

ECONOMICS--the variables of psychic loss and gain living as an established writer

[Aud]

65.6A I think I suffered more from the reviews of *The Naked and the Dead* than any other of my books. I wanted to sit down and write a letter to every critic and tell them how they had misinterpreted something I wrote. I felt this way even if they had liked the novel. Perhaps it takes 20 years or more to begin to see and appreciate book reviewing for what it is--a primitive rite. By then, you are able to ingest unkind reviews, provided they are well-written, and sometimes they can actually be as nourishing as a wild game dinner. (And, by times, as indigestible.) I'd never dream of not reading reviews. It'd be like not looking at a naked woman if she happens to be standing in front of her open window. Even if ugly, she is undeniably interesting under such covert circumstances.

[WR]

82.14 I think for any author who's had a great deal of early success, as Capote did and Vidal did and Styron did and I did, it was not automatic or easy to look upon other people with a simple interest because, generally speaking, they were more interested in us.

82.14 Buying a hardcover book is a sacramental act, and when people have to pay that much money for a work, it's best if they have a certain respect, even a touch of awe, for

the author. If you're unsavory in public life, it doesn't matter that everyone knows your name, you're not going to sell a great many hardcover books. The good authors who do are usually not in the public eye—Saul Bellow, John Updike, John Cheever. Very few can flout that law. Capote's broken it successfully. So has Vidal. But I certainly haven't.

83.40 I treat bad reviews in the manner than a politician running for office treats a loss of support. A couple of friends called up after the bad review of *Ancient Evenings* appeared in the Sunday New York Times and asked, "Are you all right?" I'd seen it a week before, so any unhappiness I'd had about it was now digested. I said that it was like realizing that the county chairman in Schenectady is deciding against your candidacy. But to lose Schenectady doesn't mean you stop running. It isn't my ego that's hurt, it's my damn pocketbook. Getting a bad review in the Times shrinks my wallet as much as any single review can. When I was younger I used to consider a bad review a personal insult and the guy who wrote it evil. In fact, however, I have never actually punched out a reviewer, which I say with a certain wistfulness. I did sit next to Philip Rahv after he had written an atrocious review of *An American Dream*. Philip Rahv had his virtues, bless him, but physical courage was not one of them. So I made a point of installing myself beside him on a couch at a party, and while I smiled at him, I kept my body firmly pressed into his, leaning into him, all the while that we had a long 30-minute conversation about something else altogether. I was perfectly pleasant the entire time and everything seemed all right except we were both titled alarmingly from my leaning into him. He was in an

absolute panic, waiting for me to strike. It must have seemed an odd sight from the other side of the table: He was a heavy man, and the two of us probably looked like two doughnuts crushed together at one end of the box.

If I had no economic pressures on me I would have written books that were more literary and more well-rubbed. I would have polished them and sighed over them and I probably would have taken them more seriously than I take my books now, although I do take them very seriously. But I would have been truly solemn. And I probably would not have gotten into journalism. ,

[Wr]

81.2 Early success changed my life. For a long time after the success of *The Naked and the Dead*, for seven or eight years, I kept walking around saying nobody treats me as if I'm real; nobody wants me for myself, for my five-feet eight inches, and whatever good looks I have. Everybody wants me for my celebrity. Therefore my experience wasn't real. All the habits I'd formed up to that point were as an observer on the sidelines. Suddenly, if I went into a room I was the center of the room, and so regardless of how I carried myself, everything I did was taken seriously and critically. I complained bitterly to myself about the unfairness of it until the day I realized that it was fair, that that was my experience. It's the simplest remark to make to yourself, but it took me ten years to get to that point. Then I began to realize that the kind of writing I was going to do would be altogether different from the kind of writing I had thought I would do. After *The Naked and the Dead* I thought I would write huge collective novels about American life,

something that required going out and getting experience, but my celebrity made that impossible. I then began to realize that there was something else I could express, which hopefully would be equally valuable. I was, after all, having a form of twentieth-century experience which would become more and more prevalent: It was that I had been utterly separated from my roots. I was successful and alienated. That was a twentieth-century condition. This understanding went into all my work after that, and will go on because by now I can say that kind of personality interests me more than someone who is rooted.

[Aud]

81.2 I used to have a much clearer idea of who I was writing for—certain friends, certain intellectuals, certain critics, a certain sense of the kind of audience I wanted. That was in the Sixties. In the Seventies there was a stretch where I really didn't know who I was writing for. You go in and out of fashion and your sense of your audience comes in and goes out of focus.

[Aud]

73.14 Yes, it did help that I was paid a lot of money to write *Of a Fire on the Moon*. That made it better. It would have been a harder book to write if I'd been paid less. I'm not shameless, just a professional. I enjoy my work more if I am paid well for it. That makes it sexier. You take yourself a little more seriously. That's a great help in writing, just as it is in sex. The hardest thing I've found in writing is to be able to feel

enough importance in oneself to dare to try defining some piece of that indescribable existence out there.

