigma of Intelligence itself. For we do not know if the people who make our history are more intelligent than we think, or whether stupidity rules the process of thought at its highest level. Is America governed by accident more than we are ready to suppose, or by design? And if by design, is the design sinister? Are the actors playing roles more intricate than we expect? Trying to understand whether our real history is public or secret, exposed or — at the

"A Harlot High and Low" excerpts from "Strange Bedfellows — The Hughes-Nixon-Lansky Connection: The Secret Alliances of the CIA from World War II to Watergate" by Howard Kohn from *Rolling Stone* No. 213, May 20, 1976. By Straight Arrow Publishers, Inc. © 1976. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.

highest level — underground, is equal to exploring the opposite theaters of our cynicism and our paranoia.

For instance, we may be getting ready to decide that the CIA was the real producer of Watergate (that avant-garde show!) but where is the proof? We have come to a circular place. The CIA occupies a region in the modern mind where every truth is obliged to live in its denial; facts are wiped out by artifacts; proof enters the logic of counterproof and we are in the dream; matter breathes next to anti-matter.

There are Americans whose careers are composed of fact. One does not begin to comprehend certain men without their collections of fact. It would probably be crucial to know if Harry S. Truman had been happy or angry on a given day since that would enter the event of the day. He lives on an elementary level of biography. There are personalities, however, like Marilyn Monroe, for whom there are no emotional facts. It does not matter on any particular occasion if she was pleased or annoyed, timid or bold, even successful or unsuccessful. Her mood did not matter on a given day since she would as easily be feeling the opposite five minutes later. Moreover, she was an actress. She was able to simulate the opposite of what she felt. Since she was surrounded by people in show business who felt no need to be accurate if that interfered with a good story, one could not begin to discover the facts about such a woman, only the paradoxes. It may be that the difficulties in coming to know Marilyn Monroe offer a modest model for our penetration of Central Intelligence.

1.

A Skew in Sociology

Questions of social class and snobbery have always been very important in the CIA. With its roots in the wartime Office of Strategic Services (the letters OSS were said, only half-jokingly, to stand for "Oh So Social"), the agency has long been known for its concentration of Eastern Establishment, Ivy League types. Allen Dulles, a former American diplomat and Wall Street lawyer with impeccable connections and credentials, set the tone for an agency full of Roosevelts, Bundys, Cleveland Amory's brother Robert, and other scions of America's leading families. There have been exceptions, to be sure, but most of the CIA's top lead-

ers have been white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and graduates of the right Eastern schools. While changing times and ideas have diffused the influence of the Eastern elite throughout the government as a whole, the CIA remains perhaps the last bastion in official Washington of WASP power, or at least the slowest to adopt the principle of equal opportunity.

— Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks,
The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence

What a baby! Known affectionately as the Company, it was delivered to America by the Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, and grew from 5,000 employees in 1950 to 15,000 by 1955. Because the old OSS was not nearly large enough to make up its cadres, the CIA raided the FBI to obtain some of its first agents (thereby commencing an immense feud with J. Edgar Hoover) and also did its best to strip the army, the navy, the air force, the State Department, and virtually every other government bureau of good personnel. There was, after all, a vision. The potential functions of the CIA were calculated to become immense. They became immense. All intelligence was the purview. There was no reason, for instance, why the best long-term weather forecasts in America should not derive from CIA weather experts — knowledge of the weather helped crops; large crops were an instrument of foreign policy. No vein, therefore, of American business or culture was independent of Intelligence — not finance, media, economic production, labor-management relations, cinema, statistical theory, fringe groups, Olympic teams. There was no natural end to topics the CIA could legitimately interest itself in.

Since we live in an age of general systems, where all knowledge is assumed to live ultimately in the same field as other knowledge, so, from its inception, the CIA looked to draw its experts from every field: bankers, journalists, lobbyists, colonels, professors, commodores, soil-erosion specialists, diplomats, business consultants, students, lawyers, doctors, poison specialists, art experts, public-relations men, magazine editors, movie technicians. Out of every occupation in American life, men and women were drawn to make up the first cadres of the CIA, and they were often the best in their field.

Because the CIA, like other government bureaus, had a table of organization which limited the rank and salary of its employees, the Company had from the beginning an army of officers serving as privates. There was not room for the amount of ambition in its ranks.

People moved out of the CIA almost as quickly as they went in and returned to universities, businesses, other government departments, and major foundations, or back to their previous occupations in American life. Of course, a banker who had been a CIA man and was now in finance again was hardly the same banker. Nor had he necessarily left the CIA. If it had been the most exciting experience of his life and/or the most patriotic, he had sentimental loyalties to the Company. He was out of the CIA but still an effective member of it. Sometimes he might even be on call for special jobs or be asked for privileged information on the movements of his financial community.

Like the breaking out of a virus from the host cell, the metastasis of a cancer colony, or the leavening of yeast in bread — depending on one's point of view — the CIA offered a suffusion into the joints and pores of American life so complete that no master list of its active and reserve members (not to speak of its devoted sympathizers) was ever available. One CIA man could never know for certain whether a CIA man who had left the CIA did not still belong to it, and if he did, there were often excellent reasons no record should exist, particularly if he belonged to the Company as to a club, and took no salary. Some agents who left the CIA but were still in it, or of it, might have given reports every week of their life. Others may never have reported once. Like "moles" — it is the CIA word — they waited underground through the seasons working at their private career in order to be of eventual use. Some old agents might still be reliable, some might not — some might report only to one old friend in the Agency. No one would be certain finally who belonged and who did not. In places like the State Department, one could begin to guess, but never know, whether the first allegiance of many a foreign-service officer was to the State desk or to the Company's cover. Since the leaders of the CIA came from a social, financial, and corporate elite, it could be said that the Agency was the militant arm of the Establishment, an order of potential martyrs to Henry Luce's American Century.

The CIA is currently the owner of one of the biggest — if not *the* biggest — fleets of "commercial" airplanes in the world. Agency proprietaries include Air America, Air Asia, Civil Air Transport, Intermountain Aviation, Southern Air Transport, and several other air charter companies around the world ... [but] CIA headquarters ... has never been able to compute ex-

actly the number of planes flown by the airlines it owns, and personnel figures for the proprietaries are similarly imprecise. An agency holding company, the Pacific Corporation, including Air America and Air Asia, alone accounts for almost 20,000 people, more than the entire work force of the parent CIA. For years this vast activity was dominated and controlled by one contract agent, George Doole, who later was elevated to the rank of a career officer. Even then his operation was supervised, part time, by only a single senior officer who lamented that he did not know "what the hell was going on."

— *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*

One cannot follow the CIA's use of funds: Nobody is meant to know where all the Company's sources of money originate nor how they begin to end. At the core of many a CIA operation is the need for secrecy in the use of money. Some foreign official has to be bought, or expensive military equipment must be left as a gift in another country. If spies are to be paid, and foreign companies infiltrated, if Central American troops are to be trained for invasion forces, and drug traffics infiltrated for the information they will supply on Indochinese troop movements, if a hundred semilegal or near-to-criminal patriotic activities need to be lubricated without congressional grit in the bearings, then money has to pass down to active operative levels in the middle regions of the Company without scrupulous bookkeeping. It was better for the Director of the CIA not to know what his agents were up to, not if he had to testify on oath before congressional committees. What one did not know, one could not tell. It was therefore the essence of policy for no one to be in command of more information than he needed — a cellular society has to have waterproof compartments, enclaves. Money, therefore, did not always have to be accounted for; indeed, it often was put into an activity on no more than the word of the good character (and/or good family) of the agent who requisitioned it. No word needed to come back on what had been done with the bread, who was bought, who was killed, who made a profit.¹

Since inside information on foreign currencies, or the domestic commodities market and gold market, or advance warning of a de-

¹ The Pike committee in Congress had a withheld report (published in the *Village Voice*, February 16, 1976) which decided that the real intelligence budget is not \$3 billion, the estimate given to Congress, but is "closer to \$10 billion," the missing \$7 billion being buried in the appropriations of other departments. Ten billion dollars is roughly equal to the annual budget of New York City.

valuation in the dollar, was as available on occasion as money, it is unthinkable that some of the Wall Street men in the CIA did not make secret investments for the Agency (that is, for their enclave in the Agency) which soon brought back huge profits by virtue of the secret information which had first encouraged the investment. That kind of surplus could now be used for ultrasecret operations or for even more resplendent financial investments. It is novelistically intoxicating to contemplate the pyramiding of wealth which must have gone on in some enclaves of the CIA. What a congeries of friendly and competitive financial empires may have begun to exist within the agency! For all we know, and we will not soon know, half the Swiss banks are now controlled by agents, facets, wings, arms, committees, councils, operators, and officers of the CIA. Contemplating the mix of real names and false names, actual companies and fronts, declared and secret investment, legal and illegal accounting, fair and flawed computers, it is doubtful that we will ever be able to measure the wealth manipulated by the CIA. Add to this the inevitable intimacies and financial interrelations of such prime possibilities as Hughes, Vesco, and J. Paul Getty, plus the covert investments of the Agency in any number of multinational corporations (with the Mafia and without) — lo, it is not so difficult to think that the economic history of the Arab nations may yet be seen to shine by the secret light of the Company's resources. One cannot, of course, know. It is just that it is easier to believe in such a scenario than to assume that all those proud, powerful Company patriots with their comprehensive information and financial skills never used CIA money to make money that did not have to be accounted for.

Besides, it would be interesting to guess the magnitude of the CIA's secret funds. Out of the real \$10-billion Intelligence budget would come the seed money for concealed investments; if the process has been going on for twenty-five years with continuous reinvestment, then these secret investments could total by now anywhere from \$25 billion to \$100 billion, not an impossible sum for the twenty-five years it has been burgeoning if we compare it to the income of the CIA's senior partner, the Mafia — but we anticipate.

I have worked on projects with many CIA men so unaware of the entire operation that they had no realization and awareness of the roles of other CIA men working on the same project. I would know of this because inevitably somewhere along the line both

groups would come to the Department of Defense for support. I actually designed a special office in the Pentagon with but one door off the corridor. Inside, it had a single room with one secretary. However, off her office there was one more door that led to two more offices with a third doorway leading to yet another office, which was hidden by the door from the secretary's room. I had to do this because at times we had CIA groups with us who were not allowed to meet each other, and who most certainly would not have been there had they known that the others were there. (For the record, the office was 4D1000 — it may have been changed by now; but it stayed that way for many years.)

