The notorious artist Ravschenko slowly opened his eyes, then closed them again for half an hour without going back to sleep. Once he woke up in the morning, he was awake for good. Although he was lying in the air-conditioned dark of a still hotel room, he wasn’t at all relaxed. He never woke up relaxed. The last part of his last dream was always a precognition of waking up tense, and he always did.

He opened his eyes again and saw the same sickly hotel room. If a hotel room can be stricken by tuberculosis, he thought, this one has been. Or, more appropriate to the local, cholera. He tried to blink the room away, shutting and opening his eyes several more times. When he couldn’t make it disappear, he gave up and opened his eyes wide, letting in what little light there was and reacquainting himself with the never-changing but never-familiar room.

Ravschenko had always looked tired, but never old—not even now that he was. He didn’t have grey hair, he wasn’t balding, he was still skinny, and he didn’t hunch over any more than he had when he was eighteen. He simply looked a worn-out fifty-five: a hard-living, uncared-for fifty-five. Ravschenko often wished that some of the symptoms of age would grace him, and lend a little dignity to his tired features. The only marks on his face were a few scars, the dark bags under his eyes, and the deep ridges on his brow, which looked so much like they belonged that no one thought of them as wrinkles. Maybe he’d had them forever, he couldn’t remember himself.

Ravschenko leaned over and grabbed the remote control. As he settled back, however, it was jerked out of his hand by the cord which connected it to the bedside table. Maybe that’s what I should have strapped down my kid. I should have strapped down my wife. Ravschenko imagined his family all strapped down in the living room of the house they used to share. All of them attached by the wrist to the nearest big piece of furniture so that nothing or no one could carry them away, so they could only be used right there and not anywhere else, like the remote control. It wasn’t as funny as it should have been. His son would have that bored, hopeful look that he used him. What he needed the cords for was to bind his things, his family, to him. Karla had never particularly liked his paintings, even the ones of her. Ravschenko doubted whether a little metal hotel cord could have held her down anyway. It would have been easier just to strap myself to the walls, or better yet, to a canvas, he thought.

Remote controls don’t get up and walk out, though, like Karla did. The cords in the hotel rooms were there to keep weird people from stealing the remote controls, but no one had stolen his family from him. What he needed the cords for was to bind his things, his family, to him. Karla had never particularly liked his paintings, even the ones of her. Ravschenko doubted whether a little metal hotel cord could have held her down anyway. It would have been easier just to strap myself to the walls, or better yet, to a canvas, he thought.

After an anemic, sputtering shower that left him feeling wet but uncleaned, Ravschenko turned on the television and sat back on the bed. He usually kept it on all day, but he only watched it with the sound turned down, or listened to it while he was facing the other direction. He couldn’t stand to hear it and see it at the same time. In the mornings he liked to watch CNN. They flashed up so many pictures that he could sort of tell what was going on without turning the sound up. As the TV went to a commercial, Ravschenko reached over for the phone. Every morning he called several galleries in the States. He pretended to them that he still painted; he figured he could always whip tried to imagine his giant, colorful canvases in the tiny, drab room. At first he laughed, but then he realized that he could picture it. He imagined one of his canvases, a portrait of his ex-wife maybe, in the hotel room, strapped to the dresser with a metal cord. Somebody has to paint those things, he thought. That’s probably where I’ll be in twenty years anyway. Plastic reproductions on hotel room walls. ‘Hey what’s that painting there on the wall with all the colors?’ a man asks his wife in bed, ‘Is it a woman?’ ‘Looks like a porpoise to me, dressed up like a clown.’

I should have strapped down my kid. I should have strapped down my wife. Ravschenko imagined his family all strapped down in the living room of the house they used to share. All of them attached by the wrist to the nearest big piece of furniture so that nothing or no one could carry them away, so they could only be used right there and not anywhere else, like the remote control. It wasn’t as funny as it should have been. His son would have that bored, hopeful look that he used when there were gallery people around, or when Ravschenko was yelling on the phone, or going on another trip to Europe. His wife would have her bored, angry look that she wore in those situations. By the end of the trip she had stopped trying to be polite to the ‘pretentious art fucks and fag hags’ that were often at the house; she had stopped asking to go with him to Europe, or wondering what he did there; she had even stopped taking the trouble to be angry, but she kept the look anyway.

Remote controls don’t get up and walk out, though, like Karla did. The cords in the hotel rooms were there to keep weird people from stealing the remote controls, but no one had stolen his family from him. What he needed the cords for was to bind his things, his family, to him. Karla had never particularly liked his paintings, even the ones of her. Ravschenko doubted whether a little metal hotel cord could have held her down anyway. It would have been easier just to strap myself to the walls, or better yet, to a canvas, he thought.

After an anemic, sputtering shower that left him feeling wet but uncleaned, Ravschenko turned on the television and sat back on the bed. He usually kept it on all day, but he only watched it with the sound turned down, or listened to it while he was facing the other direction. He couldn’t stand to hear it and see it at the same time. In the mornings he liked to watch CNN. They flashed up so many pictures that he could sort of tell what was going on without turning the sound up. As the TV went to a commercial, Ravschenko reached over for the phone. Every morning he called several galleries in the States. He pretended to them that he still painted; he figured he could always whip
something out if anyone seemed interested. I don’t know why I do this, he said to himself, it seems like I would have built up a conditioned response by now. Phone equals pain. Phone equals pain. I guess I must be more stupid than those goddamned monkeys and rats, they would’ve given up and died after about the third or fourth time. Ravschenko slowly pronounced a few words into the phone which, because they were the little Spanish he knew, seemed like magic to him. After about five minutes of buzzing that made him think the continents instead of telephone wires, the phone began to ring in New York.

The sun rose from beyond the ocean’s edge, over the waves, to peek between the buildings on the shore. Its gaze roused the lazy, sleeping gulls from their perches into the orange-blue sky, where, hypocrites that they are, they railed at the sun while scavenging in its light. Whether it was the beating of all those wings, or the solar wind, or pure luck, a breeze whipped up on the shoreline and breathed itself into the streets and alleys near the water. The gaze of the sun, like the feathers or the cries of the gulls, was born with the breeze over the low buildings on the dock, up to the rooftops, where it paused a moment, suspended. The sun peeked meekly into an uncovered window in a high apartment where a young woman was sleeping. Eilena (the young woman) said, almost in her sleep, I don’t know why you’re so shy, you see me here every morning. She fell back asleep and the sun whispered in parting that he would see her tomorrow.

Eilena’s apartment was nicer than a young artist’s should be. It was in a pre-war brownstone near the water and a park. It was in a secluded, safe part of the city, and it even had a doorman. There was only one bedroom, but it was a grand one, with its own bath and a giant window that opened out to a small balcony. The apartment had real oak floors and brass doorknobs. In the mornings it glowed amber, relaxing in its fine old age.

Eilena was able to live in this wonderful apartment not because she had achieved amazing artistic success at a young age, but because her mother had, though not quite so young as Eilena was now. With the apartment and the small legacy her mother had left her, Eilena didn’t really have to worry about being a success for a while, and so she didn’t. She only hoped that she would never have to sell any of the paintings that hung on the walls all over the apartment, paintings by her mother and her mother’s friends. Her mother’s reputation as a painter might have had short legs, but her reputation as a collector didn’t; Eilena often received offers she might not always be able to refuse. She could barely imagine the apartment stripped of its paintings, nothing remaining except less-faded patches of wall where they had been. She would move if that ever happened.