[Aud]

81.6 Every time a story about me appears in a newspaper. I am injured professionally. But I don't think there's anything to do about it. One of the reasons I'm in the papers all the time is that they keep using the same people, over and over again. It's a game, and there may be something like 100 players on the board. If I were in a Tarot deck, I'd be the Fool. I used to try to keep a stern separation between the public legend and myself, but you know, you get older, and after a while, you often feel like an old gink in Miami, with slits in his sneakers so his feet won't hurt so much. At that point it's hard to fight the legend. The legend has become a lotion for your toes.

[World]

81.6 Being a novelist, I want to know every world. I would never close myself off to a subject unless it's truly repulsive to me. I don't think it means anything if I go to certain kinds of parties, because society is nothing if not fashion. There've been a few homes that invite me to dinner from time to time. If it comes to the point where there's something to fight for and I'm not fighting because I don't want to lose my position in society, then that's a matter to be concerned about. One can never take one's imperviousness to corruption for granted. All the same, it's still important to me to know

how the world works. What ruins most writers of talent is that they don't get enough experience, so their novels tend to develop a certain paranoid perfection. That is almost never as good as the rough edge of reality. (Franz Kafka immaculately excepted!) If *The Executioner's Song* had a big effect on people, it was because it wasn't a paranoid work. But if I had conceived it in my imagination, it would have been much more perfect and much less good. (Indeed, I had a title for it before I encountered the material. I was going to call it "The Saint and the Psychopath.")

One theme that obsesses me is how much of the history that's made around us is conspiracy and how much is simple stupid fuckups. And you have to know the world to get some idea of it. You know, how much does the Mafia control, how much do they luck into because of their reputation? How much does the Jewish community affect the mentality of government, and how much are they wrongly accused of pulling the nation's strings?

On the other hand, it's not advisable for a novelist to live in society too much. It's a world of rigid rules and you cannot be yourself. There's a marvelous built-in reflex in society. It goes: If you are completely of society, then you are not very interesting. (Not unless you have prodigious amounts of money or impeccable family.) If I have any *entrée*, it's because society is always fascinated with mavericks. Till the point where they'll become bored with me. Then, boom, I will be out. But on the other hand, even as a maverick, there are certain rules I have to obey. If you start accepting those rules past the point where I choose to go along as part of the game, then I will be injuring myself.

[World]

73.43 Right now the smart money would bet against the novel. The publishing houses are getting depressed about its future, and they are the ones who will, in a large sense, determine its future. Survival probably comes down to the young editors. When a novel by an unknown gets published these days it's usually because some young editor has made an issue of it. The publisher generally goes along. In effect, it's the benevolent or charitable side of publishing. Now, this will continue so long as publishers keep a little faith in the novel. But back to the question: why is it harder and harder to write a good one? The character of experience in the twentieth century is so fragmented that it is not easy to conceive of re-invigorating the good, big novel as a form. How do you move from one fragment of experience to another? That's the hurdle. Nothing is, for instance, more difficult to bring off now than a well-written picaresque novel. Problems that could be solved on the nineteenth-century level are now intractable.

Whereas in the thirties, you had any number of major novelists. Dos Passos was writing USA; Faulkner brought out a major work just about every other year. There was Hemingway. Thomas Wolfe, James T. Farrell, and Steinbeck, plus any number of minor writers and half-major writers. The novel was flourishing. Now, once in a great while, there is something like the first couple of installments of *Twin Peaks*, or the first four years of the *Sopranos*, or the *Larry Sanders Show*.

[WR}

Grobel/1983 If you have to earn your living from your pen; you discover that you can push yourself. It's analogous to what athletes do when they take steroids to gain more strength. Ultimately damaging, but helps to set records. We do the same thing. You can force yourself to write much more than you want to. And the writing will not necessarily deteriorate. Not necessarily. But you can end up with a bad liver, or with a shortened life. Of course, one can always hope for transcendence. Sometimes working much harder than one wants to work can liberate energy. Sometimes.

[Aud]

83.55 Almost everybody wants to write. The life seems so free—no boss to face, no rush to work, and if you receive any renown for it, you have all the pleasures, the curious pleasures of celebrity. Writing for many people is the only way for them to tell the story of their lives. Experience, when it cannot be communicated to another, must wither within and be worst than lost. People believe that writers have this opportunity and all the other rewards. All the same, another part of me is ready to laugh at the naivete. They have no idea of how long it takes to learn the rudiments. That is akin to the discipline and dull punishment which, in boxing, go into the ability to throw a commanding punch at will. I never encourage people to write for too little. It is a splendid life if you think only of the emoluments. But it is death to the soul if you are not good at it. And to have a durable career, you have to build a personality that can withstand criticism. Published work is fair game; writers don't have to publish; they can leave their work in a desk drawer. Why should it not be open season, when the work comes out?

[ML, let's discuss]

[Aud]

83.20 Editing tends to make best sellers read more like each other. Few bestsellers, for an instance, don't suffer from a spate of adjectives. When a writer can't present the nuance of an experience, he often loads up with adjectives. That tells the reader what to think. There's a tendency in publishing houses to simplify books, gussy them up, too much emphasis on entertainment at all costs. My hope lies in one fact. A terrible weariness is coming into us because of the rate we are being entertained.