— L. Fletcher Prouty,
The Secret Team

It is inevitable that there should be a loss to CIA agents of a clear boundary to their identity. A man may work in the CIA for twenty years and never perform the role his title suggests he is performing. Two men may work side by side in the same office for ten years and never learn the other's real work, or to the contrary may know the work intimately but not have a clue on what it is designed to cover. A man's wife may only guess at his real activities. Old moles who have been working at a separate career for years might find themselves suddenly activated as agents and have to deal with CIA men who are present under a new cover themselves.

After years of such work, one may no longer be certain of one's own function, loyalty, or sanity — one can hardly be certain of the identity of one's friends, and one can never be sure the CIA has or has not made a new piece of history. It is impossible, for example, for anyone in the Company ever to be positive the Agency had absolutely nothing to do with the assassinations of the sixties. In such a medium of existence, paranoia is equal to logic itself, and an infinite number of scenarios may dance on the head of a pin. There is always the unforgettable paradigm of the double agent Azev, who, in the years before the Russian Revolution, spied on the Bolsheviks for the czarist police, but in the course of his false Bolshevik duties murdered czarist police with such daring that Azev rose high in Bolshevik circles and became one of Lenin's most trusted men. Indeed, Lenin could not at first believe the captured files of the czarist police although they gave unimpeachable evidence that Azev was a double agent. Where is the root of identity in that kind of man?

The human brain is divided: into a right lobe and a left lobe; a bold side and a cautious one; a moralist and a sinner; a radical and a

conservative; a live lover and a dead one; a wit and an idiot; a hard worker and a sloth. We are all ourselves, and to some degree we are the opposite of ourselves. Consider the overlays of personality which accompany these shifts of identity when a cover story is added — there must be an actual need to function as double agents now that the psyche has been already once divided! Then contemplate the variety of political activities which take place within the Company: from the right-wingers of the John Birch Society to the social engineers who brood in private over *The New York Review of Books*; consider the ideological wars which go on between cold warriors and lovers of détente, between those who would presumably die for more government and those who wouldn't mind killing for less. If we take into account the functional need of the agency to have its enclaves cut off from responsibility or accountability, and in turn the national propensity of these enclaves to become — in compensation for the dirtiness of the work — political, that is, to fight for political ends within the CIA and maneuver for power at the top, as well as engage in capers *on their own* to affect the internal history of the United States, how then can they not use every tool ranging from straight financial manipulation to Syndicate involvement to assassination? Yes, try to keep up (if you are the Director) with the movements of agents in the CIA attempting to infiltrate rival enclaves. The mind reels. The scenarios do a dervish. To live with a role is to live as an actor — so soon as the role is more satisfying than the life, all clear boundaries of identity are lost. All the more reason, then, for the CIA man to try to find an identity within his false identity by way of some enclave that satisfies his political needs. It is a way of saying he looks for a secret political action which will seem authentic to him — an action that can cut through the confusion of enigmatic projects and multiple identities in order to give the country what it really needs, that is, what he believes America secretly desires.

It is against the background of this mammoth of shuffled identities, concealed fortunes, fever-hot enclaves, secret killers, paranoid visions, osmotic bureaucratic walls, pervasive unaccountability, double agents, infiltrated capers, and cross capers that we attempt to look at Watergate. If what has been proposed already is valid at all, then we can be certain no clear picture will come to us soon. It is better to recognize that we are blind and can only try, through the distorted reverberation of the echo, to improve our knowledge of the mood. Of course, that is the true perception of the blind.

2.

A Hitch in Historiography

Haldeman ordered an exhaustive investigation into O'Brien's relationship with billionaire Howard Hughes. Caulfield reported back in a Jan. 25, 1971, memo that the investigation could bubble gum in Nixon's face.

The Hughes organization's "tentacles touch many extremely sensitive areas of government," cautioned Caulfield, "each of which is fraught with potential for Jack Anderson type exposures."²

— Jack Anderson, the *Washington Post*,
June 6, 1974

The phantom billionaire repeatedly insisted upon total secrecy. He didn't want "the most microscopic chance of the slightest hint being accidentally dropped to *anyone*," stressed a typical memo. Another time, he declared that his informants "put their very lives in jeopardy with some of the disclosures they make to me, and if they thought this information went to anybody — no matter whom — they would not continue to inform me."

— Jack Anderson, May 23, 1974

Howard Hughes has not been interviewed or photographed by any pressman since 1958.

— Stephen Fay, et al., *Hoax*

By the end of his life, Hughes satisfies some idea in us of the giant amoeba or master spider. If he first appeared on the screen of the American media as a rich and prodigiously eccentric young man, reminiscent of Orson Welles at the beginning of *Citizen Kane*, he ended as one of the wealthiest recluses and most mysterious right-wingers of history (that is, assuming it was Hughes who just died and not one of his — more than one — legendary doubles). He is at once the principle of total invisibility in public life and a gargoyle out of *The Day of the Locust*. We think fondly of young Hughes, his racing planes, and his movies: *Scarface*, *The Front Page*, and

² The memo actually said "Maheu's tentacles. . . ." We will meet Maheu before long.

Hell's Angels; his stars: George Raft, Jean Harlow, Bob Mitchum, Jane Russell; and then we read of the old gink who abhors bacteria as Dracula fears the cross.

Hughes kept his last wife, movie actress Jean Peters, on a yo-yo string. He would disappear for long stretches and send her endearing but false messages. . . .

In 1965, he promised to have Thanksgiving dinner with her. But because of his fear of germs, he told her to sit across the room from him. She walked out in a huff.

The following year, he persuaded her to join him in Boston where he promised they would settle down. But again, he kept her at across-the-room distance. She put up with it for three days.

—Jack Anderson, May 23, 1974

Since secrecy was his antiseptic, the media are often tempted to portray his ventures as absurd. The story of the \$350-million CIA contract for the Glomar Explorer came out in the press as a huge and peculiar sum for the CIA to pay Hughes to design a boat that could "retrieve military codes and nuclear warheads from a Soviet submarine sunk three miles deep in the Pacific . . . [especially] since the codes were outdated and the value of the other information was negligible."³

Of course, the Soviet submarine might only have been the cover. Maybe, it was wiser to assume the CIA had grown concerned with finding a new source of minerals to compete with Third World cartels. They could have "awarded Hughes the \$350 million to develop an advanced technology for underwater mining — thereby giving Hughes a head start toward a bonanza with more potential than oil. . . ."⁴

The Glomar bonanza could leave Hughes, by some counts already the wealthiest man in the world, an order of magnitude wealthier. But then for two decades Hughes must have been suffering something like the psychosis of a heavyweight champion. (Every heavyweight champion has to be a fraction insane since he cannot know if he is the greatest fighter alive or if some unseen maniac of the martial arts is getting ready to destroy him in an alley.) So Hughes had to wonder whether he was making history or was only a servant of the history the CIA might be making through him.

³ Howard Kohn, "Strange Bedfellows — The Hughes-Nixon-Lansky Connection," *Rolling Stone*.

⁴ "Strange Bedfellows."

He could not know, and no one looking on from the outside could know, how much of the CIA was part of his operation or how much of his operation was directed by the CIA. Indeed, was there even a live man named Hughes at the center of it all, or was there a Special Committee?⁵ Suffice it that whatever entity was comprised by his name, Hughes had properties. Since we don't know what we are dealing with, let us designate it HUGHES.

HUGHES's corporations earned more than half a billion dollars a year from government contracts alone and thirty-two such contracts were with the CIA. That was the largest number held by any corporate entity with the Company. *Time* fortified such figures: "During the past ten years Hughes Aircraft, which relies almost exclusively on Government work, has won nearly \$6 billion in Government contracts. . . . There was also about 6 billion dollars more in secret contracts with the CIA over this period. . . . Asserts one former Pentagon official, 'Their interests are completely merged.'"⁶ So, HUGHES, whoever HUGHES was, might begin to look like the pope of Avignon to any director of the CIA. If an enclave needed funds for a special caper, who was better than HUGHES to fund it? HUGHES was Daddy Warbucks to the CIA. HUGHES owned half of Las Vegas. HUGHES, by way of various intermediaries, had absorbed it from Meyer Lansky. Since the CIA already had associations with Lansky, easily as old as their mutual attempts to assassinate Castro, the Company could now, by way of HUGHES and Las Vegas, enter into another majestic interface with the Mafia, that is, with half the labor unions of America, and nearly all of the entertainment industries, the construction industries, the highway, travel, and tourist industries, not to speak of the more celebrated nonlegal industries like prostitution, porny, narcotics, and — the finest operation yet discovered for laundering huge sums of money and evading the IRS — gambling. (If the Mafia had detested the very mood and atmosphere of gambling casinos, it would still have been obliged to get into the business for the legerdemain it offered to heavy sums.) In turn, the high-potential money in the CIA would want to discharge into the great sea of Syndicate wealth. There the take — voices fill in awe — came to \$50 billion a year, and

⁵ The body of the Hughes who died in April of this year had its fingerprints checked "against genuine Hughes prints on file with the FBI in Washington. It was," *Time* says cheerfully (April 19, 1976), "Hughes, all right." Of course that assumes no one in the mills of identification has ever been able to switch a set of prints.

⁶ *Time* also says: "Not until 1971 did the IRS subject the Hughes holdings to an overall audit; the results of that audit have been kept secret."

that was twice General Motors' if only half the size of the defense budget.

CIA officials asked Maheu to enlist Syndicate men for the Castro murder ... and authorized him to pay \$150,000 for the hit. Maheu told the Church committee he hesitated initially because he feared the project might interfere with his work for Howard Hughes,⁷ who also had retained Maheu's services. But Maheu said he agreed to the assignment after informing Hughes of the murder plot — and, according to one source, gaining the billionaire's approval. For the project Maheu called on John Roselli, Sam Giancana and Santo Trafficante.

— Howard Kohn, *Strange Bedfellows*

We could speak of Maheu, an ex-FBI agent on special retainer to the CIA since 1954, as a man of variety and dimension, a veritable fixer, but such words do not elucidate the physics implicit in his personal forces. Rather, Maheu is known in Intelligence as a "pivotal" figure — the roads go through his tollbooth. We will learn for instance from the Pike committee that pornographic movies were sometimes made with CIA funds to blackmail people and "one of these was titled 'Happy Days' with Mr. Robert Maheu as casting director, make-up man, cameraman and director." The detail is cited not to offer us the opportunity to rise in moral height above Maheu so much as to loosen our imagination. He was also for a time the most visible HUGHES representative in public life. "You are me to the outside world," reads one memo to Maheu.⁸ "Go see Nixon as my special confidential emissary," says another in the spring of '68. "A Republican victory this year ... could be realized under our sponsorship and supervision every inch of the way."⁹ HUGHES even had a \$600,000 French colonial mansion built for Maheu on the Desert Inn grounds.