After her visit from the sun, Eilena had fallen back asleep, and she was dreaming about paint. In her dream, her hands were like ghost hands held out in front of her; they had no real substance. The pale sky-blue and the bloody maroon and the blooming orange swam around in her cupped fingers and palms and left slightly glowing trails that crossed and mixed and left an impenetrable swirl of softly glowing color that gave her ghostly hands shape. The colors leapt off her hands like brightly-hued sprites into the void ahead of her, where they danced and jumped, sometimes coming back to rest in her hands, but usually not. An intoxicating smell rose from their dances and made her feel faint. As the fairies, nothing but little tight bands of pure color, danced on her hands and in the void in front of her, a canvas appeared, also floating. She knew that she was supposed to guide the colors to the canvas, but she didn’t want to stop their dancing, she didn’t want to fix them on the cold, white surface. As she tried to paint the colors in shapes and forms on the canvas, they danced more and more furiously, betrayed, until finally they flung themselves out of her control and onto the canvases in desperate, vivid splashes. She woke up as the heady smell of the dance dissipated.

Eilena didn’t remember the dream, but a sad feeling lingered, and she lay in bed trying to shake it off. It always took her awhile to realize where she was in the morning, and in the few minutes between dreaming and wakefulness, she often noticed the simplest things. She felt how the flannel sat softly on her legs, and she understood the absolutely pale light that drifted in through the open window; the right angles of the floors meeting the walls seemed perfect to her; her own sleepy smell reminded her who she was; and the clear, impossibly slow, ticks of the clock comforted her. You’re in between, you’re in between, the flannel and the floors and the clock said to her. I know who you are, she answered, but where am I? Shhh, they whispered, you’re in between.

Splashing water on her face in the bathroom, Eilena remembered her plan. She needed to take a shower if she wanted to see the man at the gallery, but she hated showering in the mornings. She looked at her black hair resting on her shoulders, sticking up on one side of her head more than the other, and decided to skip the shower. She sprayed perfume on her wet fingers and ran them through her hair, tying it back. She knew it emphasized her narrow features and
sightly pointed chin, and especially her eyes. They were her mother's eyes - pale grey-blue like ice, but not distant. With her hair pulled back they seemed giant, and specks of every color swam on the edges of her irises, like the dancing colors in the dream she didn't remember. She was thin; she had small breasts and narrow hips that embarrassed her, so she dressed in men's jeans and an oversized sports coat. Her hands were long and pale, but strong from painting. When she painted, she held the brush tightly, and her hands had developed many lines and ridges, like the hands of an older woman. Sometimes she decorated them with silver rings on almost every finger, but today she only wore one.

Ravschenko hung up the phone, discouraged even though he had fooled himself into thinking he wouldn't be. None of the galleries would even take his calls - or, if they did, it was a secretary or an intern. At best he felt like he was being humored. He realized how vain he was, that he missed the attention and the pampering that came along with success. He used to go to parties and rich women he didn't know would try to seduce him. It was their idea of the wild side. He had flirted with them, eaten with them, slept with them, loving every minute of it even as his hate for them grew. He had felt like he was the person who had invented this irony, like he was the only one who could appreciate it. Now only the bitterness remained. The art world tripped along without him while he ate away at himself in a terrible hotel room. Ha ha, he thought, I didn't think I'm an artist?

As he was flipping through the channels, the flashes of color reminding him a lot of the paintings of an old friend of his, he saw a nicely-drawn, bright-orange map of the little country he was in. He stopped, curious, and turned up the sound. He had picked this country because it was fairly quiet and wasn't ever in the news. He had also picked this country because it was fairly quiet and wasn't ever in the news. There was a very stable dictator, open to deals with the CIA when communists threatened to win national elections. As he turned up the sound, he noticed the word under the little graphic of the country: revolution. Oh shit, he thought wearily, I better pack.

Eilena walked through the double glass doors of the gallery and failed to feel as nervous as she thought she might. After all, she was a so-far-unknown artist and this was a well-respected, if small, gallery. She actually felt like she was shopping. The gallery was in an old store front, and there were still ledges in the windows where mannequins used to pose. The exhibit looked sort of like a terrible accident in the appliance section of Macy's combined with a Saturday-morning cartoon—creatures made of household items battled on a field of shocking primary colors. Eilena laughed out loud quietly, almost snorting. “Not to your taste young lady?” asked a voice stiffly from the open door near the back of the room.

“Hardly,” Eilena responded, “I prefer art that doesn't require batteries.” She took a chance and matched his cold tone, adding an arch look in the bargain.

“A traditionalist at your age, my dear? What will you be when you are old and wretched like me?” She saw a stooped, weary shape emerge from the door, hands resting on a protruding tummy. It wasn't a cold shape at all.

“Maybe an appliance repairman if this trend continues.”

“Touché, touché, my dear. I lost my wit when I lost my hair, almost thirty years ago. I'm too weary to spar with spicy young artists, and besides, I don't wish to. You should be careful with that sharp tongue of yours, it will get you into trouble, with yourself not least of all. The irony of irony you know.” Eilena didn't know, but she let it pass.

“My name is Eilena,” she said, extending her hand, “and that wasn't even sparring. What makes you think I'm an artist?”

“I might be old, but I'm not feebleminded. I have made my living for longer than you have been alive by being able to tell who is a young artist and who isn't. That's what I do - I discover people before anyone, sometimes even themselves, knows they are an artist. Then I try to sell as much of their work as I can before they get a big head and move to a bigger gallery. You, my dear, have got a head start. You already have a big head.”

“I'm not here to show you my work. At least not yet,” said Eilena. She could see over the old man's shoulder into the back room, which was covered in paintings like her own apartment. “I'd just like to ask you some questions.” The gallery man stepped backwards into the room of paintings and made a sweeping motion with his hand.

“Well, come right in, but I must say that I am somewhat busy. What can I do for you?” Eilena didn't answer right away. She was busy taking in the amazing array of paintings on the wall in front of her. Most of the paintings had simple elements, a few lines and some soft colors. “I see that these are more to your taste, young lady. I confess they are more to mine as well. Ostensibly these are on sale, but I have the terrible habit of tucking the ones I like in this back room,
and somehow nobody seems to notice them. Some of them have been ‘on sale’ for forty years. It doesn’t do much for the profit margin, but it does good things for my failing health to be surrounded by my favorites. My dear, you say you don’t have any work for me to see, and surely you can’t afford these pieces. I will help you if I can, but I’ve invoices and shipping to do, and all sorts of other things I’ve never mastered, and I simply don’t have—"

“...and my mother painted this. And this,” Eilena said quietly as she pointed to two canvases on the wall. They were both quite small, but they drew like magnets. Their colors were so quiet—like wheat lying in the fields under the sun or faded flannel cloth—and their lines so sparse that you could mistake them for sketches at a distance. But there was nothing quick or haphazard about them. What looked like blank spaces revealed themselves to be layers of light paint swirled on the canvas to create patterns and textures that grew the longer you stared. For a while they would look like fields of dry grass blowing in a light breeze, and then they would change into wispy clouds or smoke twirling through the air. All this surrounded strange, sad faces, like masks, that looked like they were soaked into the canvas. They were faded and quiet, but they looked like they persevered, like water stains on a table or floor.

“...Oh my, oh my. My dear, I should have known who you were. You have your mother’s hands. Beautiful hands.” The gallery man was also staring into the paintings, as he often did.

“I think I recognize these, I think I remember my mother painting them,” Eilena said quietly.