[Aud]

95.22 Everywhere I go, booksellers ask me, 'Why don't you write a short book? Short books take up less space on our shelves. Our shelves can then bring in more income per foot.' Marketing has taken over writing. But short novels? Not for me! I was seduced at an early age by Thomas Mann who said that only the exhaustive is truly interesting.

[Aud]

95.7 When you write you can't be thinking "I'm going to put this in because it's going to help it sell copies." That doesn't work. Even in bestseller there is a integrity that makes it a best seller--it is the best book that man or woman is capable of writing at that time. The author believes in the book. That's why it's a best seller.

[Aud]

Lee/2001 It usually doesn't matter if your book is good or bad. Within reason, you're going to get more or less the same number of good and bad reviews. A dreadful book will probably get three good reviews in ten, and a very good book may get six. It's amazing how pen-pushers tend to push verdicts to the middle. Until you know that in your bones, it's very hard to keep writing year after year, book after book, and rise above those unholy desires to maul a nerdy critic.

[Aud]

Hughes/2001 When I started, we were under the umbrella of Maxwell Perkins—anyone who became an editor wanted to be like him. Young editors felt a loyalty toward their writers. There were spiritual marriages, if you will. It's true to a degree, but the odds against sustaining such loyalty are much higher. Today's publishing dictates that an editor has to bring in books which make money, and that enters the interstices of an editor's thinking. (And the intestines.) I imagine it would be hard for most young editors not to start pushing their authors just a little bit in the direction of trying to be more popular. That, of course, strains the bond.

[Aud]

Vitka/1984 Everybody was waiting for the big war novel, so called, to arrive, and mine happened to be first. The timing of *The Naked and the Dead* was extraordinary. If it had come out a year earlier or later, it wouldn't have done as well. In mid-1948, people were ready. You see, immediately after the war, nobody wanted a war novel. You would go to publishing houses and say you were working on one and they would say, "Oh, God, don't do that. You'll never get it published." Of course, there had been a spate of bad war novels published all through the Second World War and publishers were now skittish. Publishing houses also have fashions. They conclude that certain book should or should not be written in a certain year. By the time *The Naked and the Dead* came out, everyone was ready. The war was three years gone; people were disposed to think about it again.

[Aud]

84.24 I was truly in debt in the early 80s and owed my publisher a great deal of money. The day of reckoning came and I realized I damn well had to write a book. It had been a book I had been trying to start all year but hadn't been able to. I was tired. (I had worked very hard on *Ancient Evenings* over the previous couple of years.) Then suddenly my mind cleared. It was like a joke. Popeye gets his can of spinach. The first draft of *Tough Guys Don't Dance* took 61 days. I've often felt that the only time you do anything with great energy is when you're acting out of your best and worst motives at once. My best motive was to create a little art, and my worst was to make some money. They don't always go together, but in this instance they did.

AB I believe primitive man saw himself surrounded by a circle of forces-- demons, gods, friendly forces, impersonal forces. If there could ever be a movie of a primitive walking through a forest, his stance and movement might be quite different from ours. When we pass through the woods, if it's an easy trail, we just walk, and if it's not open, we bushwhack. But the primitive may have stopped before a certain tree and bowed. Before another, he may have lain prostrate on the ground. Where there was familiarity, just a nod of the head as he passed by a relatively modest divine force. That was all that was required unless the tree gave an indication that it was annoyed. How did it speak? By many shades of difference in the rustling of its leaves.

Consciousness, therefore, was different for the primitive. He was always a protagonist; his day was heroic or ghastly. For what does it mean to be a hero? It requires you to be willing to deal with forces larger than yourself. The average primitive of that time was terrified and heroic. Small wonder if their lifespan was shorter than ours.

By pagan times, of course, you have societies like the Romans ready to rely on all sorts of rituals and special relation to their gods. If you are trying to form and maintain a society, you can't have people going off every moment to propitiate forces on their own. You do well to get them believing that there's a central force, society itself, which offers the best approach to such propitiation. I think I'd even go so far as to suggest that there is a buried element in many talented writers that unconsciously expects their work to serve

for acts of conjuration or propitiation. When you get down to it, what was Joyce, for example, trying to show us? We haven't begun to catch up with him yet.

V^D

Rising expectations can create a revolution in expectations, but is the rise earned? I see people as looking more and more for passive power. A built-in fantasy accompanies the personal computer. You never leave your house, but if you're bright enough, maybe you'll end up running the world, or destroying the world. Get to that level of fantasy, and it hardly matters whether you capture a country or jump off into empyrean cyber-space. I expect most teenagers would rather be Bill Gates than Fidel Castro. No wonder. Castro had real problems.

yes

LON Writing with anger that is void of irony is as bad as writing when horny. It's a species of pornography. You're just venting your rage. Pornography is generally empty of novelistic value because the people who are copulating are without specific character. So it's exploitive. Anger, void of irony, is of that ilk. But irony mixed with anger can be a heady combination. One of the best examples of controlled, sustained rage, full of irony, is Catch-22.