The first time he entertained for lunch the casino managers ... Maheu tapped his water glass for attention. Then, to the astonishment of his Las Vegas colleagues, Robert Maheu said grace.¹⁰

⁷ In excerpt, out of respect for the source's punctuation, *Hughes* will appear in lowercase.

⁸ David Tinnin, *Just About Everybody vs. Howard Hughes*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

"O'Brien and Maheu are longtime friends from the Boston area. . . . During the Kennedy administration there apparently was continuous liaison between O'Brien and Maheu."

—Memo from John Dean to H. R. Haldeman,
January 26, 1971¹¹

There was, of course, the delicate matter that Hughes wanted to hire me but didn't want to meet me face to face. Maheu raised the issue — he said that was simply Hughes's style of operation, that he, Maheu, had worked for the man for years, and was his chief executive officer, but had never met him.

—Larry O'Brien, *No Final Victories*

After Hubert Humphrey's defeat in 1968, Larry O'Brien was relatively at liberty. The new administration might be Republican, but O'Brien had not worked as postmaster general and chairman of the Democratic National Committee nor managed the presidential campaigns of Kennedy, Johnson, and Humphrey for too little. Nobody had more contacts in Washington than Larry O'Brien. From early in 1968 on, even as Maheu was being confidential emissary to Nixon, so was he also being instructed to hire O'Brien as HUGHES's Washington representative; but it was only in October, 1969, after a stretch for O'Brien on Wall Street, that the consulting firm O'Brien Associates was formed and given a HUGHES contract at \$15,000 a month. The arrangement, however, soon faced complications. By late 1970, HUGHES had decided to replace Maheu with Intertel.

Although this is not widely known, an increasing number of big corporations in recent years have either established private intelligence units or hired intelligence consultants from the CIA, the FBI, the DIA, the Internal Security Division of the Justice Department, the Treasury, the Secret Service, or the Internal Revenue Service. The purpose is, basically, to protect a corporation's own secrets or acquire other corporations' secrets in the ever-competitive business world. A whole underworld of corporate intelligence has thus developed.

Several organizations in the United States openly offer corporate intelligence services. The most important is Intertel. . . .

—Tad Szulc, *Compulsive Spy*

¹¹ J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare — The Underside of the Nixon Years*.

It could be said that Intertel had better CIA connections than Maheu. In fact, they were socially superior. Intertel's owner was James Crosby, good friend and host of Rebozo and Nixon. Crosby was also the chairman of Resorts International, an immense gambling-and-tourist complex in the Bahamas which (with many a camouflage) had been taken over from Meyer Lansky by the CIA. (Brave men grow bold in the Caribbean and gentlemen turn into pirates.) Resorts International came right out of the Crosby Miller Corporation, in which a controlling interest had been acquired in 1958 by Mary Carter Paint, a corporation originally gotten up by Allen Dulles and Thomas E. Dewey.

If the CIA hierarchy had icons analogous to the Mayflower, they were Allen Dulles, Thomas E. Dewey, and the Mary Carter Paint Company. By such cachet James Crosby of Intertel was to Maheu's CIA pornies and assassination capers as Louisburg Square to Scollay Square. In addition, Intertel may also have been in position to offer HUGHES the Glomar Explorer contract if he would take them on. That meant letting Maheu go. Since Maheu knew a lot about HUGHES, it was a big payment for a real peril.

The changeover in 1970 was accomplished with the maximum of mystery. The man, Hughes, six feet four inches, reported to weigh 97 pounds and, by a Las Vegas doctor's report, next to death, gave over his authority to Maheu's most determined enemies with a proxy which enabled these enemies to bring Intertel's security force into the casinos and drive out Maheu's troops, a dramatic night for Las Vegas, whose citizens were learning about this time that a tall thin man, claimed by his proxy-holders to be Howard Hughes, had been smuggled out of his sanctuary in the penthouse of the Desert Inn and been flown to the Bahamas (even though he was next to death and swore he would never fly again). There were some, Maheu among them, who offered the mordant suspicion that HUGHES was now a karmic transplant, but then there were others who had been supposing the same since 1958, when the man, Hughes, stopped seeing anyone but a few Hughes Tool Company executives and/or his rotating male nurse-secretaries (five), who received all messages for him. Maybe, by the time of the move to the Bahamas, HUGHES was going into his second karmic transplant; maybe HUGHES was now a computer not unrelated to OCTOPUS at Langley.

But such speculations take us too fast down the stream. Let us keep to what we may suppose we know. It seems clear that HUGHES,

now divested of Maheu, would not necessarily want to keep Maheu's friend in his employ. Of course, dropping O'Brien would hardly be fail-safe. It was not comfortable to estimate how much O'Brien had learned about the CIA from Maheu (if for that matter O'Brien had had a great deal to learn about the CIA).

Nonetheless, the transfers were made. Some time after Intertel took over from Maheu, HUGHES replaced O'Brien with Bob Bennett. The son of Senator Wallace Bennett (R), from Utah, Bob Bennett was a churchgoing Mormon; in fact, he was part of the three-man bishopric of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Arlington, Virginia, a detail of dubious interest until it is fortified with the knowledge that a large number of HUGHES aides, assistants, and top executives were Mormons; indeed, Maheu's most devoted enemies in HUGHES were Mormons. We might wonder how such religious fellows would comport themselves in Las Vegas, but there is always a tendency to underrate the sects we know least. It seems, consulting the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, that a secret Mormon society called the Danites was organized for Joseph Smith in October, 1838. They had "the avowed purpose of supporting Smith at all hazards, of upholding the authority of his revelation and decrees as superior to the laws of the land, and of helping him to get possession, first of the state, then of the United States, and ultimately of the world."

It would be an investigator's pleasure to now reveal that there is a modern-day Danite enclave in the CIA reaching out to the Danites in HUGHES, but we shall have to content ourselves with the only Mormon we have — Bob Bennett — and his relations to Chuck Colson and Howard Hunt.

Bennett had been a director of congressional relations at the Department of Transportation, to wit, a public-relations man and lobbyist. Needless to say, both are splendid positions for a mole. In addition, any work Bennett could find concerning highway construction might bring him, if he chose, close to the Mafia; he was thereby twice-connected to voyage out from his one third of a bishopric. Since he had also been friends with Chuck Colson since 1968, and lately of quiet service as the White House contact (that is, informer) in the Department of Transportation, Bennett was on his way to being his own pivotal figure. Consequently, he was in a position to try to do a favor for HUGHES. The good deed (seeking to divert the dumping of nerve gas from the Bahamas ocean floor — a way of protecting future HUGHES investments in the Bahamas)

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could not be accomplished, but Bennett left a good impression and was hired by his fellow Mormons.

Then "Colson called Bennett to say that Robert Mullen wanted to sell his company. Colson urged Bennett to buy the company and said he would help him find clients."¹² Bennett bought into Mullen & Company, and in one month rose from executive vice-president to president; after nine months he completed the purchase. Earlier than this, sometime "during his first months with the company . . . Robert Mullen told him about the company's relation with the CIA."¹³

This small account of a purchase is invaluable for what it teaches of how to detect a cover story by the incriminating anemia of its narrative. For it asks us to tolerate the idea that a useful CIA front was sold to a non-CIA man who was then kindly informed of the CIA's relation to the company he bought; in return for such courtesy, he proceeded without ado to labor for the agency. Since Bennett will labor long hours, it is comfortable to suspect he has been with the CIA before we have met him.

It is in the political agent's interest to betray all the parties who use him and to work for them all at the same time, so that he may move freely and penetrate everywhere.

— Galtier-Boissière¹⁴

Enter Hunt. He has been with Mullen & Company since May, 1970, a little better than six months, before Bennett has arrived, and according to his account, he is furious with Mullen because Bennett came as a surprise. "The switch was as unexpected as it was unwelcome."¹⁵ Hunt had seen himself as eventually taking over Mullen & Company. Accordingly we are encouraged by his account to believe Hunt moved over to the White House out of disgust with his situation at Mullen & Company rather than as part of a more or less orchestrated plan to bring Bennett and Hunt nearer to the administration. It was, in any case, not a shift that was difficult to make, for Hunt was also a friend of Colson's. They had met at the Brown University Club of Washington in 1966. Later, Colson became president of the club and Hunt, vice-president. They met frequently for

¹² *Nightmare*.

¹³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴ E. Howard Hunt, *The Berlin Ending* (epigraph).

¹⁵ E. Howard Hunt, *Undercover*.

lunch all through 1969 and 1970, and at one time Colson even thought enough of Hunt to try to make him director of a conservative think-tank, the Institute for Informed America, which would provide intellectual opposition to the Brookings Institution. The scheme lapsed (since Hunt frightened off Jeb Magruder by a proposal to use the think-tank for covert action), but now that Hunt was working for Colson in the Plumbers and Colson was also friends with Bennett, maybe Colson could be forgiven for thinking the prospects seemed fair for a happy family. As early as the beginning of 1971, he even sent a confidential memo to an aide of Agnew's:

Bob is a trusted loyalist and a good friend. We intend to use him on a variety of outside projects. One of Bob's (new) clients is Howard Hughes. I am sure I need not explain the political implications of having Hughes' affairs handled here in Washington by a close friend. . . . Bob Bennett tells me that he has never met the Vice President, and that it would enhance his position greatly if we could find an appropriate occasion for him to come in and spend a little time talking with the Vice President. The important thing from our standpoint is to enhance Bennett's position with Hughes because Bennett gives us real access to a sort of power that can be valuable, and it's in our interest to build him up.

— *Compulsive Spy*

It is enough to remind us of Tolstoy's opening sentence in *Anna Karenina*: "Happy families are all alike: every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Colson's gang, we know in advance, will be unique.

But we can get a look into how closely Hunt is working with Bennett. A couple of years later, it was found out by way of the minority staff of the Ervin committee that Bennett "suggested to Hunt that Hank Greenspun, publisher of the Las Vegas *Sun*, had material in his safe that would be of interest to both Hughes and the Committee for the Re-election of the President," and Bennett also arranged "a Hunt interview with Clifton Demotte [about] the episode at Chappaquiddick. . . . Furthermore . . . Bennett learned of [Dita Beard's] whereabouts from a Hughes Tool Company executive . . . [and] acted as an intermediary between Howard Hunt and Gordon Liddy after the Watergate break-in. . . ."¹⁶

¹⁶ Fred D. Thompson, *At That Point in Time*. The author was chief minority counsel for the Ervin committee.

This encourages the minority staff to the following conclusions:

- (1) While Hunt was at the White House on Charles Colson's payroll, Bennett was, at least, suggesting and coordinating many of Hunt's activities;
- (2) Bennett obviously enjoyed a close and confidential relationship with some of Howard Hughes' top people at a time when they were furnishing cover for the CIA; and
- (3) Bennett was acting as a go-between between Hunt and Liddy immediately after the Watergate break-in, and during all of these activities he was undoubtedly reporting periodically to the CIA case officer.