“She painted these while I knew her—I don’t think you could have been born yet, child. I hope you’re not going to try and take them away from me, I can assure you that I bought them legitimately—I have papers if you’d like to see. I’m afraid they’re not for sale either, if that’s what you came about. I—"

“I didn’t come to try and take my mother’s paintings away. I didn’t even know you had them.” The gallery man didn’t try to rush Eilena anymore. They both stood for long moments in silence, almost sharing in a common vision of the paintings coming alive. They both felt like they were being drawn into the washed, dusky landscape, but they both felt too acutely the presence of the other. The paintings were best when viewed alone.

Eilena knew she would have to give them up, at least for now. She closed her eyes and let the images swirl in her head for a moment before she shook them out. Slowly, she remembered why she had come. “I’d like to ask you about an artist, the artist Ravschenko.”

The artist Ravschenko was drinking his second or third bottle of wine from room service. He had bought a plane ticket, but he wasn’t sure he was going to use it. He had called his lawyer to see if anyone in the States had forgotten the charges of tax evasion, failure to pay child support and alimony, fraud, and a few other minor, but more violent charges against him. They hadn’t, which meant that he faced an unpleasant homecoming. When he’d first heard the news, Ravschenko had been scared, but had then decided that it was just a learned response. He realized that he had no real desire to flee, just some nagging notion that that was what he was supposed to do. It was the same feeling that he’d had when he fled the States in the first place.

When he called the airlines to make a reservation, they gave him two choices: a flight that left in an hour and flew all night, or one that left the next morning. Ravschenko had always hated rushing for flights, it made him nervous and his stomach would hurt on the plane. The real kicker was that the first flight didn’t have a movie, and he really hated flying without a movie. It was with a peculiar calmness, which he noticed but didn’t recognize, that he made a reservation for the following day. As a concession to the small fugitive impulse that remained, he also reserved a seat on that night’s flight in case the police checked. Ooh, sneaky, he thought sipping his glass of wine, I’m a regular James Bond.

Lying on the bed hours later, Ravschenko stared intensely at the green wall ahead of him. It used to be that if he fixed his eyes on the dull field of a wall long enough, he could make it disappear, or even replace it. Today, however, like most days for a very long time, the green wall remained a green wall, fixed and dominant. He hadn’t had to make a decision at all in years, that was one of the things he liked best about this place. It upset him that he had to choose whether to run or not. He didn’t care. The stolid nature of the furniture and the unflinching green wall began to upset him also. It was a constant physical reminder of his mental boundaries and his limited, spent opportunity. He used to be able to make them disappear, but not anymore. The wall is the wall, he reflected, I guess there’s really no decision at all. The wine was starting to make him sleepy, and he let it. He never relaxed himself enough with drinking to be able to make the walls disappear, but it often calmed him enough to sleep, which he appreciated.

A sharp knock on the door woke him. How charming, he thought, a visitor. Mr. Ravschenko, a voice called, only hitting about half the letters, you are to come to us. Come to us, Mr. Ravschenko. How
romantic, they really like me, he thought. Do you know who I am?, he asked the policeman when he opened the door, I’m the artist Ravschenko. He said it as a joke, mostly to himself, and the policeman didn’t get it— you’re the prisoner Ravschenko now, the cop said in slow English as he walked in to search the room.

Eilena found herself having a cup of tea in the back room with the portly gallery man. She was explaining why she wanted to see Ravschenko, and she was talking more than she usually did. “You probably know more about that part of my mother’s life than I do,” she said, “My mother never talked about it very much. She loved to paint, I remember that, but I don’t think she loved the lifestyle.

“She worked in the morning, early. She would wake up while it was still dark. She liked the cold, blue light that filtered through the windows in her studio. My father woke up with her; he’d walk with her to the attic and read or catch up on business. He loved to watch my mother paint. He didn’t even look at the canvases, only at her painting.

“They’d walk quietly past my room, and after I woke up to the sound of their passing, I would lie in bed awake listening to the noises they made. I guess my mother didn’t really make a whole lot of noise painting, but there are certain sounds I associate with it— like the rushing and hissing in the pipes as my father warmed water in the sink above me. He liked to shave in the little sink in the studio. The pipes would shudder as he shut off the water with a clunk, and then I would hear the constant little metal plink of water dripping off his chin into the basin, and the steady swishes of the razor being rinsed every once in a while.

“That’s how I pictured painting for the longest time. Little plinks of falling water like color dots, and the swish of a razor through the water like the pass of the brush over the canvas. It seemed so nice, like taking a bath.” Eilena realized how long she had been talking and looked down, embarrassed. The gallery man didn’t seem embarrassed at all.

“Why would you want to see Ravschenko, my child? What do you know of him?”

“My mother mentioned him often in her diaries. They started at about the same time, I guess they had some shows together. I don’t know if they were just friends, or lovers, or what, but she seemed to have awe for him. Fascination also - he couldn’t have been more unlike my father, after all— but mainly awe. She said in one of her entries that he seemed to hold a lot of himself back and still produce these amazing spectacles of painting, whereas she had to give her all to produce a ‘tiny, dark patch on the wall’. I think she thought that there was something very powerful in that holding back.”

“Do you really want to know if your mother and he were lovers, my dear? Very often we fool ourselves in these types of situations.”

“No, that’s not it. My mother had one of his early paintings - maybe they traded at some point, I’m not sure - but it’s bright and colorful, you could see the beginning of his outrageous style, but I always imagined that it was mocking itself, that behind the bright colors was a sad man playing jokes on everyone and himself.

“When I was a child, I would stare at it for a long time, and I would see a face in the painting, or the shadows of a face. Where the painting was bright, his face was only different shades of darkness, like the reflected shadow of a face— of a long-suffering, contemptuous sadness, hidden behind the canvas. I guess that’s why I want to meet him.”

“I hope you haven’t stopped staring at it just because you’re no longer a child. If staring at paintings is the test, then I am a babe, despite my wretched looks. Paintings are meant to be stared at, my dear, it is why they are there. Bore a hole in it with your eyes if you can, it is the artist’s best compliment. That was his best period, right at the beginning. I’m glad I had him then. After that, his canvases grew faster than his ego, grew bigger and bolder, but never better.”

“I used to think that they grew so fast that they eclipsed my mother’s. Hers just got smaller and more faded and sketchier. They seemed to work at an inverse proportion. The more famous he got and the larger his paintings became, the more my mother slipped back to the country to paint her little pictures.”

“Your mother was a wonderful person, and her work was wonderful, even after she faded from New York. She had something to say child, she felt something at least. You notice I don’t have any of Ravschenko’s on my wall. I’ve had chances to buy some of the later ones, but they seem to me heartless, and even a little cruel.”

“I love my mother’s paintings, of course. But my Ravschenko speaks to me - it always seems to be speaking. Sometimes I imagine that the hidden face laughs at itself and at me in this low, wry chuckle. I only wish my mother had had more of a chance—”

“Your mother had every chance, dear, she chose not to follow Ravschenko’s path. She was very strong, I think.”

“I’d like to see him. I thought maybe you’d kept in touch.”