SUF

yes

Genre: Research

A good novelist ought to be able to pick up a good bit about a subject just by going into a new room. If, for example, you visit an auto sales showroom with the idea you might buy a car, your imagination begins to work on everything that's involved.

Let me put it in a more direct context: If you want to write about that showroom and the salesman in it, you may not know a great deal about that particular milieu. All the same, let's suppose you do have an insight that feels as if it is inside, is truly yours, that it is indeed your insight, and no one else's. In this good state, it is not that hard to pick up a lot of the collateral material. Because everything you are seeing is illumined by this private perception you have, this personal hypothesis.

Let's say, you have the hypothesis that you can't be a good car salesman unless you're a complete rogue. You may start with this, but after you've met a few car salesmen, the idea doesn't work as well. All the same, so long as it did, you learned quite a bit about selling cars. There's no question that Updike, or even more, say, a writer like Joyce Carol Oates, needs very little experience to extract a great deal out of what is imbibed.

Sometimes, however, you really have to do the research--if it's a very large subject, you can spend years on one book reading scores of related books.

Ancient Evenings, a novel about ancient Egypt in the Tenth and Twentieth Dynasties, took me eleven years to finish. All I knew on commencement was I had

certain instincts about what death might be like, and these intimations had curious similarities to Egyptian notions. The ideas of the ancient Egyptians were certainly not the same as mine, but one element was near to identical. In death, believed the Egyptians (and so did I), you entered a second set of adventures which brought you to either a better place or a worse one. That was stimulating enough. I spent those eleven years on the book because I had to learn new things every step of the trip. I don't recommend it. It's a hell of a way to spend eleven years. In fact, I was unfaithful to the book, because, believe me, if you become a serious novelist---dare I say it?---it's almost easier to steal a march on your beloved than on your manuscript. The real question is who or which is more unforgiving, the book or the lady? It can well be the book. In the case of Ancient Evenings, and I do speak of that work as a creature--she ended up being immensely forgiving. I deserted her for two years to write The Executioner's Song. And it's as if when I came back, the manuscript might as well have said, "Hmmm, you look tired. Do your feet hurt? Here, I'll wash them." And there I was right back in the book. But often, if you desert a serious project, that's the end of it. It may not come back to you.

There's an enormous commitment to writing a novel. If you take on something that's larger than yourself, like ancient Egypt, you can end up seriously beached on long dry fields of research. If I have a tip to offer, I'd say if you're going to do a book that demands a ton of research, then get a subject about which other authors write well. Because part of the difficulty of doing my opus about ancient Egypt was that most Egyptologists had just the sort of style you would expect. You not only have to absorb

reams of fact, but you also have to extract the style of the factologists from your synapses while writing.

That's the worst. The most difficult aspect of being a good novelist who takes on a dull and heavy subject because of one exceptional element, is that you are constantly cleaning out your system of these bad literary styles. That is kin to the problem young writers face after they have grown up with bad books and bad prose in newspapers. They, too, have to cleanse themselves of the second-rate styles that are in their system

GRAF (Pieces)

h D — Hazenb + Version
Sources
superior

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 Robert 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.

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 more 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 artform screaming through space on a unilinear subway line?

W D

At night, in the yards, the walls of the subway cars sit there possessed of soul—you are not just writing your name but trafficking with the iron spirit of the vehicle resting. 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 movement, 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 or Chinese curls of alphabet, and 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 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 an 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 an 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 the macadamization of the psyche, save the blank city wall of their united 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 project 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 tall in those choice places worth the effort for one to stand on another, ah, if it had gone on, the 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 erog 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 and 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 ahhr 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 virtue—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 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-1 sat in the station with John 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 stripped all polish from the manufacturer's surface. New subway cars looked like old cars. Only the ghost-outline of former masterpieces 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. Tow 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-1 walked the streets with John Naar, they passed a sign: DON'T POLLUTE—KEEP THE CITY CLEAN. "That sign," the photographer murmured, "is a form of pollution itself."

no

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?)

HARLOT HIGH (Pieces)

N 6

It is painful to admit that study of the CIA may not lead to 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 paper-mache 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.¹ It is just that one would like to know if the few pieces left belong to the same set.²

Epistemological Model II

Maybe it is the splinters of a mirror rather than the scattered pieces of a jigsaw 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.

You are not doing what you saw on that TV set. The answer that people are getting when they read through the mass media demonstrates that the mass media system who doesn't the media really know something about the people. But they don't know anything about the people. That's why I give you the example of the Arabs. The person exists in a world which is hermetically separated from the larger world of the generals who are planning the higher strategy of the war.

The mass media is made up of a group of people who are looking for power. The reason it got to be that way is that they have no moral sense, no larger sense of a goal, of an ideal that's worth fighting for, dying for, if one is brave enough. No, the reason they want power is because power is the only thing that will relieve the profound illness which has seized them. Which has seized all of us. The illness of the twentieth century. There isn't any other name for all of us. Madison's boy has moved from excessive postulation of justice to the excessive medication of psychosis. The demons don't exist on the battlefield any longer, or through malnutrition. They occur within the brain, within the psyche itself.