— *At That Point in Time*

We are even offered a bona fide side-bar. An inquiry came in from HUGHES. The Mormons (we may as well assume it is specifically the Mormons) wanted to know "the cost of bugging the home of Clifford Irving at the time he was writing the spurious Howard Hughes biography. Hunt got an estimate from James McCord and reported back to Bennett." The project proved to be too expensive, but HUGHES, whether the man or the karmic transplant, announced by way of a telephone interview with seven reporters that he had suspicions about the origins of the hoax. "To assume that it's all an accident certainly takes a lot of assuming." It seems HUGHES had decided the genius behind Clifford Irving was Maheu. Dare we say that every unhappy family is happy in its own way?

3.

An Exercise in Epistemology

In an ironic twist, the White House's high priest of snooper, Charles Colson, was himself bugged recently as he uttered some of the Watergate scandal's most indiscreet confessions.

Colson, when he was the top White House hatchet man, was fond of flipping a switch and tape-recording friends and enemies alike. A few days before he went to prison for obstructing justice, however, he was secretly recorded as he bared his soul to Washington businessman and sometime private eye Richard Bast. . . .

Beside Bast's swimming pool, whose fountain made background water music over a "mike" secreted among poolside flow-

ers, the two men discussed how Nixon could rid himself of CIA and military spying on the White House.

— Jack Anderson, July 15, 1974

If we have been entertaining ourselves until now with the illusion that we are pursuing a narrative, or hovering over a picture that will soon come to focus, we may as well recognize that we can count, at best, on no more than a glimpse of a narrative — enough perhaps to give us hope this is a narrative which exists and not a chaos. But it is a curious endeavor. The best details often lead nowhere. Nixon, for example, received campaign contributions in 1972 which were as large as \$2 million from W. Clement Stone and \$1 million from Richard Mellon Scaife of Pittsburgh. Nonetheless, the Nixon administration reacted with excessive anxiety to the disclosure of a gift of \$100,000 in 1970 from HUGHES by way of Richard Danner to Bebe Rebozo; in fact Nixon fired Archibald Cox only two days after he had indicated to Elliot Richardson how displeased he was about Cox's zealous investigation of Rebozo. The break-in at Watergate was even explained in some scenarios as the measure of Nixon's need to know how much O'Brien knew about HUGHES's gift.¹⁷ It made no sense. Rebozo had an explanation which was legally impeccable. He told investigators that he was worried about the "appearance" of the gift and so did not give it to the President but put it in his own safe-deposit box, and later, in June, 1973, sent it back to HUGHES. One did not have to believe the story, but in the absence of evidence that the cash had been passed, why did Nixon react so powerfully?

"They must certainly know something very heavy on Nixon," commented Bast. . . .

Colson . . . replied, "They must."

"I mean, if he knows this stuff is going on and he's not doing anything about it . . ." began Bast.

"You know what I think?" interrupted Colson. "You want to know what I really think? . . . I'm loyal to the guy (Nixon) 'cause he's my friend . . . I think Bebe used that (\$100,000) for himself and for the President, for the family, and the girls. I think that the President figures — this is my worst suspicion — that if he really blows this, Hughes can blow the whistle on him." . . .

. . . Bast asked whether the only thing the CIA had hanging over Nixon's head was the \$100,000.

¹⁷ That would assume it was worth \$250,000 to CREEP to find out a little more about \$100,000.

Replied Colson morosely:

"Who knows that that's the only \$100,000?"

—Jack Anderson, July 16, 1974

It is a fascinating detail. It is just that nothing comes of it. We still don't know if it is the only \$100,000 or no more than the tail of the mouse left in the trap. Since much that we examine will appear, then tend to disappear, it is nice to think there is something iridescent about a view seen for an instant in the fog.

Perhaps it is the effect of such glimpses to leave us with an after-image. On reflection, Nixon's reaction to the \$100,000 does not have to be political. Even a political man is entitled to a private emotion. Fighting the attack on Rebozo, Nixon could be expressing the outrage he felt at attacks against himself. Or, maybe the gift just gave him an uneasy feeling from the moment it was proposed. Of course, the hard chancre of an inflamed in-house scandal could also have been sitting beneath the money. We simply do not know to which corner the mouse has gone.

The nature of the difficulty begins to disclose itself. We cannot house an explanation because we do not know which of our facts are bricks and which are papier-mâché painted to look like bricks. We can only watch the way the bricks are handled.

It is painful, nonetheless, to relinquish one's hope for a narrative, to admit that study of the CIA may not lead to the exposure of facts so much as to the epistemology of facts. We will not get the goods so quickly as we will learn how to construct a model which will tell us why we cannot get the goods. Of course, that will never be enough — willy-nilly, the habit will persist to look for a new narrative (and damn the papier-mâché bricks).

In the meantime, however, a short course:

Epistemological Model I:

If half the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle are missing, the likelihood is that something can still be put together. Despite its gaps, the picture may be more or less visible. Even if most of the pieces are gone, a loose mosaic can be arranged of isolated elements. The possibility of the real picture being glimpsed under such circumstances is small but not altogether lost.¹⁸ It is just that one would like to know if the few pieces left belong to the same set.¹⁹

¹⁸ Larry Rivers has taught us as much.

¹⁹ Is this what Robert Rauschenberg is up to?

Epistemological Model II:

Maybe it is the splinters of a mirror rather than the scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that provide a superior ground for the metaphor. We are dealing not with reality, after all, but that image of reality which reaches the surface through the cracked looking glass of the media.

Epistemological Model III:

What is most crucial is that we do not forget that we are interpreting curious actions. Men who seem to be honest are offering cover. We are obliged to remind ourselves that a life lived under cover produces a chronic state of mind in the actor which is not unlike those peculiar moments when staring in the mirror too long we come to recognize that the face looking back at us must — inescapably — be our own. Yet it is not. Our vicissitudes (but not our souls) stand revealed in the mirror; or, given another day, and another mirror, there we are, feeling wretched, looking splendid.

Epistemological Model IV:

Doubtless the difficulty is analogous to writing a poem with nothing but names, numbers, facts, conjecture, gossip, trial balloons, leaks, and other assorted pieces of prose.

For example:

When we interviewed him in my office on December 10, 1973, he struck all of us as a highly intelligent, highly motivated person. . . . Finally I asked him, "Mr. Martinez, if in fact you were a CIA plant on the Watergate team and were reporting back to the Agency, would you tell us?" He broke into a broad smile, looked around the room, and laughed. He never answered the question; no answer was necessary.

— *At That Point in Time*

Let us go back to the facts, to the false facts, distorted facts, concealed facts, empty facts, secretly rich facts, and unverifiable speculations of our narrative.

In this connection, nothing we have read about Gordon Liddy explains his long silence in jail so well as the supposition that he is an agent of real caliber. Of his biography we know he was in the FBI in the early Sixties, an assistant district attorney in Dutchess County, ran for Congress on the Conservative party ticket, and got a

job with the Treasury Department high up in a Customs Bureau drug campaign called Operation Intercept. It was not a position to leave him alien to certain intimacies of the CIA, the Mafia, and the flow of profits in the drug trade. Liddy came to the White House to work for Egil Krogh, who was trying to organize the Nixon administration's war on drugs with a projected team of CIA men, FBI men, narcs, and private detectives, an undertaking some would see darkly as a most ambitious cover for Nixon's real intent, which was to commence his own Intelligence on a competitive level with the CIA and the FBI — in other words, his unspoken follow-up to the Huston Plan. It is worth mentioning that during this period, Liddy wrote a memo for Nixon in criticism of the FBI, which Nixon described to Krogh as "the most brilliant memorandum" to come his way "in a long time."²⁰ It is with this background that Liddy comes to CREEP. There is nothing in these details to suggest he could not be a career agent.

We read of how he burns his hand in a flame to impress a girl and threatens to kill Magruder if Jeb touches him on the shoulder again. John Dean describes to us how Liddy offers to commit suicide if that will protect the administration. Liddy offers a lecture on how to kill a man with a finely sharpened pencil. There is nothing in these details to suggest he could not be a career agent.

"The master who instructed me in the deadliest of the Oriental martial arts taught me that the outcome of a battle is decided in the minds of the opponents before the first blow is struck."

— G. Gordon Liddy²¹

We have the habit to look on the Watergate burglars as ignorant Cubans led by clowns. Being scorned as ridiculous is, of course, a cover in itself; the CIA can count on such a disguise being provided by the wire services. Simple declarative sentences make curious actions appear automatically absurd.

Under examination, the burglars look better. Gonzales had been a bodyguard for Batista, and fought in the Bay of Pigs. Martinez had been a CIA boat captain and made 354 illegal runs to Cuba. Barker was a member of Batista's secret police, and an FBI contact in Cuba, then an informer against Castro. By Hunt's own description, Barker

²⁰ These details are given in a forthcoming book impressively researched by Edward Jay Epstein, *An American Coup D'Etat* (Putnam's).

²¹ As quoted in *Nightmare*.

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became his "principal assistant" during the Bay of Pigs, and Hunt was chief of political action.

The fourth Cuban happens to be Italian — Frank Sturgis, an ex-Marine born Frank Angelo Fiorini. He served with Castro in the Sierra Macstra — and would later claim he was already an agent for the Company. In any case, he was good enough to be working as Fidel's personal supervisor in the Havana casinos until the day gambling was eliminated. Then Sturgis decided to defect. To the Mafia and to the CIA. (Or is it simpler to say the Mafia wing of the CIA?) It is a not inconsiderable defection.

Before the Bay of Pigs, Sturgis would act as contact for Santo Trafficante, who with his son Santo Jr. "controlled much of Havana's tourist industry," and was alleged to have received "bulk shipments of heroin from Europe and forwarded them through Florida to New York."²² During this period, Sturgis joined a CIA unit called Operation Forty, which had been set up to kill Castro and a number of important Fidelistas. Involved in this training were Trafficante and E. Howard Hunt,²³ Frank Sturgis,²⁴ and Robert Maheu. Maheu and Sturgis must have been reasonably well met, since Sturgis is still pivotal enough eleven years later to be chatting with Jack Anderson in the lobby of Washington National Airport on the morning he arrives from Miami with Barker, Martinez, and Gonzales for the last break-in at Watergate, but then it would be difficult to name an investigative reporter in America more pivotal than Anderson.

"I don't know if I told you before," Sturgis wrote to his wife [while in jail], "but William F. Buckley used to work for CIA and I don't know if he still does. When he found out that Howard (Hunt) was going to work in the White House, he told Howard it was good that he could be so close to the President but Howard told him that he was there to take orders and not to influence anyone. That was a good answer!"