“I probably know as much about him as you do, dear, that he is in some dreadful little South American place hiding from the law. I have ceased being angry about it long ago, but the fact is that Ravschenko was very cruel to me, very cruel. The reason I don’t have
some of his earlier paintings, which I love, on the wall here is because he demanded them back. He paid for them and then resold them at another gallery because I insulted him. I bruised that large, but fragile ego of his. I never claimed to have 'discovered' him or anything of that nature, but I had faith in him. I gave him a head start, and I backed him. I thought we were friends, I thought there was some sort of bond between us, beyond the business. I'm sure at some point he would have moved to a bigger gallery anyway—he started getting offers after that first show—but I refused him first. I didn't like the work he was doing. Of course, you could see great talent in it, and even some inspiration, but I thought it was impersonal and show-offish. I wasn't trying to reject him out of hand, but I thought he would value my opinion. I thought we were somehow collaborators.

"I realize now, of course, that that was a mighty and faulty presumption on my part, but I don't think that's what drove him away. I think he left because I was right. I think he felt his paintings were empty, that perhaps he was emptying himself too fast. His paintings had lost that feeling of 'holding back' that attracted your mother. They were almost desperate. He refused to paint anymore until I sold the ones he had given me, and I refused to sell them. So he took everything of his out of the gallery and prostituted himself somewhere else. He was very frightened, I can tell you that. He called me an old, horrible lech and the most horrible things you can imagine, but he was very frightened."

Two.

While Ravschenko sat in the living room every day staring at the canvas-covered wall, Eilena painted and painted and painted. It drove him crazy to hear the sounds she made painting, to see the stack of canvases grow, and to see the images on those canvases grow bolder, more mature, evocative. He had cast himself as the mentor at first, offering criticism and suggestions. Eilena had only smiled and given him a quizzical look that told him he was redundant. What do you want from me, he had yelled at her one day, why did you want to meet me in the first place? I liked your painting, she had answered. He had lashed out at her then in frustration. I wanted to meet you because of your mother, he had said, but your mother was nothing like this. You don't know anything about my mother, she said with a rare coldness. Usually she gave him only the same, meaningless grin. It enraged and paralyzed him. He felt like he'd been fooled.

Never trust a gallery owner bearing gifts, he chuckled bitterly to himself, remembering the day in prison a few months ago when the guard had told him that someone was there to see him. For a few brief moments Ravschenko had hoped or dreamed that it might be his wife with his son. He pictured her in his head getting out the car, locking the doors carefully, and pulling the boy across the parking lot of the prison as she tried to pat down her hair with one hand. He'd seen it so many times that it was burned in his memory; it seemed to him at that moment to be as real as the prison bed he was sitting on.

When he heard the ever-familiar voice of the gallery man calling the guard a dear, a bitter wave of disappointment hit him. She's not coming, he thought, she's not going to drop the charges and I'm not going to see my son. He apologized to the gallery man easily, too easily, and the gallery man knew it. They reminisced halfheartedly about Ravschenko's first show and some of the people they had known, and they joked that perhaps the notoriety from the trial would raise the prices on Ravschenko's paintings. It's not as good as dying, Ravschenko had said, but I do what I can. The gallery man promised him space 'when' he started painting again, but Ravschenko remained distant and uninterested until he mentioned that a young artist had wanted to talk to him. When the gallery man told him whose daughter she was, Ravschenko had asked to meet her.

Eilena wasn't thinking about Ravschenko at all; she wasn't thinking about when she met him; she wasn't thinking about when he got out of prison on bail; she wasn't thinking about when he moved in; she wasn't thinking about when they made love in the beginning. The walls knew more about what Eilena was thinking than Ravschenko did, so did the sun through the windows and the gulls on wing. All it took was the patience to shut up and watch, which Ravschenko didn't have. Eilena was thinking about painting, and she was painting. Sometimes she thought about her parents or the day outside, but mostly she painted. Ravschenko's bad vibes, strong enough to shake the door, rolled off her, as they say, like water off a duck's ass.

Ravschenko also thought a lot about painting, or rather, paintings. He thought about his painting hanging on the wall, he thought about the other paintings there, but mostly he thought about Eilena's paintings. He often pictured a huge, growing pile of them spilling into the living room while she painted on. The pile grew features—eyes and a mouth—and laughed at him before it swallowed him whole.

He sat in front of his painting and wondered...
what Eilena liked about it so much. She, of course, wouldn’t tell him— couldn’t tell him she said. It didn’t even seem like a painting to him, certainly not a work of art. He didn’t remember it clearly, couldn’t recall exactly what it looked like unless he was sitting in front of it. It was like a smell to him, a tag alerting his brain to remember something, but having no value in and of itself. Whatever space the gallery man was holding for him would soon go to Eilena, Ravschenko was sure of that.

Eilena had just finished a painting. Though she didn’t realize it, she had made peace with the sprites who inhabited her dreams. They no longer fought her tooth and nail, but rather cooperated with her, as if they shared her vision. She had only to give them the slightest hint of what she was thinking or seeing, and they flew off her hand and arrayed themselves on the white canvas with perfect grace. Canvas after canvas had happened this way in the past few months. That’s how Eilena thought of it: the canvases happened.

Sometimes she felt like she wasn’t very much a part of them at all. The process of painting had gone from being a struggle to a trance-state. Afterwards, she felt rested, as if she had been sleeping or meditating. She rarely slept more than a few hours a night. When Ravschenko insisted on going to bed she would stop painting for the day and go into the living room to read for hours, until the dawn reminded her of sleep. A lot of nights she only shared the bed with Ravschenko for a few hours, or not at all.

Three.

Ravschenko sat in the bath full of warm water, his head resting on a folded washcloth on the back edge of the tub. A half-empty glass of gin rested on the shelf beside him. Like the contrails of a jet airplane in the sky, crimson smoke billowed out of a few neat cuts in his wrists. They swirled and dissipated like especially passionate clouds. Ravschenko thought it curious that nothing really felt different. He didn’t feel relieved or scared— only, perhaps, a little more relaxed. What a man won’t do for a good night’s sleep, he thought drowsily.

He stared at the wall paper of the bathroom. As he stared, the wall oozed forward and enveloped him, and he shut his eyes. The blackness was pierced with sporadic bright spots of colored light that grew behind his eyelids. As he watched them, they grew from spots, to lines, to circles and ellipses. They spun around each other, crossing and folding in on themselves in iridescent trails, and bloomed into crystalline, arching paths like sketched neon petals. He wandered down and around these glowing flower paths, following the sweeping lines of light to the core of the blossom where they bundled so tightly that the glare was unbearable, and then rode them back in a burst, up and out of the flower. He emerged shocked and alert, as if he had burst wet and naked out of a cold lake into a winter’s clear, biting night.

In front of him, floating, a face began to condense from the colored mists that swirled around his body. At first Ravschenko thought the mist was from his breathing, like when he was young and tried to blow rings with his breath on winter mornings. He realized, though, that the face was not of his making. He began to recognize the features in front of him— the noncommittal twinkle in the eyes and the stubborn turn of the mouth. Eilena, he whispered quietly, Eilena is that you? The figure seemed to reach out for him, and he thought he heard it call his name, but it stayed vague and unformed. Perhaps it is Eilena, Ravschenko thought, suddenly remembering where he was. Maybe she’s trying to save me. He tried to lift his hand to the face but it was too heavy; he felt as if he were trying to lift air. A great pain began to settle on Ravschenko like a terrible lead blanket; it covered his face and his chest, it weighed down his legs. It felt like the night-pains he had a child, the screaming aching in his joints that woke him into nightmares. Eilena, he screamed, Eilena— but the figure moved farther away from him. It seemed suddenly that it wasn’t Eilena at all, but an old woman. Her face was blurred and rippled, like scenery through a rain-soaked windshield, but Ravschenko saw that she was a beautiful woman, a powerful woman. She seemed to be every color at once; great arcs of light flashed from her face and shot into space; she was surrounded by a shimmering aura that reminded Ravschenko of Joseph’s technicolor dreamcoat that he had seen on Broadway. Who are you, he screamed, the pain in his joints increasing as the figure grew dimmer, who are you?