If America ever gets as sick as Germany was before Hitler came in, we'll have our Hitler. Our way of inflicting, we'll have our Hitler. After all, you can have Furies in any form at all, through the Church, through art, through social workers, through stars.

KRASSNER (Pont)

NO

Your eye is not drafted when you turn on that TV set? To assume that people are getting what they want through the mass media also assumes that the men and women who direct the mass media know something about the people. But they don't know/ anything about the people. That's why I gave you the example of the Army. The private exists in a world which is hermetically alienated from the larger aims of the generals who are planning the higher strategy of the war.

The mass media is made up of a group of people who are looking for power. The reason is not because they have any moral sense, any inner sense of a goal, of an ideal that's worth fighting for, dying for, if one is brave enough. No, the reason they want power is because power is the only thing that will relieve the profound illness which has seized them. Which has seized all of us. The illness of the twentieth century. There isn't psychic room for all of us. Malthus's law has moved from excessive procreation of bodies to the excessive mediocritization of psyches. The deaths don't occur on the battlefield any longer, or through malnutrition: they occur within the brain, within the psyche itself.

If America ever gets as sick as Germany was before Hitler came in, we'll have our Hitler. One way or another, we'll have our Hitler. After all, one can have Fascism in any form at all, through the Church, through sex, through social welfare, through state

² Is this what Robert Rauchenberg is up to now?

conservatism, through organized medicine, the FBI, the Pentagon. Fascism is not a philosophy but a murderous mode of deadening reality by smothering it with lies.

Every time one sees a bad television show, one is watching the nation get ready for the day when a Hitler will come. Not because the ideology of the show is Fascistic; on the contrary, its manifest ideology is invariably liberal, but the show still prepares Fascism because it is meretricious art and so sickens people a little further. Whenever people get collectively sick, the remedy becomes progressively more violent and hideous. An insidious, insipid sickness demands a violent, far-reaching purgative.

VJ2

Think of a young pilot who comes along later, some young pilot who goes out on a mission and isn't prepared for the fact that a bombing might be beautiful; he could conceivably be an idealist, there were some in the war against Fascism. If the pilot is totally unprepared, he might never get over the fact that he was particularly thrilled by the beauty of that bomb.

But if our culture had been large enough to say that ^{Marsolini's} Ciano's son-in-law not only found that bomb beautiful but that indeed this act of perception was not what was wrong; the evil was to think that this beauty was worth the lot of living helpless people who were wiped out broadside. Obviously, whenever there's destruction, there's going to be beauty implicit in it.

WEATHERBY (Pont)

yes

It seems to me there are two kinds of violence and they are altogether different. One is personal violence—an act of violence by a man or woman against other men and women. The second is social violence—concentration camps, nuclear warfare. If one wants to carry the notion far enough, there are subtler forms such as censorship, or excessively organized piety, or charity drives. A juvenile delinquent is violent not necessarily because his parents were violent to him nor even because society is directly violent to him—he's not, let's say, beaten in school—but because his spontaneous expressions are cut off by institutional deadenings of his nature. The boy who lives in a housing project is more likely to be violent than the same boy living in a slum tenement because the housing project puts him in direct contact with a deadening environment. The housing project is not a neighborhood but a massive barracks.

Violence is directly proportional to the power to deaden one's mood which is possessed by the environment. Threatened with the extinction of our possibilities, we react with chronic rage. Violence begins, you see, as the desire to fight one's way out of a trap. Moral questions over the nature of one's violence come only as a secondary matter. The first reaction, the heart of the violence, is the protection of the self. The second question, the moral question, is whether the self deserves to be protected, that is to say—was it honorable to fight? Was the danger true? For example, if a boy beats up an old woman, he may be protecting himself by discharging a rage which would destroy his

body if it were left to work on the cells, so he takes it out on the old woman. The boy may be anything from a brute to Raskolnikov. It requires an exquisite sense of context and a subtle gift as a moralist to decide these matters at times. Mexicans have a saying that when you commit murder, you carry the dead man's soul on your back and you have to work not only for one soul then, but for two.

It does seem more or less self-evident that men who have lived a great deal with violence are usually gentler and more tolerant than men who abhor it. Boxers, bullfighters, a lot of combat soldiers, Hemingway heroes, in short, are almost always gentle men. It is not because they have read Hemingway. They were gentle long before Hemingway was born. It was just the first writer who observed the repetition of this fact and paid his profound respects to it.

I think the reason is that men who are otherwise serious but ready for personal violence are almost always religious. They have a deep sense of dread, responsibility, of woe, of reluctance to make an error in violence, and a grim, almost tragic sense of how far violence can carry them. If I think of the athletes, criminals, prizefighters I have known, and the Negroes living in Harlem (their lives have much in common with precisely athletes, criminals, and prizefighters), they all have an understanding of life which is comprehensive and often tragic. It is, of course, deadeningly void of any kind of culture that could sustain them in their more boring times, but they do have a specific gravity and a depth of compassion which one doesn't find in their social opposite, the university-trained intellectual.