... Buckley frankly admitted he was a "deep cover agent" for the CIA from July, 1951, to March, 1952, but said he had not worked for them since.

— Jack Anderson, September 18, 1973

²² Alfred W. McCoy, et al., *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*.

²³ "Strange Bedfellows."

²⁴ In *Undercover*, Hunt mentions in passing that he did not meet Sturgis until shortly before Watergate. Of course, he also does not mention that there was a plot to assassinate Castro. Nor does he bother to inform us that Hank Sturgis is the name of a character in Hunt's early novel, *Bimini Run*, which Frank Angelo Fiorini liked well enough to modify into an alias.

It was apparent from the documents that in November 1971, a month after he took part in the Fielding break-in, Martinez mentioned his association with Hunt to his case officer who, in turn, took Martinez to the CIA's chief of station in Miami.

We immediately requested that the chief of station be brought from Florida for an interview. The chief, a heavyset man who appeared rather nervous, told us that in March 1972, Martinez had asked him if he "really knew all about the Agency activities in the Miami area." Martinez had dropped hints about Hunt's activities, the chief said, which had concerned him so much that he wrote a letter to CIA headquarters inquiring about Hunt's status. The answer, we were told, was that the chief should "cool it" and not concern himself with Hunt's affairs.

— *At That Point in Time*

One does better not to rely on that comfortable picture we have of E. Howard Hunt as an unhinged undercover man in a wild red wig impotently badgering Dita Beard on her hospital bed — the wig may have been chosen to make him startling to a fearful woman.

By the rank of the posts he occupied in his career, it is obvious that Hunt, for a long time at least, was well regarded in the Agency. For that matter, he has so many credentials we can wonder how close he came in his own mind to becoming director of the CIA. In his autobiography, *Undercover*, he remarks, "Obviously I was never going to be director of Central Intelligence, nor did I particularly want to be," but the year is 1966 and he says it after more than fifteen years of service and such prime positions as deputy chief of station in Mexico (which is where William F. Buckley, Jr. worked for him); chief of covert operations for southeastern Europe — Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey; chief of political action for the Guatemala operation which overthrew Arbenz; chief of covert operations for the north Asia command — China, Korea, Japan; chief of station in Uruguay; chief of political action for the Bay of Pigs; chief of Domestic Operations Division (the United States); and chief of covert action for Western Europe.

Before joining the CIA Hunt had been an English major at Brown, served in the navy, the OSS, has been a war correspondent for *Life*, published novels, worked in Hollywood, had a Guggenheim Fellowship for one of his novels, and was in Europe for the ECA under Averell Harriman. Later, within the CIA, he collaborated with Allen Dulles in the writing of *The Craft of Intelligence*. He also worked closely with Frank Wisner, Allen Dulles,

Dick Helms, Richard Bissell, Track Barnes, Tom Karamessines — there are no larger names in the CIA. If his autobiography fails to mention Cord Meyer or James Angleton there is no reason we cannot speculate on his concealed relations with them, particularly from 1966 to 1970, when Hunt neglects to describe what he is doing for the Company, and the assumption, since he is stationed in America, is capers, domestic capers.

A Dutch manufacturer of electronic gadgetry was demonstrating some ultrasophisticated electronic "sneakies." The Dutch salesman announced that over twenty items of gadgetry had been hidden in the exhibition room and invited his CIA guests to find them. Then the Dutchman set about to uncover them, and *he* couldn't find them. Jim McCord had sneaked into the room before the demonstration, found them all, and removed them. "Jim is one fine operator," said Helms. . . .

— Miles Copeland, *National Review*,
September 14, 1973

McCord was in the CIA for twenty years but he seems like nothing so much as an FBI man. A devout Methodist, abstemious, soft-voiced in his right-wing opinions, his personality speaks of law and order rather than espionage or counterespionage. With the CIA from the first years of its inception (those years when it was raiding the FBI, and Hoover did not like it, and may for all we know have been casting about for a career agent who could infiltrate the CIA for the rest of his working life), McCord worked for the Company from 1951 to 1970 and became chief of the Physical Security Division of the Office of Security.

As we know, his work had in part to do with finding concealed bugs and dealing with advanced eavesdropping equipment. He was good enough to receive a Distinguished Service Award from Helms, and Allen Dulles once referred to him as "my top man."²⁵ We do not know what he was top man in, but it is not mean praise.

His performance during the Watergate break-in is on the consequence fascinating for its incompetence. McCord, according to Hunt's account, bought only four walkie-talkies where six had been needed. He delayed charging the batteries. He neglected to disconnect a burglar-alarm system. In the course of the first break-in, he

✓ ²⁵ Lewis Chester, et al., *Watergate*.

removed his men from the Democratic National Committee offices before the job was done. Then for several days he was unable to process the two rolls of film the Cubans did manage to take because McCord's "man" was out of town. In addition, according to Liddy, McCord "bugged the wrong telephone line. He was supposed to tap O'Brien's."²⁶ So a second attempt was necessary. On the next try, two of McCord's walkie-talkies had uncharged batteries. McCord retaped the locks after the guard had removed the tapes. He then insisted to Liddy on going ahead with the operation. He also retaped the locks horizontally instead of vertically; the tape was therefore visible at a glance. Hunt would finally decide that McCord was a double agent for the Democrats. A double agent he may have been — for the CIA — and a triple agent for the FBI, but a Democrat? McCord?

Whoever he was, McCord broke the Watergate case by his letter in March, 1973, to Judge Sirica: "There was political pressure applied to the defendants to plead guilty and remain silent. Perjury occurred during the trial. . . ."

He also said, "The Watergate Operation was not a CIA operation. . . . I know for a fact that it was not." It is a retired CIA operative speaking, which is to say, a man who may or may not be retired. Authoritative disclaimers by CIA officials bear the same relation to fact that the square root of minus one bears to a real number. The net effect of McCord's remark, therefore, is to make us more suspicious of the CIA. The possibility that he is an FBI man thereby increases an iota.

The second break-in took place in order that the tap on Larry O'Brien's phone that McCord had not put in well enough to function after the first break-in should now be put in again. Hunt thought the project was odd. "O'Brien's in Miami," he said to Liddy. "Why in hell should we tap the phone in his Washington office? . . . What's the rationale? As a friend, colleague and fellow professional, I'm asking you to go back to Mitchell, Dean and Magruder and reargue the case."²⁷ Liddy replied, "Okay, I'll try again, but I hate to do it. They look to me to get things done, not argue against them."

²⁶ *Undercover*.

²⁷ Quoting from Hunt is biting the bullet. Still, it is tempting to quote. From *Undercover*.

Since Liddy is the conspirator who has remained silent, we do not know his "principal," that is, we do not know who told him to break into Democratic headquarters the first time, nor — it may be more interesting — who insisted on a second time when Hunt thought the only logic was to call it off. It is not impossible that Magruder, Mitchell — or could it be Dean? — had an undisclosed relation to the CIA. Let us spin on the vertigo of that thought.

Mr. Haldeman said he had never understood why Alexander P. Butterfield, the aide who disclosed the existence of the White House tapes to the Senate Watergate committee, wanted to join the White House staff. . . .

"He was soon to become an Air Force General. I have never understood why he insisted, against my advice, on dropping his commission or why he suddenly wanted to be part of the Nixon team.

"In view of his subsequent role," Mr. Haldeman went on, "these actions seem even more curious today. Was Butterfield a CIA agent? Maybe. I just don't know."

— The New York Times, June 23, 1976

In the early Sixties he [Haig] ran a CIA-financed Bay of Pigs rehabilitation program, preceding Alexander Butterfield in the job.

— "Strange Bedfellows"

Colson complained to Bast that the President was always on the verge of coming down hard on the CIA. But, Colson grouched, Nixon was talked out of it by presidential staff chief, Al Haig, who feared it would "take down the whole intelligence community."

— Jack Anderson, July 15, 1974

Haig told us there was "no way" he was working for the CIA.

— Jack Anderson, July 15, 1974

Paul F. Hellmuth, the managing partner of St. Clair's Boston law firm, has been associated over the past decade with . . . Anderson Security Consultants, Inc . . . a CIA front. . . .

Mysterious checks, written for large amounts, would frequently arrive at the office of the firm's secretary-treasurer, Virginia lawyer L. Lee Bean, who would . . . disperse it upon instructions.

The secret instructions often came, say our sources, from James St. Clair's quiet law partner. Some of the mystery money was dispatched to Miami banks and was used allegedly to support the CIA's anti-Castro activities. . . . [Hellmuth] insisted . . . that James St. Clair didn't know "the first thing about the security firm."

— Jack Anderson, July 22, 1974

[Leon] Jaworski had been . . . a director of a private foundation that laundered funds for the CIA.

— "Strange Bedfellows"

We also learned that Paul O'Brien, who had served as counsel to the Committee to Re-elect the President after the Watergate break-in, was a former CIA operative.

— *At That Point in Time*

Among the officers of OSS Detachment 101 was Clark MacGregor, later a Congressman, a White House staffer, and, after the Watergate break-in, the replacement for John Mitchell as head of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President.

— *Compulsive Spy*

"Bob Woodward interviewed me on numerous occasions. I have told Woodward everything I know about the Watergate case, except the Mullen company's tie to the CIA. I never mentioned that to him."

— Robert Bennett: House subcommittee testimony²⁸

Because Robert Bennett's CIA ties were exposed by the Watergate scandal, he has closed down the Mullen Agency. He now works for the Hughes organization as a vice-president and CIA liaison.

— "Strange Bedfellows"

During the Bast interview, Colson would name Bennett as Deep Throat. At one point, he would say in pain, "Every story that Woodward won the Pulitzer Prize for was fed to him by the CIA."

An observer of the Company, hearing of this, shook his head. "Deep Throat is a cover in itself. Where is the casual reader who will argue with so agreeable a story — one man's revelation pulling down the entire Nixon administration? If Deep Throat told all, it was only because the information had already been neatly collected

²⁸ As quoted in "Strange Bedfellows."

for Deep Throat to tell." The observer shook his head. "Learn the law of reversal. The victims can be the agents in these affairs. There is as much need to remain suspicious of Colson as to feel sorry for him, since in attacking the CIA, Colson creates good cover for them. The reaction of the newspaper reader who dislikes old Chuck is to think, 'Even if it is true (and I must say I have had my suspicions of the CIA) I won't believe the story if it comes from Colson.' The Bast interview, you see, bothers me. Colson visits Bast, a private investigator, sits down by the pool next to the shrubbery and never wonders if he is being taped? Colson? Pit-bull Colson?"