Eilena walked down the litter strewn street feeling numb and closed from the world. The sky, as if it knew it was being given the cold shoulder, responded accordingly— with dingy breezes and haggard clouds. The buildings seemed to respect her mourning, dipping their giant, dirty knees as she passed. The sun had even left her alone that morning. It had been three weeks since she’d buried Ravschenko; she wasn’t mourning for him. Her hair was unwashed and straggly, even when her knuckles and back ached and her eyes burned. She wasn’t sure she wanted to stop anyway. Her show was in a month.
She saw an old woman who looked like a bag lady stooping down to pick up something. Eilena bent down to help her and saw that she was incredibly old, older than anyone she'd ever seen, but that she had wild, bright eyes—eyes that flicked across Eilena's face, absorbing everything and staring almost through her. "Thank you dear, thank you so much," the old woman whispered. As Eilena watched the old woman's face, it seemed to shed the wrinkles and the grime, and begin to glow translucently. Waves of blue and gold cascaded from her brow and washed over Eilena, filling her with warm and cool currents flowing together. "Don't worry about your baby", a voice said, a different voice, "there will be another time for her, a time with love.

The woman turned her back to Eilena and went down the street a few feet. She swirled suddenly with her chin tilted up and her eyes half-closed, and her face was aflame and awash at the same time with swimming, singing colors like Eilena had never seen. "You're a queen" the woman called out to Eilena. "Hold yourself like a queen. You're beautiful, like the queen of the world." Eilena turned to walk away and felt her chin rise upward and her cheeks glow inadvertently. In her man's clothes and greasy hair, with her paint-flecked hands and dirty fingernails, her empty womb and tired, red eyes, she felt like a queen. An emptied, hushed, striving queen of the world.
Lerin

For the Model of Print #5 Stein

for T.

The golden mean could never be more sharply delivered: even your hair is thin. But something grinning in you calls you the slightest cage and pokes through at your edge as through tin foil or dry tissue machée, not living tissue, not body. I would share such discomfort; there the shirt pulled down to show your shoulders, I’d carve how no curve curves but it strains, how no flesh hides what grain sticks out like a wooden soul: a mannequin that pulls from collar bone to neck a bar it wants to break.
ElizabothTraces of the Primitive

Incontinent strikes me like a word for travel,
As in, “Will you be incontinent this year?”
On the stretches of highway through upstate New York,

Unspeakable town names like Cheektowaga and Tonowanda—
Vaguely obscene — reminded me that girl’s bladders are small
And become only more so. Every fall my father drove our antiquated

Chevy across miles of New England backwater
To the reaches of the leaf-changing season,
As if we were tireless collectors of its rare pigments.

Why was it only in travel that I became aware of my body?
Like every family ritual, ours had traces of the primitive,
As if under my jeans I hid a curled tail. I bounced

On the shiny vinyl of the backseat, singing the little ditty
Of my brand new body, whining for my father to stop.
Then, somewhere on the lattice work of 128, the car pulled

Over, and I jumped out, screaming into the scrub,
Squatting in the bushes far from the roaring interstate,
As I discolored the hard, dark ground.
We pushed our legs through the deepest part of the snow. I saw the corner of Jamie’s eye and the dark crinkles that gathered up to it as he smiled. His teeth were yellow, and his lips trembled from hangover, but his eye flashed dark against the winter morning, and his head tilted towards mine while he stared forward, like he was telling a joke when he asked again would I leave with him.

I guess I smiled, felt the skin prickle beneath my new whiskers and tugged at them.

“Come on,” I said. “That’s the last time you’re gonna ask me.” ...the cold air turning my voice into a whisper, rasping into my scarf. The end of my sentence became a cough, then a chuckle.

“Ok, Ok,” Jamie laughed back. He looked off to his right and his eye flashed away, then back again. For a second I saw the white, and suddenly, the little red veins, a red spot where a capillary burst when he fell against the fire escape. I remembered seeing it happen one summer at a party when we all hung out the window. Then I watched the trees as we passed them, how the snow clung to their bark in ragged, broken lines.

He led me off the path and we came out upon a blank field of snow. Across it was a clump of birches, and to our right, the arboretum wall.

“Just through there, then over a short fence.” Jamie pointed with his right shoulder, his hands deep in his pockets, his arms and coat pulled around him. He blinked tiredly and smiled. “Let’s rest a second,” he said.

My pants were stiff and falling, and they kept the curve of my knees, how I curled my legs last night in sleep. There was cold along my sides, beneath my jacket, and dust and nail ends and paint specks from Jamie’s floor where we had spread out our coats and sat down on the fraying rug to start drinking.

As the night had gone on the windows had thickened, the walls crouched and yellowed, the radiator banged with the heat coming up and we pulled our glasses full and poured our mouths open and pushed it down.

There were blankets in the corner of his apartment, a few books Jamie hadn’t packed yet. We talked and waited for Jamie’s brother to call for directions from 91, but somewhere the phone got knocked over ...and the buzz of the light on Jamie’s face, his eyes drunk and staring past me, staring at the walls, at night shimmering in the corners.

“Why don’t you come back home with me tomorrow?” His glance caught mine, and he grinned like it was a joke, and scratched behind his ear.

I answered in a stumble about having to go to school, about missing him, about long distance phone calls. I played with a dime in my jeans pocket.

“There’s room in Rich’s car. When he calls, I’ll tell him you’re coming with.”

The radiator banged again and I counted the clangs and the spaces between them and the bursts of heat...

“For a visit, at least. They’ve got the most incredible whiskey there. We can steal books from the library and watch movies all day.”

...until I felt Jamie stop looking at me, sigh, get up and go to the bathroom. The floor twisted. The heat climbed on my neck and the radiator banging. In the noise were whispers, hot flames of whispers warming in my ears.

I stretched back along the floor, let my eyes flutter closed. They rolled beneath the lids and I felt warmth behind my face. I heard my breathing and felt my heart beat in my ears, then the sound of Jamie coming back from the bathroom. My eyes stayed shut while he put a blanket over me.

I guess I slept, black and dreamless, until I heard the light go out, and Jamie somewhere close, maybe sleeping too, maybe talking to himself.

“...that party at Nick’s, when I slammed my head against the fire escape climbing out the window... you told me I got up and walked around after, but I don’t even remember it. My body walked, but I was gone. The last I remember, the stars, the steel railing with my blood on it... my bloody head trembled and you were holding it.”

And then his whiskery face right next to my ear and I started. I half-dreamed the words “So close...”

“I was very drunk.” His breath was hot and he laughed. “Every boy’s got a falling down story.”

But I barely remembered the party myself. I remembered things moving, the night black and warm. I remembered the grime on the kitchen floor, the dirty glasses, and flirting with some girl who had sweat on the back of her neck and tired eyes. Then everyone rushing to the window, Jamie’s name called. I tried to get out there, saw his legs spread out on the fire escape through the window. People were shoving up against my back, trying to see. When I wedged myself out the window, it was as though I didn’t move at all, just pushed the whole building back behind me. And there was the night. There was Jamie, his mouth open, his eyes open, slowly blinking. He didn’t see me, or anyone.