CARROLL (Pont)

NO

Marijuana does something with the sense of time; it accelerates you; it opens you to your unconscious. But it's as if you're calling on the reserves of the next three days. All the sweets, all the crystals, all the little decisions, all the unconscious work of the next three days—or, if the experience is deep, part of the next thirty days, or the next thirty years—is called forward. For a half hour or two hours—whatever is the high of the pot—you're better than you are normally and you get into situations you wouldn't get into normally, and generally more happens to you. You make love better, you talk better, you think better, you dig people better. The point is, you've got to get in pretty far, because you're using up three days in an hour—or whatever the particular ratio is for any particular person. So, unless you come back with—let us say—seventy-two hours in one hour, you lose. Because you have to spend the next three or four days recovering. You might ask, what happens to the guy who smokes all the time? I don't know. But I do know something is being mortgaged; something is being drawn out into the future. If his on future has already been used up in one or another mysterious or sinister sense, then maybe the pot is drawing it out of the very substance of what I may as well confess I call God. I suspect God feeds drug addicts the way a healthy body feeds parasites.

If God has great compassion, He may not be willing to cut the drug addict off from Him. During the time the addict has some of his most intense and divine experiences, it is because he is literally imbibing the very marrow and nutrient of

existence. But since I do not necessarily believe that God is inexhaustible, the drug addict may end up bleeding Him. You see, I don't think you have a mystical experience on chemicals without taking the risk of exploiting something in the creation. If you haven't paid the real wages of love or courage or abstention or discipline or sacrifice or wit in the eye of danger, then taking a psychedelic drug is living the life of a parasite; it's drawing on sweets you have not earned.

I'm not going to say that LSD is bad in every way for everyone, but I'm convinced it's bad if you keep taking it. Any drug is bad finally in the same way that being a confirmed gambler is bad. A confirmed gambler ends up losing all his friends because he blows their money and blows their trust. A gambler will tell any lie to get back into action. By the same token, if you stay on any drug for too long, then you have a habit; you're a victim; to anticipate something, you're a totalitarian.

My guess is: On LSD you begin to die a little. That's why you get this extraordinary, even divine sense of revelation. Perhaps you taste the essence of your death in the trip; in excess, it's a deadly poison, after all. Therefore, what's given to the expert is a broader vision. Dying a little he begins to retreat from his expertise and begins to rejoin his backward brothers. So that LSD taken a few times could be very good, I would imagine. But before long, if the expert keeps taking LSD, he can become nothing but an expert on LSD.

PLAYBOY: What do you think of Timothy Leary?

MAILER: Well, I wonder who were just talking about.

PLAYBOY: More of an answer, please.

MAILER: I never met him. Perhaps I'd like him if I did. Many of my friends like him. But I have heard him speak, and he is then naught but simple shit.

maybe

An obsession is created, I think, in the wake of some event that has altered our life, or perhaps we have passed through some relation with someone else that has altered our life drastically, yet we don't know whether we were changed for good or bad; it's the most fundamental sort of event or relation. It has marked us, yet it's morally ambiguous.

Suppose a marriage breaks up. You don't know if it was finally your fault or your wife's fault. People move forward into the future out of the way they comprehend the past. When we don't understand our past, we are therefore crippled. Use the metaphor of the Army here: if you move forward to attack a town and the center of this attack depends upon a road that will feed your attack, and this road passes through a town, yet you don't know if your people hold it or someone else does, then obviously, if you were a general, you'd be pretty obsessive about that town. "Will you please find out who is there?" You'd send out reconnaissance parties to locate the town, enter it, patrol it. If all sorts of mysterious things occurred—if, for example, your reconnaissance platoon didn't return—you'd feel so uncertain you might not move forward with the attack. The obsession is a search for useable reality. What finally did occur? What is real?

Alcoholics are often obsessives. If a man's drink takes him back to an earlier, younger state of sensitivity, then it is taking him to a place back of the place where he

originally got into the impasse that created the obsession. If you can return to a state just preceding the one you were in when these various ambiguities occurred, you can say to yourself, "Now I'm approaching the event again. What really did happen? Who was right? Who was wrong? Let me not miss it this time." A man must drink until he locates the truth. I think that's why it's so hard for people to give up booze. There's an artwork going on with most serious drinkers. Usually, it's a failed artwork. Once again, one's playing against the house percentages: one drinks, one wrecks one's liver, dims one's vision, burns out one's memory. Drinking is a serious activity—a serious moral and spiritual activity. We consume ourselves in order to search for the truth. On occasion, a relationship alters in one's memory from a morass to a crystal of recollection.

No

A note to precede this: It is hard to be a novelist without arriving at a vision of life. This has been mine and has underwritten all my work for the last forty years.