"By the same guideline, the heroes can be the villains. Beware of the heroes of Watergate. I look at the *Washington Post* and think, 'Isn't it a brave paper? Isn't that a heroic editor who dares what no editor of no other major paper will dare? Isn't that right in the vein of major newspaper editors as we have come to know them?'"

On publication of this piece, the editor of the *Washington Post* emphatically denied that he had ever been, or was now, a member of the CIA.

"Never allow yourself," the observer says, "to think you have a fixed platform from which to measure these motions. We're out in the stars with Einstein, I assure you. For instance, you speak of McCord as being inefficient, when what you relate is no more than Hunt's description of how McCord acted in the break-in. Hunt's book could have been written by an enclave."

"Were they wishing to suggest that McCord was dealing with the Democrats?"

"Never look for the answer. Pursue the question into the next question. The answer is invariably smudged, but the questions are beautiful. There is the rapture of the depths descending into the questions."

I also suspected, but could never prove, that the Nixon crowd tapped my telephones. I was only slightly surprised, therefore, by a letter mailed to me on April 15, 1972. It was written by William Haddad, a New York entrepreneur who, until a dozen years ago, had been a prize-winning investigative reporter. Haddad told me he had learned from a private investigator of plans to tap the telephones of the Democratic National Committee. Haddad understood the plot had been hatched by a group of advertis-

ing men, known as the November Group, who had been recruited for the Nixon campaign.

— Jack Anderson, *Parade*, July 22, 1973

A letter from William Haddad to Larry O'Brien, March 23, 1972:

"I am hearing some very disturbing stories about GOP sophisticated surveillance techniques now being used for campaign purposes and of an interesting group here in New York where some of this "intelligence" activity is centered. The information comes from a counter-wiretapper . . . who had come to me highly recommended. . . . Can you have someone call me so you can get the info first hand and take whatever actions you deem necessary."

— *At That Point in Time*

O'Brien sent the director of communications for the Democratic National Committee to visit Haddad and there was a meeting with the counter wiretapper whose name proved to be Woolston-Smith. He was "a short paunchy bald man who spoke with a pronounced British accent and smoked a pipe." In October, 1973, a year and a half later, two members of the minority staff of the Ervin committee took a deposition from Woolston-Smith.

He testified that he was a private investigator in New York City, a citizen of New Zealand with experience in British intelligence, and a permanent resident of the United States. He acknowledged that he had excellent contacts in the intelligence community and said his New York offices had been used by the CIA, after the Bay of Pigs, as a clearinghouse for those returning from the invasion brigades. This information was consistent with what we had determined from other sources. Woolston-Smith was a most mysterious person; there were indications that he had connections with both British and Canadian intelligence, although we could never determine the exact relationship.

Woolston-Smith said he had told William Haddad of the possibility of Republican media control through the November Group as early as December 1971, and that they had discussed the Group many times before the meeting of April 26, 1972. He knew enough about the operation, he said, to know that Gordon Liddy "ran the show."

— *At That Point in Time*

Since Gemstone, Liddy's first ambitious plan to tap the Democratic National Committee and wire Miami for the Democratic con-

vention, was not even presented to John Mitchell until January 27, 1972, it seems that some undisclosed scheme was already being developed by Gordon Liddy and the November Group in the fall of 1971. Such a probability hardly diminishes the hypothesis that Liddy is an agent of stature. (In fact, the November Group will even be given a million dollars by CREEP before the famous April 7 deadline for campaign contributions. While the majority of this is ostensibly for the November Group's stated purpose, which is advertising, not espionage, the figure is nonetheless interesting. It is equal to the sum Liddy tried to get for Gemstone.)

At any rate, we are left with the following additions:

(1) The Democrats were well aware of the November Group and the possibility that their offices would soon be bugged.

(2) British and Canadian Intelligence can now be added to the soup. Let us think of them as herbs.

(3) Maybe the Democrats were putting in the garlic. Haddad "sent his entire file to Jack Anderson in April 1972" and now "could not remember what was in it. In fact, Haddad said, he sent material to Anderson twice, but had kept no copies." Jack Anderson "had acknowledged receipt of the material from Haddad concerning plans for the break-in, but he said he had since lost it."²⁹

Of course, the CIA had infiltrated the FBI, and the FBI had unknown men working for it in the CIA. We must assume both had agents in the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the IRS, the National Security Council, the 40 Committee, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Special Operations Division, Naval Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Council on Foreign Relations, HUGHES, plus a number of private intelligence companies whose work extended from military-industrial security to private detectives' offices. In turn, these companies, bureaus, groups, and agencies had to the best of their ability infiltrated the CIA and the FBI. Since the CIA, the FBI, and other major intelligence also had had their authority infiltrated by their own unknown enclaves, it is, in certain circumstances, meaningless to speak of the CIA as a way of differentiating it from the AIA, the DIA, the NSC, HUGHES, or the SOD — let us use the initials CIA therefore like a mathematical symbol which will, depending on the context in which it is employed, usually offer specific reference to a CIA located physically

²⁹ *At That Point in Time.*

in Langley, Virginia, with near to 18,000 employees, understanding that under other circumstances CIA may be no more than a general locus signifying an unknown factor whose function is intelligence and whose field is the invisible government. Students of Einstein's work on tensor calculus may find it comfortable to deal with these varieties of unknowns. In the world of social theory, however, we are at the point where a special and general theory of relative identity in social relations would be of inestimable use since the only situation for which there can be no cover is *anguish*, and the operation of the twentieth century may be to alienate us from that emotion in preparation for the ultimate destruction of the human soul as opposed to the oncoming hegemony of the technological person.

Generally, his enemies and friends agreed that Nixon was a fool not to destroy the tapes. They may not have understood the depth of the pot in which he was boiling. There was reason to believe there were copies of the tapes. If Butterfield would reveal their existence, he could be an agent; if one agent was near those tapes, then more than one; what reason to assume duplicates of the damaging tapes were not being systematically prepared all the while he was being set up? Impeachment was certain if he burned the evidence and a copy appeared.

"You do not understand. This man stood at the threshold of his own idea of greatness. He was going to write the peace with Communism. He was going to be immortal. Now, as he loses respect, it is slipping away from him inch by inch." Kissinger smiles sadly over his salad. Across the city, the Ervin committee is holding a hearing in the hot summer afternoon. "People criticize Nixon for being irresolute about Watergate. Why does he not confess what is wrong and end it? they ask. They do not understand that he cannot make a move because he is not in possession of all the facts. He does not know what is going to happen next. He does not know what is going to break upon him next." Kissinger sighs. "Nobody will ever know how close that man was to getting the foreign situation he wanted."

Nixon is not only a Shakespearean protagonist in the hour of his downfall, but Macbeth believing that Birnam Wood will never come to Dunsinane. Of course, he is as appealing in his travail as Ronald

Reagan might be playing Lear, but the echo nonetheless of a vast anguish comes back — who else has known such anguish and managed to live in the American world? Birnam Wood will come back to Dunsinane as the tapes one by one get to be taken.

Epistemological Model V:

"Sometimes," said the wise observer, "I think of that story of Howard Hughes being so fearful of bacteria that he kept Jean Peters across the room from him, and then I think, what if the fear of bacteria is the cover, and the double dare not get too close to Jean Peters?"

Epistemological Model VI:

There is hardly an episode in Watergate which was not presented to us in a way that makes it seem more stupid than it ought to have been. Or, is it closer to say that what we hope to perceive is more brilliant than the level at which we have been encouraged to perceive it?

The tapes, for example. If a tape can be made, a copy can be made. Until we brood upon the matter, it is natural to assume the copy is equal to the original. We do not stop to think that the poor tapes we thought were the originals could in fact have been inferior copies. The remarkably bad quality of the tapes might have been produced by design. There are advantages to a tape which can hardly be heard: The affair is downgraded, and seems less sinister. No cover is more comfortable to a clandestine operation than the appearance of ineffectuality. Let us remind ourselves of how inept the Secret Service seemed in its taping operation. Possessing all that White House power, all those funds, all that available electronic equipment — yet the product sounds like it was recorded in the glove compartment of a moving car. Admittedly, there were technical difficulties to the taping, but the product still seems inadequate. Nixon must have suffered another turn of the screw. Since he cannot know if the tapes he hears are the unique, original, and only tapes, or a debased copy prepared by his enemies, he cannot even be certain whether it is a trap to encourage him to take advantage of the garbled sound and rephrase the transcripts in his favor. He takes the plunge. But his emendations are discovered later by the House Judiciary Committee. A corrected transcript is presented to America.

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How can Nixon not wonder whether somebody substituted a subtly clearer version of the tapes to John Doar's staff?

All the while, Nixon has to confront another question. If he evades every snare, pit, impressment, and delusion, if he even manages to work his way through the Senate to the edge of being declared not guilty in the impeachment, how can he be certain that in the last minute after the very last of all these abominably unexpected breaches in his cover-up, the missing eighteen minutes will still not appear? Then he can envision how America will spank the horse, and he will twist forever in the wind.

4.

A Crisis in Criminology

I received a telephone call from L. Patrick Gray, the Acting Director of the FBI — a man I had never met. Gray told me he was disturbed by reports suggesting the FBI was not conducting a thorough investigation. "That is simply not true," Gray told me. "I assure you this matter will be pursued wherever it leads, regardless of my position in the Administration. Let the chips fall where they may." I told Gray I appreciated his call, and he concluded our talk with an unexpected comment: "Mr. O'Brien, we Irish Catholics must stick together."

On July 7, following Gray's call, I was visited by two Secret Service agents. . . . They told me they had been instructed to report to me that the FBI's exhaustive examination of the National Committee offices had uncovered no telephone bugs or other electronic devices — that "the place was found to be clean." I accepted their report without question. I knew the FBI had torn the place apart — removing ceiling panels, dismantling radiators, and the like — and if they said there were no bugs, then I assumed there were no bugs. Later evidence, of course, revealed that bugs had been placed on my phone and that of Spencer Oliver, Executive Director of the Association of State Democratic Chairmen. To this day I cannot explain the discrepancy between those facts and the report I was given.

— *No Final Victories*

When Hunt's team was caught, McCord had already removed a few panels from the ceiling of O'Brien's office. It is not so very well known that an excellent and advanced kind of eavesdropping can be

achieved by driving a nail into the flooring of the office you wish to monitor from the ceiling of the office below. A listening device is then attached to the nail. The sophistication of this method is that it is not possible to detect the bug from the office being taped, since the listening device attracts no more attention than *any* nail in the floor. The first question to ask of many a break-in is not therefore which office was entered, but who is working in the office above. By this logic, a real interest in O'Brien's conversations could best have been satisfied by a break-in on the fifth floor — in order to tap the sixth. Since we are already on the sixth, who inhabits the seventh?