By then, back on Jamie’s floor, I knew I was asleep. I dreamt of me as a child in my old home town. It’s me, in the sudden light of first snow. The road isn’t plowed, but it’s been packed down with boot marks, it
ripples in treads and footprints and glimmers with new ice. And I am walking there, slowly, trying not to slip. Trees to either side, deep, black, waxy firs, and as I stumble along they jostle and slide in the corners of my eye, my body’s balance tumbling, slipping and starting. The world is a bright somersault, blood’s rushed to my ears and nose, frozen and aching, my eyes are cold and watery. I shuffle my feet, they slip out and I fall. The trees leap and stretch to my sides, lean and groan and curl above me. Warm air bolts from my lungs, and spit runs up my throat and fills my mouth. Above me, the dots of sky between the branches turn a bruised purple; when my head settles on the ground, they turn white again, and the trees’ wooden fingers slow and lock and trap my vision in their web of growing stillness. I feel the snow against my neck. I bend my knees a little and scrape my heels along the ground, then still, drowning in the light, it climbs and crackles in the trees.

When I blinked my eyes awake I saw wings in front of me, then socks warming by the radiator, tears of melted snow on the window. There was a pile of blankets next to me where Jamie had slept. I found him sitting at the kitchen table, resting his head on his hand and staring at the sugar he had spilled. I told him it had snowed, and we decided to go out to pick up coffee and cheese, and Jamie said that we could cut through the arboretum to the store. Now we were waiting in a clearing, cracking our grey knuckles and breathing into our jackets. Powdery snow stuttered up with the wind and stung my face. After a while, Jamie turned to pull out a cigarette and try to light it. I was looking ahead, and somewhere across the field a shadow between the trees shuddered and twisted as it came closer. It was a man.

“Hiya, Rich.” Jamie forward, dropping his cigarette. I saw the same bob in his head until he stopped to rub the back of his neck and kick a little snow around his feet. “Where’d you come from?”

“I took the exit from the turnpike. Nice morning.” He turned to me and his face sprinkled with little red scars... “Don’t you think so?”

“The pike? I thought you were on 91.” Jamie was mumbling.

“91 doesn’t go to Boston. Stupid prick. The pike does though.”

“But you didn’t have directions, Rich.”

“I made it to the exit ok.”

“But you didn’t call...”

Rich pursed his lips and sighed quickly, I could hear his breath mean through his teeth. He stopped looking at us. His glance shifted to the sky, the trees behind us, the buildings that poked up in the distance behind the arboretum wall, and settled on the empty air just behind us.

That emptiness came up and crawled on my back and in my throat. I felt it tingle on the skin on the back of my arms. Like the smell of vodka it was sweet and gray and dusty and bitter, pushing us up towards Jamie’s brother, circling the three of us, quiet and frozen. For a second, all I could see was Rich’s jaw, pushed out slightly and shuddering with cold.

“...you didn’t call,” Jamie tried again.

“Actually, I did call. I froze my ass at a Merit station for two hours calling. Was busy. Who were you talking with, Jamie?” He looked at me. “You? Were you two talking? On the phone?”

“Jesus, Rich, I’m sorry. Something must have happened to the phone.”

“Something, Rich chuckled low in his throat. Something must have happened.” He stared at me, laughing, shaking his head. “Nice morning, you know? Good day for a fucking walk. Get your shit together James. I gotta get going. I don’t make a living by driving you home.”

Jamie’s eyes darkened. “How did you even find me Rich?”

“I went over to your bakery this morning and asked.”

“They tell you I live in the park?”

“What do you think? You didn’t see my truck outside your building? You think I guessed you were here?”

“Why’d you follow us here, Rich? Did you follow us? From the apartment?”

They moved closer, and there was a ringing in the snow as they pushed through it. “Come on,” I mumbled. There was a skittery siren in the cold, and a train passing somewhere, and an ambulance. I could
barely hear for the blood in my ears. “Please. Don’t.”

“Get your shit together, Jamie. I’ve been telling you for a long time. I don’t give a fuck you drop out of school. I don’t give a fuck you waste your life. I don’t give a fuck who you leave the house with in the morning. But when you run out of money and I have to tow your ass somewhere, you better get your shit together.”

Jamie was in front of me now. “Rich are you talking about my friend? Do you want to talk about my friend?”

“Yeah, I know about your friend.”

Jamie took a step, but his brother came in fast and pushed his hand into Jamie’s stomach. The ground bent while Jamie’s knees gave, and my head whipped back in tears. Rich backed off and spat, the cold pushed in, and Jamie screamed, a skittery ambulance demon whispering in my ear. He dropped hard against my chest, and my arms wrapped around his middle, and I felt Jamie pouring out from where Rich had cut into him.

We fell back. Somewhere his brother was screaming words that ran together. Snow flew up around us and I felt Jamie’s weight over me thrashing and crying, but my arms flew out away from him and my back arched. I pushed my head desperately back into the snow, let the icy water down my shirt and up my nose, searing my eyes. Back into that blanket that numbed my ears to Jamie’s last sobs, so that I could not hear or see or feel... into the white empty silence, at last alone, at last safe, at last, at last.
An Interview with Jeffrey Morton

"Mountain Tablet"

Jeffrey etching Morton
In The Differendi you assert "The time has come to philosophize." What are we to understand by philosophy in this context? Is there something specific to our time which necessitates this call? Was it not time before to philosophize?

That’s a perilous question. (Laughs.) No, it’s always time for philosophy, for philosophizing. But it seems to me now there is something different because something happens which is precisely the crisis of philosophy. And when you ask about what it is to philosophize now, precisely that is the question that philosophers have to ask. Because, you know, traditional philosophy, it seems to me, academic philosophy, tries to avoid real questions asked now, by the situation, the general situation, the so-called postmodern situation. And in particular it seems to me that the regular, traditional way of philosophizing which is mainly, essentially focused on the question of arguing; the argument as the philosophical essence, the essence of philosophical discourse. It seems to me that now, it is not enough. Because the belief in the capacity of arguing on one side still remains the same as ever and has its place among a lot of genres, discourses. And there is no reason to repudiate it. But at the same time, there is something new, open to reflection now, which is not a matter of arguing, or anything obvious. And something like that also with the "after-effect" of psychoanalysis, with the Freudian discovery of the so-called unconscious. Which obliges us to be suspicious about arguing, and argumentation in general, because its possible that something else is talking through our talk. And in this case the question is not to argue with logical rules and the general laws of clarity, and deduction and consequences, and conviction, you know. It’s not enough. If... I take an example: I remember this beautiful analysis by Freud about a man he called ‘Rat Man.’ This man is a case of obsession; he was obsessed. And precisely the point with these sort of disturbances is the fact that this man is perfectly able to argue, without any mistakes. And the first time he came to Freud was to explain his own neurosis and to give his explanation why. In his way, that’s to say precisely a good argument. And in a sense that was the opportunity for Freud to object against philosophy.

But in terms of "now it’s time to philosophize" the point is also that, in fact, philosophy is more and more challenged or even assaulted by the cultural environment in terms of: ‘What is this strange and useless discipline? What are these sort of disciplines for? On the effect of this discourse on the state of the community, what is it that the community has and can wait for with such discourses of obscure uses?’ And there is a real aggression not only from the institutions as such, but among the audience, even students. But at the same time some, a very small group of students, are more and more involved in this discourse.