All we can see in our human condition are thundering, monumental disproportions, injustices of such dimension that even the conservative notion of existence—which might postulate that man is here on earth not to complain but to receive his just deserts and that the man who acts piggishly on earth will be repaid in hell regardless of whether he was rich or poor—yes, even this conservative vision depends on a God who is able to run a world of reasonable proportions. If the only world we have is one of abysmal, idiotic disproportions, then it becomes too difficult to conceive of an all-powerful god who is all good. It is far easier to conceive of a God who died, or who is dying, or who is an imperfect God. But once I begin to think of an imperfect God, I can imagine a Being greater than ourselves, who nonetheless shares His instinctive logic with us. We as men seek to grow, so He seeks to grow. Even as we each have a conception of being—my idea of how we should live may triumph over yours, or yours over mine—so, in parallel, this God may be engaged in a similar war in the universe with other gods. We may even be the embodiment, the expression of His vision. If we fail, He fails too. He is imperfect in the way we are imperfect. He is not always as brave or as extraordinary or as graceful as He might care to be. This is my notion of God and growth. What gives me

sustenance is that it enables me to love God, if you will bear these words, rather than hate Him, because I can see Him who is like other humans and myself, except more noble, more tortured, more desirous of a good that He wishes to receive and give to others—a torturous ethical activity at which He may fail. Our human condition, male and female, is, then, by this logic, epic or tragic—for the outcome is unknown. It is not written.

In capsule: there are times when He has to exploit us; there are times when we have to exploit Him; there are times when He has to drive us beyond our own natural depth because He needs us—those of us, at least, who are working for Him. We have yet to talk of the Devil.

STRATTON (Pont)

NO

It's reputed that Jimmy Hoffa once said: Flee a knife and charge a gun. I have no idea if he ever said it, but I think, if he didn't, somebody who knew an awful lot about the subject had to be the author. Because there is something intimate about a knife, whereas there's something closer to moral decision about a gun. If you charge the gun, the man who holds it finally has to say to himself (since it's not a physical act but a mental act), has to say to himself that he has the right to shoot you. At that point his moral sense of himself has to be invoked. He may not feel the sanction to shoot. Whereas if you charge a man who has a knife, his physical sense of himself is invoked, it's competitive. Am I going to hold this knife until he gets it away from me and humiliates me?

Source?

no

The use of drugs today, if we're going to employ an analogy, is comparable to the war in Vietnam. If you have a great deal of money to spend and very few results to show, and if you can't find the enemy, well, then, goddamnit, says Barry Goldwater, burn down the fucking foliage. Scorch those gooks, get them out of there. Denude the land and you will find what is there. That is what the allegedly best generation of our young are doing to their minds. They're saying, If I can't find the idea I was looking for yesterday, I am going to take twice as much tonight, burn down the foliage in my mind to find some of those ideas I can feel running around in there. It's a military operation, it's technological.

I don't think drugs are going to find God or the Devil. I think what they're going to create is the scorched earth of consumed karma. I believe, you know, that one has to be as reverential about drugs as about sex. The mark of an utter idiot, in my mind, is to find, let's say he is a man and falls passionately in love with a woman. He finds this divine cunt and he not only fucks the hell out of her but fucks the hell out of himself until his balls are as wet as gravel. You know, he is grinding his ass up over the stones in order to get in one more fuck for the ego. He's gone over. He is a gassed-out, farted-out goose. That is our drug addict. That's what the drug addict is doing to mysticism. If God is a rabbit, the drug addict is trying to kill the rabbit with a thousand flails.

ADAMS (Pont)

No

Over the last ten or fifteen years I've kept going back and forth in my mind over a notion that's hard to formulate and I don't know that I should try—it's the sort of thing that sounds silly unless you can write a book about it—but for the purpose of this answer, just let me say that if there's a war continuing between God and the Devil for humankind, for the future of humankind, then this war is much more complex than a simple confrontation. We have to ask ourselves what the role of technology is in all this, and I've had years when I believed technology is an instrument of the Devil, other years in which I've seen God in a Faustian contract with technology. Technology is perhaps some third force, some element that's come into our universe from other universes. Now all this is too endlessly and chronically paranoid to try to get into it in the form of an interview. I think you can dramatize these notions in a major novel, but only a major novel. You would wreck a minor novel by introducing such ideas. Therefore to talk about it in an interview is hopeless, but here, perhaps what I'm trying to say: To the degree that I have any intense religious notion, it's that when we fail God, we are not merely disappointing some mightily benign paterfamilias who'd hoped we might turn out well and didn't. We are literally bleeding God, we're leeching Him, depriving Him of His vision. You see, I start with the idea that the explanation of our situation on earth may be that we are part of a divine vision which wishes to take us out across the stars—a vision of existence at war with other varieties of existence in the cosmos.

N6

FARBAR (Pont)

The moment you accept too much permissiveness in sex, you get pulled into somebody else's manipulation scheme. My idea these years is that total promiscuity is the unstated need of a technological society. Its impulse is to accept indiscriminate fucking. It wants humans to become units. About the time we no longer distinguish between a man and a woman, he-she has become an interchangeable sexual part. We put it into the hole of those weaker than us, and get it put into our own hole by those stronger, we become a link in a technological chain of sex.

I've always hate the Pill. It reduces the fuck to a species of upper masturbation. Part of the beauty of the fuck was that you were taking a terrible chance. You could knock the girl up, and if you did, then, by God, you found out what you really felt about her, how phony were you, how true. When a woman comes to you and says she's pregnant, you know more about what you feel for her than you did before.