That part of the seventh floor of the Watergate Office Building, which rested unmistakably over Larry O'Brien's quarters, was occupied at the time by no less than the office of the secretary of the Federal Reserve Board. Can matters be this simple? It is not seemly that great financial secrets should be discussed in an office of a building which looks to have been designed by an architect with a degree in Mafia Modern, but interest augments when we learn that one of the computers of the Federal Reserve Board is located in the basement of the same Watergate Office Building. If, on a given day, the Federal Reserve Board had sealed itself in to discuss a change in the discount rate, is it wholly inconceivable that a CIA man (a veritable Grand Mole of a banker) installed for years on the Federal Reserve Board might have phoned in to the computer in the Watergate Office Building basement an apparently routine question that would yet manage to tell his undercover assistant in the basement what the shift would be in the discount rate? Assuming that this assistant has been sequestered with the computer to maintain his discretion during these important deliberations of the board, the question is whether the basement assistant could not manage to make an innocent phone call to somebody on the seventh floor. Since we are assuming the man on the seventh floor is not part of the team to which the man in the basement belongs, the conversation would have to go something like this:

BASEMENT: I hear Vida Blue is pitching today.
SEVENTH FLOOR: Impossible! He pitched two days ago.
BASEMENT: (Indignantly) Who did?
SEVENTH FLOOR: (Triumphantly) Vida Blue!

That was what the basement wanted to hear said on the seventh floor and said loud enough for the nail in the ceiling of the sixth

floor to pick it up — the names of baseball pitchers having been geared to the rise and fall in the discount rate. Now, whoever monitored that conversation could pass the information along. Since more than one team would presumably be working to get advance information on the change in the rate, let us assume our team got the word out with a possible lead of three hours over all the others.

"How much would such information be worth?" a banker was asked.

"Conservatively," he replied, in the rich and pompous voice which is privy to large sums, "*billions*."

"For just a few hours' lead?"

"That is time enough."

The possibility is now open that the CIA was using the break-in to the Democratic National Committee as its elegant cover to the real operation, which was to tap privileged Federal Reserve Board information. Elegance offers its exquisite use of resources, so one would not claim the CIA had no interest in O'Brien nor in Oliver. O'Brien and Oliver had had their propinquity with the CIA, after all. While we know they cannot be in Intelligence — since how may we conceive of a good liberal Democrat who is? — nonetheless, they might attract an enclave in the CIA (if, of course, it is an enclave performing the break-in under the auspices of CREEP and not just a burglary by red-hot amateurs executed at the third rate of CREEP stupidity). Yes, some enclave might legitimately have been curious to know more about what O'Brien and Oliver knew of Chappaquiddick, or Eagleton's secret medical file, or HUGHES in relation to Maheu, Lansky, Rebozo, and Nixon on one side, or HUGHES, Bennett, Hunt, and Helms on the other. Name the teams; HUGHES is on all of them. Recognize that with the Democratic Committee break-in as cover, the operation has power over CREEP — which is to say ultimately over Nixon — even if its burglars are caught. That is elegance. Obtaining neither their first objective — the Federal Reserve tap — nor the second — lines on O'Brien and Oliver — the entrepreneurs still end with more power over the presidency than before. Once everybody made certain the election was won in spite of Watergate, there would be even more power.

Of course, a risk was taken. If Watergate had broken too early, McGovern might have been able to get his campaign turned around (although the thought does not ring loud in the lost ether) but then

Watergate never burst until the election was safe and the operators could begin to apply that wrenching pressure on the bones of the Nixon administration.

It must, however, be immediately visible that while this last scenario violates no facts, it is only a literary fancy — not an iota of proof. Just another model. Perhaps we can modernize William of Ockham's razor by saying: The simplest model which satisfies all the facts is likely to lead us to inexplicable facts.

Four of the five men arrested in the bugging attempt at the Democratic National Committee headquarters Saturday morning were registered as guests at the Watergate Hotel on April 28, the same night that two other firms in the Watergate building were broken into. . . .

The firm of Freed, Frank, Harris, Shriver and Kampelman, located on the 10th floor of the Watergate Building, 2600 Virginia Ave. NW, was broken into on May 18, but officials of the firm did not report the incident to police until yesterday. . . .

A spokesman for the Freed law firm said yesterday that the burglary was not immediately reported to police because nothing appeared to be missing, and employees did not associate the incident with political espionage until disclosure of Saturday's break-in. . . .

On April 28, the night four of the five bugging suspects were registered at the Watergate Hotel, according to police, the 11th-floor offices of the Sterling Institute, a management consulting firm, were broken into and \$1,100 worth of typewriters and calculating machines was stolen. . . .

The same night, police records show, the law firm of Boykin and DeFrancis, located on the eighth floor of the Watergate, was forcibly entered and \$525 worth of office equipment was stolen.

— The Washington Post, June 21, 1972

Maybe if our scenarios have had a purpose, it has been to flavor our reading with the temperament of an agent, a way of saying that we have become sufficiently paranoid to see connections where others see lists. So let us look at a list of the offices in July, 1973, on the seventh and eighth floors of the Watergate Building, and take the pleasure of wondering how many of those names and corporations have no relation to Intelligence.

701 Defense & Aerospace Center of Sterling Institute, Inc. H. F. Dean Human Factors Re- search Associates, Inc. Inst. for Psychiatry & Foreign Affairs	805 Division of Federal Reserve Bank Operations 808 Foreign Banking Authorities Office of Defense Planning Securities Stat Methodology & Procedures Section
704 Harris Intertype Corp. Harris Shire, Con- ductor Radiation, Inc. R. F. Communications, Inc.	811 Interstate General Corp. L. E. Steele 812 Armistead I. Selden, Jr. Boykin & De Francis
707 EDP Technology Systemed Corp.	815 Perkin Elver Corp. Joseph Dixon, Manager
711 Federal Reserve Board Office of Sec'y	

When we add the three robberies in the last news story and include the possibility of break-ins to other offices we know nothing about by burglary teams who were removing taps that others had been putting in, there is now posed to our brand-new agent-type brain a further question: What part of the Watergate Office Building was not being tapped?

Our procedure has conducted us to the point where we have to recognize that we have used up our last scenario in order to bring us to a place where we have no scenario to replace it. Now, we know less than before of what might possibly be going on.

5.

A Tension in Teleology

Said the CIA:
Authority imprinted upon emptiness
 is money,
 honey.
Bang bang Howard.
We don't need you.
We need
The space where you were.
 — Anonymo L'Rivera

Like a main gear in the clockwork is Nixon's anguish. As we hear the tick, we dwell in the fascination of the inexorable.

Next to Nixon, Hunt is an idler gear. His anguish is all of his existence, but it moves us less. The main gear goes until the last of the tension in the spring runs down, but the idler gear never runs down — it is merely attached to the alarm. So its end is not inexorable but catastrophic — as when the clock is dropped and the idler gear is broken.

Hunt was broken. The style of *Undercover* has that numbness of affect which comes from a fall. He writes without feeling more for one period in his life than another as though he is saying it is costly enough to locate the episodes. He is like a semiconscious victim who senses that coming awake will be equal to crawling up a slope of broken glass. The horrors to come will be greater than the ones he has known already.

Yet, as with Nixon, there is no danger of getting to like Hunt too much. We can decide that Nixon was set up by Watergate and feel no great pity because we can also remember the war in Vietnam he kept going for four years in order to assure his reelection. One can always recall the voice Nixon used when he spoke of the North Vietnamese as "my enemy," on the day he ordered the Christmas bombing. He had always wanted to be an actor and he ended by playing the classic role of the criminal who is convicted for the wrong crime. So one does not have to feel an overcharge of compas-



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sion for Nixon — just enough to water our imagination. Your enemies succeed after all when they dry up your imagination.

By the same token, there is a built-in limit to how much compassion we can feel for Hunt. We have only to read his account of his own methods on a caper in the early Fifties:

The Mexican Communist leader was then visiting Peking. On the day of his departure Bob North airmailed me a copy of a Chinese newspaper announcing his departure, sending a duplicate copy to CIA headquarters. To replace the departure announcement I fabricated a story in which the Mexican Communist was quoted as deprecating fellow Mexicans and saying, among other things, that Mexican peasants could never hope to achieve the cultural level of the superior Chinese. I cabled the fabrication to headquarters, where a special type font had been made by reproducing samples from the local paper. My fabricated story was set in this duplicate type and the entire front page of the local paper re-created by technical means. A dozen copies were pouched to me and were received before the target Communist returned to Mexico.

The fabricated newspapers were made available to local journalists who published facsimiles of the offensive interview together with a translation into Spanish. The target's protestations of innocence gained no credence whatever, for technical tests conducted on the duplicated Chinese paper affirmed that the type in which the story was printed perfectly matched other type samples in the same newspaper and so had to be authentic.³⁰

— *Undercover*

A footnote says, "It was this sort of technical assistance from CIA that I lacked when I undertook to fabricate two State Department cables in 1971."

No, we do not have to like him too much. Self-pity is Hunt's companion, and bitterness is his fuel. He writes with the tightly compressed bile of a disappointed man; the reader is to be reminded that his early prospects were happier than his later ones. Photographs taken of him on the beach at Acapulco a few months out of OSS show the would-be screenwriter looking well built in bathing trunks. He bears a bit of resemblance to Hemingway, and is at pains in *Undercover* to show pictures of himself skiing and hunting. For that matter, he is also adept at fishing, squash, golf, tennis, riding, boxing, and screwing — so the autobiography suggests.

³⁰ This story is a perfect example of how a fact can be wiped out by an artifact.

It would be a bet Hemingway is his hero, and that Hunt in the late 1940s was torn between a life as a great novelist and a social life as a spy. We can guess how he chooses. He is, with everything else, a social climber, and drops on the reader every big name he knows from Eisenhower and Nixon down, making a show of his good WASP family origins (Hunt's Point in the Bronx is named after a relative who goes back to the Revolutionary War, and Leigh Hunt is on the family tree) as well as his wife's sterling ancestry ("In addition to being descended from the Presidential Adams and Harrison families, my wife was one-eighth Oglala Sioux . . ."). Before Hunt, she has been married to the Marquis de Goutière. No matter that her maiden name is Wetzel and Hunt is from Brown, not Princeton (a full demerit in the early CIA), he will still look to climb high into the good life of Oh So Social. "The service plates were Revere gadroon, the crystal was an opaline . . ." is a line from one of his novels, and he will make a point of asking Bill Buckley to be godfather to his children. At the end, when tragedy strikes, he and his family are living in a house called Witches Island in Potomac, Maryland, in "what was to be our final family home. On its ample acreage were paddocks, a stable, outbuildings and woods." He is the perfect reader for the magazine edited by the godfather of his children.