Also in The Differend, you name “the genre of academic discourses” as one of the current adversaries of philosophy. You write of setting up “a philosophical politics apart from the politics of ‘intellectuals’...” Are you suggesting that one can’t philosophize in the affirmative sense in the context of a philosophy department? Also, what would a “philosophical politics” be?

You know, yes and no. It’s possible and it’s impossible. It’s necessary, because philosophy departments are able to give you a lot of, you know, a corpus. And a corpus of philosophical texts, it’s necessary to read them, absolutely necessary, exactly in the same sense that it is necessary to read a corpus of literary texts or to go to museums and galleries if you are in a school of art. You know, that’s to say, from the viewpoint of the history of philosophy, philosophy departments are necessary. The problem is and, presumably, has always been, the problem of teaching philosophy. There is in Kant, I remember in Kant, a phrase. At the end of the First Critique, Kant put: ‘It’s impossible to teach philosophy; it’s impossible to learn philosophy, and a real philosophe, a philosophy teacher, is presumably
It's not enough. There is an intrinsic division of ourselves, of our ways of thinking, which is also present. That's to say a woman is perfectly able to think as a man, as a phallocrat. I mean for example mastering arguments and mastering propositions, to convince or to prove and so on. There is no difference in this way, as capacity. The difference is only the distribution of roles, in the society and culture. You have and we have to struggle against this inequality, this balance between women and men. The question if women are also men is obvious. You have also to consider that men are also women.

And that's more difficult, because in general, men are refusing it, trying to repress it, and are used to being men; masculine in all things, even in their way of thinking. So it seems to me that philosophy can be a part of this struggle of yours, of ours, exactly to the extent that it can introduce into itself a sort of different way of thinking. And that resumes the first point, that is to say, a way of thinking which is not necessarily, exclusively argument which is a sort of privilege of the left part of our brain. But also to work with the right part, the so-called feminine realm which is presumably not only important but the most important. There is, by this capacity of exploring fields a sense of what is relevant and what is not before any argument. The sense of invention, also I would say the certain sense of conservation, which is a strange name but, to be awake of something, a waking of it, not to forget, etc. It seems to me that if philosophy gives a place for all these ways of thinking, as artists are able to do - and there is almost the same number of woman artists as men - in this case, philosophy is able to not be the object of an aggression and take part in this general remodeling of the Western way of thinking, its so-called culture - a term I don't like. (Silence.)

You don't like the term culture?

No. (Laughs.) No. No. Its not about that term, not yet. No comment. (Laughter.)

No question.

Thanks.

The American phenomenon of "applied ethics" suggests a conception of the philosopher as an ethical expert. The philosopher is called before the public eye to comment on "ethical" issues, be they political, medical or judicial. The philosopher is part of a group of "professionals" who determine the legality of issues such as euthanasia, the death penalty, and abortion. How might the philosopher...
"Three Trees"

Jeffrey etching Morton
respond, not just to the questions posed by "applied ethics," but also to the dynamics of the situation in which he or she is required to respond?

It's not the case in France. (Laughs.) We are not required, there are no. We are not required, because the French institutions know us better. (Laughs.) They know the obvious response, so they can't give us questions, at all. And, I'm sure that it's impossible for a philosopher, something I said in the introduction to The Postmodern Condition. I was required by this Canadian institution to write a report about, (silence, gestures, laughter) the so-called state of knowledge in developed societies. If I may, it seems to me it's impossible for a philosopher to be an expert in any field. It's always... To me, it makes pertinence to have a practice. That's essential. The practice, the judgment coming up through an after-effect is, you know, is not only knowledge of a quite definite field but also practice in this field. That's to say not only that it's theoretical knowledge, but also the practical how-to-do which is quite essential. The philosopher has nothing like that. He has a sort of view about everything. He is like a useless second. (Laughs.) And he's associating, making some consequences about the others' practice. And in this sense he can be an expert. And can give a questioning answer about such and such questions, but not a specific answer. In general the job of the philosopher consists in saying: 'Please let's try to elaborate a little better these questions.' So...

But do you think this appeal to the philosopher in the case of applied ethics is symptomatic of the way...

Symptomatic of what?

Of the way philosophy is treated...

Yes, but that's to say what kind of way? That's the question, you know. It's treated both as a sort of émblème, as a sort of guarantee of security, that we are serious, that we have our philosopher here. (Laughs.) That's to say the representative of wisdom. (Laughs.) Imperial. But in the same time it's a sort of content vis-à-vis the real task of philosophizing, because its displacing this task as a sort of empirical anxiety about things. You know, displacing it by what, by the notion, that he or she is an expert, which is ridiculous. And well, you know, read again the introduction written by Kant on the very, very late book, The Conflict Between the Faculties, about the university. Kant explains that compared with the school of law, the school of medicine, the school of politics, the faculty of philosophy is necessarily the poorest faculty with the less granted and the less estimated because precisely, it is unable to give real help to the community. And Kant says that we have to maintain this miserable situation, that's the honor of philosophy; to rest, to remain miserable. That's my position. (Laughs.)

Ok...

And if I am the Luce Scholar in the Whitney Center.... (Laughs.) Well, my God... (Laughs and indicates the computer on his desk.) With a computer (laughs) and interviews...

Ok...Your public position on the Persian Gulf War indicated support for American intervention in Iraq. In the lectures collected in Peregrinations you suggest that responses to political events should be formulated in a non-predetermined fashion; that we should respond to each case without criteria. Can you give us an idea of how you formulated your response to the War? How did, and how do you, face that event?

I did it, in a French newspaper. I countersigned a text.

Yes, we saw it.

Yes. And it was exactly a good case because I'm supposed to be a left-wing man and in this case, surprisingly, I was supporting the war for the first time in my life. Yes, because, you know, I was exactly in complete disagreement with my friends in the left-wing because they were just occupied, involved in the self "good-consciousness"; that is to protest against war in general. Okay, I don't like war, like everyone, except some you know...(laughs)...ultra-psychotic persons. But, I don't like that. But, I remember, I was only a child, but I remember the same sort of proposition coming from the left-wing in France before the last, second World War. The last one, I hope... And this command coming from, you know, all the left, every party confused together in a sort of, they called that at that time the "bloc des gauches"; that's to say communists, socialists, protesting against the war, trying to delay the moment of war. That is the reason, for example, that France and England were invaded by Nazi troops and et cetera and most of them had to be unified by force with Germany and so on, the north of... Terrible things. And finally when Hitler decided to invade Poland, at that moment, it was time for war finally. And it was just too late. It was too late. And you know the result. And there were not serious preparations for the war and it had to be better to make war there as soon as possible against this despot. And I
remember that I was considering the map of the Middle East and wondering if there is no real, practical, efficient opposition against this expansive despot. The next time it could be Saudi Arabia and the next time Israel and finally all these countries might be passed under the control of Saddam Hussein. And it's not a good solution for this part of the world. And it's a very dangerous situation for the whole world, at that moment. And there is no other possibility than to make war because the block is inefficient and we know that it's a pure formality. Because there's a lot of parts of the boundaries of Iraq which were open, in fact. That's to say we have to, even if we detest, we hate this war. This war must be nothing.

That's exactly, that's a special case. That's a singular case. We have to have no presuppositions, have no prejudices. I mean have no criteria preceding this case, just the result as clear as I can, considering this case. And, it seems to me that in this case the decision was not controversial. But the result was a very bad reputation. I remember discussions in Italy and Japan, people asking me: "Where are you now? On the right-wing?" Sometimes we have to risk something. The risk of my reputation is nothing compared with the risk of this invasion.