All right, the women will counter and say, That's good for you, finding your identity, but we're losing ours. Because we have to get butchered by abortionists. I've never been able to answer this. I will agree that the absence of the Pill was better for the sanity of men than women. I think women, if they're willing to look at themselves in such fashion, are in the embattled position. Since they are closer to creation, they have to pay more for the privilege. They hate it now. They hate it because we live in a

technological world, where to be pregnant means that you're removed for a time from the major scene, which is to say the whole technological process. The last power of the human heart as we approach apocalypse is ambition. Everybody gets more ambitious to be in on more. If we can't wield the power, then we want to be in on the shaping of power. Even when a woman goes through a legalized abortion, she goes through hell. There's no use hoping otherwise. Sometimes she has to be saying to herself, "You're killing the memory of a beautiful fuck." I don't think abortion is such a great strain when the act was some miserable little screech, or some squeak oozed up through the trapdoor, a little rat which got in, a worm who slithered under the threshold. That sort of abortion costs a woman little more than discomfort. Unless there are medical consequences years later.

But if a woman has a great fuck, and then has to abort, it embitters her. A profound and awful transaction. The Pill didn't come into existence for nothing.

MEDWICK (Pont)

N O

Let's try to separate sex and love. For instance, it's possible sex inspires more mystical feelings than love. I'm talking about love in the immediate sense. A loves B. Terribly concrete and particular. You love the way someone walks, the way they talk, the way they do all those things in the songs, you love the way they smell and you love the way they wear clothing, you love the way they laugh, you love the way they tell a joke, you love the way they say no to somebody—it's all the things they do. Hereas sex very often makes you feel close to God. Now, if you love someone and you also have good sex with her, then you can feel very close to God as you love. In fact, it's easier to feel close if you have good sex with someone you love, because having good sex with somebody you don't like, can leave you with an angry, confused, lustful feeling that may inspire you to more and more sex until you burn it out, and it drives you further and further away from any tenderness. To that extent you offer nothing to God, you're only thinking of the Devil. Sex also inspires, very often, a feeling that you're awfully close to the Devil. But I think the paradox of sex is that you can have sex with someone you don't know on the first night, and feel closer to God in that moment than you're likely to feel again for five or ten years, even if you're never going to see the person again.

ND

The first time someone has a profound sexual act, when it's all over, there's this shocked, stunned, incredible recognition: "Why God, God exists." I say it usually happens in sex rather than in love because it's got to happen quickly, a sudden revelation. So there are certain advantages to one-night stands. One brings none of one's baggage to a one-night stand and that makes it possible to have, once in a while, extraordinary emotions. The average one-night stand is, after all, not necessarily a small disaster, but unless it's very very good indeed, it leaves a terrible aftertaste. They can be exceptional once in a while; when that happens one often has this religious sentiment. It doesn't come from the person—you don't know the person—it comes from something in sex itself. Sex may be something that's outside of people.

MCELROY (Pont)

Years ago, I knew a lot of painters, abstract expressionists, young ones, and I had just begun to understand most of the work they were doing. You'd come in and one of them would have done about twenty window shades. It looked to my untutored eye as if he'd thrown some paint on those window shades and then let it drip down. I knew one of the painters better than the others and I remember she said, "That's awfully interesting work." I said, "Interesting, what do you mean, interesting? It's horrible." She said, "What he's done is very valuable," and I said, "Why?" and she said, "Well, I'm glad he's done it because now I don't have to do it." That was the period when you were truly exploring every last way you could put color on a surface, and so she was happy with it because it saved her some work—she didn't have to go in that direction.

Source?
McBlum yes

The problem of going out and searching for experience, I think, is true for very young writers who just don't have enough to write about. There comes a point where you say, "I want to be a writer, I feel all the equipment of a writer. I feel the livid intelligence of a writer but I don't really know enough." This is where journalism rears its ugly head. It's very hard to enter strange places and learn a lot about them unless you have clout. Kids get into journalism because the moment they flash a card that says they're a bona fide reporter, people start talking to them. Of course it's a false experience. Hopefully, you develop a sense of how to filter this experience and correct it, refract it into what experience might have been like if you hadn't had the peculiar advantage of being a journalist.

I discovered this all by myself when I started doing journalism and realized it was a marvelous way for me to work. It was vastly easier than trying to write novels, and I was discouraged with the difficulty of writing fiction at that point. I had run into the business of trying to tell a good story and yet say wonderful things about the nature of the world and society, touch all the ultimates, and still have it read like speed. I always had a terrible time with the story. My stories were always ending up begrounded. There I'd be

in the middle of the dunes, no gas in the tank. I loved journalism for a little while because it gave me the story, which I'd always been weakest in. Then I discovered that this was the horror of it. Audiences liked it better. They'd all been seeing the same story you'd been seeing, and they wanted interpretation. It was those critical faculties that were being called for, rather than one's novelistic gifts. I must say I succumbed, and I spent a good many years working at the edge of journalism because it was so much easier.