Still, he is not just one more anti-Communist with nothing but the righteous moral equivalent of tunnel vision. He has also had a life. It is almost an appealing life. He has had dyslexia as a boy and played trumpet in a high-school dance band. What is most irritating about Hunt is that he is nearly large enough to be a protagonist in a good and solid novel, and yet — hatred has certainly dried his imagination — he is never large enough. No moment of wit will ever separate his soul from his disasters.

All the heavier must those disasters sit on him. Those disasters pose insoluble questions. Their lack of an answer promises insanity.

What, for instance, can he make of that list of offices on the seventh and eighth floors of the Watergate Office Building? Or of those extra break-ins he may now be hearing about for the first time? With his sophistication in the infiltration of one group of intelligence by another — he has after all been chief of covert action in the Domestic Operations Division — how could Hunt not entertain the hypothesis that a species of trench warfare in bugging and counter-bugging had been going on in the Watergate Office Building long before his operation ran into its peculiar trap? Let us even assume

that everything he has told us is only a cover story for the more serious job he assumed he was doing. After the arrests, how can he be certain he was told anything accurate?

There is a tool of inquiry provided by Lenin. He suggested that when a political event occurred whose origin or motive seemed incomprehensible, then ask the question: "Whom?" Whom does this benefit? Whom did Watergate benefit? Hunt would ask the question. And he would have to face the nightmare that the Nixon-Kissinger wing of the CIA, which by now for practical purposes could be described as the Rockefeller-Détente wing, had been mangled at Watergate by the Cold War wing. If so, however, then he, Hunt had also been set up in the process, had been sacrificed by his own people to implicate Nixon. There was a centrality to such a hypothesis no agent could ignore.

There are not only dimensions to paranoia but degrees. Cold paranoia can serve as the assistant to brilliance, but fevered paranoia (where the heat comes from the thought that one is being done in by one's friends) is the true hellion of hysteria. All panics are loose, all proportions are lost. In such a fry, how can one ignore the smallest detail?

Hunt could even begin to brood over people like R. Spencer Oliver, whose phone happened to be the other line tapped at the Democratic National Committee. Hunt could remember a dinner with a young Democrat named Spencer Oliver who had been out with Mullen, Bennett, and himself back in 1970 or 1971. During the meal, Oliver had made a point of mentioning the names of a few CIA officers Hunt knew personally. Oliver had been surprisingly knowledgeable. Mullen and Bennett had even wanted to take Oliver into Mullen & Company as a partner! But Hunt had disapproved.

Now, he had been caught on an operation which had for one of its tasks the tapping of Oliver's phone. Hunt could mention Oliver casually in his book and make no connection between the Spencer Oliver with whom he had dinner and the R. Spencer Oliver whose phone was tapped. He does not ask if they are not most certainly the same man. Such calm, however, is for his book. From Hunt's point of view, Oliver might have little or a great deal to do with Watergate. In the ongoing crisis of trying to solve the mystery of his life with all the working experience of his career, how is Hunt to measure the relevant importance of that detail, or of McCord and Fensterwald? McCord, for instance, has taken Bernard Fensterwald for his lawyer to go before the Ervin committee, Fensterwald who is

chairman of the Committee to Investigate Assassinations. The unspoken shock to the media would not be small. It is a way of saying Watergate is related to Dallas. Which enclave now wanted the media to think that way? Dallas and Watergate. That would be the scoop of the century. The people behind McCord might be serving some kind of notice.

We are trying to live in the measure of Hunt's anguish, but it is impossible to speculate here. We do not know, after all, whether he had anything to do with Dallas. The photograph of the two bums arrested by the police in Dealey Plaza shortly after the murder does show a resemblance to Hunt and Sturgis but there is an indigestible discrepancy in the height. On the other hand, Hunt was chief of covert action in the Division of Domestic Affairs at the time; that is a perfect desk from which to have a hand in such an assassination (especially if it has been brought off by some variant of a Mafia and anti-Castro Cuban team). At the least, we have to assume that Hunt would have been in position to pick up enough to embarrass the CIA profoundly. But then it is staggering to contemplate how much Hunt may have found out about matters he had not necessarily been active in himself. If no one in the CIA could locate to a certainty the details of other operations, still a tremendous amount might be learned through gossip, or by reconnaissance through those more or less secret files which would be more or less available on long, dull office afternoons. And he was a writer of suspense novels, no less. What material might be at hand! To the degree the CIA is bureaucratic and not romantic there would be formal procedures in getting to the files which could be winked at, breached, circumvented, or directly betrayed. To the degree the CIA was a culture, then Hunt was a living piece of inquiring matter, and in the years from 1966 to 1970 as his career in the CIA was ostensibly winding down, he had time to do a little research on some of those hundred and more murders in Dallas supposedly connected to witnesses of the assassination, time to get a line on who might be doing the job. For the CIA, whether implicated or not, could hardly be without interest in a mop-up operation of such magnitude. Over a hundred murders to keep the seepage of information under control!

So Hunt may have known a great deal about Dallas. We have to hold this in our attention when we begin to think of the nightmare within Hunt's nightmare — the death of his wife in the crash of United Air Lines Flight 553 from Washington to Chicago on December 8, 1972. The plane had crashed on landing at Midway and

she was one of forty-five people who were killed. We do not know how much Hunt knew nor how much he had told his wife. We know that she was making payments to the Cubans with White House money, but that is hardly a piece of information worth silencing by the risk and carnage of sabotaging an airplane. An investigator, Sherman Skolnick, in Chicago, would lay the claim that twelve people in one way or another connected with Watergate were on the plane, and he would remind us that White House aide Egil Krogh, Gordon Liddy's old White House boss, was appointed under secretary of transportation the next day and would supervise the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration in their investigations of the crash. That is not an automatically insignificant detail. On December 19, Alexander Butterfield would be appointed the new head of the F.A.A.³¹

If Hunt and Dorothy Hunt had known a great deal about Dallas and were threatening to tell the world, then Hunt would not have to brood over such details. He could assume his wife's plane had been encouraged to crash. Of course, we would no longer be talking about anguish, but masterplots and last-reel peril. The likelihood is that Hunt and Dorothy Hunt were trapped in a smaller game, and the crash was a mixture of inefficiency, cynical maintenance, and who knows? — some overload of psychic intensity among the passengers. (Why else do great athletes live in such fear of traveling by air but that psychic intensity is also a species of physical charge and can even distort the workings of an electronic system?)

No, it is more likely Hunt was living with the subtle horror that attends every inexplicable crash — is there a psychology to machines? Had there been an intervention of moral forces, a play of the dice from the demiurge? At the least, Dorothy Hunt's death was evidence of the raised law of coincidence in dramatic and dreadful events. Great or livid events could indeed be peculiar in their properties, and maybe no perfect conspiracy ever worked, since people were so imperfect — only imperfect conspiracies succeeded and then only when a coincidence drove the denouement home. Was it possible that Hunt was finally obliged to look over the lip of tragedy itself — a view which leaves us, the Greeks were certain, babbling and broken? Did he come to think that a psychic vortex pulls in a higher incidence of coincidence itself?

³¹ For that matter, Dwight Chapin, appointments secretary to Nixon, moved over two months later to an executive position at United.

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"A man may defend himself against all enemies save those who are resolved that such a man as he should not exist."

— Tacitus, epigraph to *Undercover*

Reflect on the phenomenon: A higher incidence of coincidence itself. The more central the dreadful act, then the greater is the number of accidents, disasters, and astonishing connections which surround it. By such a cosmic thesis, more than one assassination plot would come to collision on those murderous days of our history (when Americans began to live in fear of more than the atom bomb) and so, too, more than one agency, more than one enclave, more than one motive, yes, more than one plot have been set up, or unhinged, at Watergate. We have to free our minds of a hundred certainties we have been provided (and have provided ourselves) on that third-rate burglary. We have preferred to rely on the testimony of a hundred skilled and professional liars rather than face into a vision of reality which would recognize that Franz Kafka is the true if abstract historian of the modern age, and the Möbius strip is the nearest surface we can find to a plane.³²

To free our minds! We live in one existence, but have the overlay of another upon us. We strive to make our history, and sense, with the uneasiness of confrontations never faced, that we may dwell under the overall domination of an invisible second government (at odds with itself?) whose touch is subtle, but whose scenarios sit like an incubus upon Intelligence itself.

Of course we also live in a world more dazzling with the montage of startling connections than a Kenneth Anger film. Maybe, it is our reward. During that season when Bobby Kennedy, weary from stalking Jimmy Hoffa, would relax with Marilyn Monroe, we find out Hoffa, in his turn, hired a wiretapper, Bernard Spindel, to listen in on Bobby.³³ Spindel, who must have been as proficient as Gene Hackman in *The Conversation*, was going to be arrested eventually and would die in jail. There is reason to think the Kennedys never forgave him, for Spindel seems to have gotten some tapes on Bobby, and the wiretapper's widow appears to have kept and concealed them. She rose up to the polluted surface of the news a year or two ago, Mrs. Barbara Fox Spindel. A small munitions company she

³² A Möbius strip is like a paper band curved into a circle, but twisted a half turn before it is glued. If you start drawing a line down the middle of the band your pencil will end up on the opposite side of the paper once you have circled the ring. Stated by it a paradox, the top surface of the plane is now the bottom surface.

³³ Robert F. Slatzer, *The Life and Curious Death of Marilyn Monroe*.

owned had been offering (by the claim of its promotion material) to be able to produce fatal exploding cigarette packs and other small works of surprise for the use of the CIA and other espionage. Her company and her name became connected by way of the newspaper story to Lucien "Gus" Conein, an old CIA hand who had long worked for General Lansdale, the CIA station chief in Saigon. Conein denied the connection vehemently, of course, but then we can imagine how quickly somebody in his line of work is going to admit a professional association with Mrs. Spindel.

Now, it happens to be Conein, an old Company associate, whom Hunt interviewed when Chuck Colson was looking for a way to cook up a few false Kennedy cables on the assassination of Diem. It is a long trail which leads from the tragedy of Marilyn Monroe to E. Howard Hunt and his thunderstruck fun and games, and there is not much voltage in these connections. No shock comes across the gap. It is just that like Agatha Christie's characters we all seem to end up knowing one another. Before too long, if irony does not paralyze, we may be singing, "No man is an island, intire of it selfe" in the godawful music of Ernest Hemingway's final whiskey-cracked voice. Listen to his record.³⁴ What a crazy country we inhabit. What a harlot. What a brute. She squashes sausage out of the minds of novelists on their hotfooted way to a real good plot.

³⁴ Ernest Hemingway Reading, *Cadmon Records TC 1185*.

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