Finally, can you comment on the massive migration of European intellectuals, particularly French, to the United States? What brought you to the United States? (Laughter.)

Insolent, arrogant question! (Laughs.)

How? (Laughter.)

Is it so massive? Is it so massive? It's not enough.

(laughter) "What brought you here?"

I mean, France is nice. (Laughter.)

France is nice, but French people are not so nice. I like them, but I have some problems with them as any French man or woman does. No, no, okay, the question, I try to be serious. No, the question is a quite important question, in fact, no, it's a serious question because there is a lot of commentary possible. The first one is just the most primal, flat, the flattest commentary. Considering the situation of philosophy in France now, that's a fact, that there is no employment for philosophy in France now, that's a fact and they have to immigrate in order to philosophize. No, that's true, you know, that's a real crisis. I tried to explain this crisis in the beginning. Okay, that's a fact, a mere fact. And if a young philosopher, you know, between thirty and forty years old, wants to not renounce and to make something else, a real estate or a technical or mediatic job, they have to find something outside. That's a problem. It wasn't the case for my generation at all. My generation was in a very easy situation because there was an enormous, huge growing up of the population at the time. That's to say, it was necessary to create positions in universities and that's the reason we could have positions easier, almost without requirements. Now it is not the case, not at all. For young philosophers, they are very good, that's a necessity to emmigrate toward richer countries. And not only richer countries, not generally the States or even Japan, but also countries that are more involved, or secure, more demanding for asking or waiting or desiring a sort... you know this French commodity which is, which is, what, a certain sophistication in our thinking. We are reputed to be able to sophisticate in any way; anything and any relationship. (Laughs.) Inside, something is true in this reputation. We have not to interfere with it. But there is a certain way of questioning which is presumably the specificity of French writers and philosophers. And third... No, no I said that it's not, I'm not proud of this fact. I don't know why. You know, for example, last year - I have a lot of friends in Italy, I like Italy, that's my second country, my second patrie and so I spent one month in a philosophy department. It was in a school of architecture and I was suprised by the high level of sophistication; culture. (Laughs.) To be cultivated, it's not exactly the same. But here, among architects, extraordinarily capable to have discussions about philosophy. They were perfectly aware of the general situation and main problematics. It was very agreeable, good to work in these conditions. But nevertheless, nevertheless there was short a step more in sophisticated dealing with the art to critique and conclude a question. For example, in philosophy there are too much marked by the tradition of hermeneutics, and hermeneutics is a good way, okay, it's something which can be taught, but, at the same time there is something like a machine for churning by itself and able to throw out any problem you put in the machine. There is a lack of sophistication in this way of thinking and I have to struggle against this way of thinking, of posing issues and trying to solve them. Okay. So, we have, we French people have this commodity to sell as perfumes and good wine. And what else?

Clothes.

Fashion.

Cheese. (Laughter.)
Cheese, yes, and something else? Yes, and very good trains. (Laughter.) Excellent trains, the best in the world. Okay, and we have also this way of thinking. Okay. That’s the reason you can buy it. But third, there is something else more serious, it seems to me, in the relationship between France and America. It’s a long story. Not so long, actually, three centuries maximum. Not so long. That’s the age of your civilization. That’s not so short. Generally you are annoyed and shameful because you are too young in your pursuit of culture. Comparing with China that’s true, but, finally no. No, but there is something between France and the States, something quite completely different, a sort of special connection which isn’t evaluable even in terms of economic or power competition, because you are... No, no, it doesn’t matter. It’s not that. You know this old story of emancipation, you made the first model of this, and we did it just after you. And you had at that time models from us, and these model came back, through you, to us and that’s very strange, that’s unique. That’s unique. Except maybe between China and Japan. But in western societies, that is something special. And, you know this sort of, this situation of collaboration, it’s too much. You know, the feeling today, of a say, family, it’s too much. But nevertheless, there is a family story. That’s to say, oddly, a sort of ancient investment from both sides, but also a lot of, suspicion, disagreements. In general French people have a very strange representation of the States, they are fascinated, they come more and more. But, at the same time, they are quite reluctant against it and are, in general, Americanophobes, Americanophobic. Maybe it’s the same for Americans toward France, I don’t know. It’s in general not well placed to judge from a university. There is Frenchphobia or Frenchphobics in America, maybe it’s possible.

I think more Francophiles....

Apparently yes, but is it real, I don’t know. But there are all these statistics. In general it seems to me that French people prefer to come here than, for example, to go to Germany, for a lot of historical reasons. What I like is not enough. What I want now is that... You have a right-wing as stupid as any right-wing and now, this, it’s called PC? Okay, it’s not... I mean it’s regular, it’s the fact of a democracy, it’s impossible to avoid it. No, but in spite of this, you remain the country of welcoming, you know. And you have been made by refugees, you know, that’s quite important. You are the unique in the world with refugees coming from everywhere in the world. And its enough to open a phone-book to have all the names of the world. Even in a small town, that’s so strange... that’s admirable... And this tradition continues, in a sense. And that’s the reason you continue to appeal to... And you can’t experience it now at least through a representation. And the opportunity to experience it now with my English... because my English is so bad. I have to deliver lectures and seminars, you know, and so on... to take part in exams, my God. And with my horrible English! There is no problem. You are able to accept any idioms. And you know the old countries like England and France are unable to do that. It’s impossible for an English man to understand, to listen, to what is not the regular English, British accent. And for the French man or woman, it’s the same with French. And there is something which is repelled, there is a sort of closure of these countries, in that sense. Here, for the old Europeans like me, that’s exactly, that’s the reason.... (Laughs.) Here. Isn’t it a good answer?

I think so.

You are not satisfied?

No, I think we’re satisfied.

Emily O. Wittman and Katharine Mieszkowski

---

1 The Differend: Phrases in Dispute., Tr. Georges Van Den Abbeele., c.1988 University of Minnesota Press

2 "One of the Things at Stake in Women’s Struggles", Tr. D.J. Clark, W. Woodhill and J. Mowitt, Sub-Stance 20., pp 9-17

The idiotic beating of the steamy radiators and drainpipes
says it is time for some sort of disaster whether
natural or personal they will not say.
Perhaps it is enough that the sky go pale
and the snow stream against the dark bricks and dark steps, filtered
through open iron. The window across this space of pouring white is higher,
its light out, windowshade down, wood strips stroking thin black bars,
exclamatory, on its shielding blank, the whole mass of dark brick isolated,
a floating world surrounded by white and grey.

That space hangs open, a muted question of how
distance becomes inconsequential.

(blank— expressionless creaminess that folds away and up with a turn of the jolted wrist,
thumb, tightened, fingers curling marks into the palm—)

Behind it within only a movement
in the dark, thought skittering through the air, only
enough light for showing the darkness of the shadows, a gleam of the metal lamp, the dull
sheen of the bar at the foot of the bed, its edge softened in jars lined on the windowsill.
The light on, there is a glow, vibrating through a thousand tiny holes,
edges finally delineated, a space of openness beneath,
slicing through the air to the rooms and rooms beyond—
There is the dark cutout of someone's back (man or woman? but implacable—)
The weight of silence is worn raw, sharpness running up and down,
there is too much breathing in those empty rooms, there is too much order,
that back is always there,
it's straightness a mockery to the darkness,
it's weight a silence circling out,
fluttering above the iron feet of the bed,
wings swooping it with a restless banging cry
until each bone wakes and cries too, rising you from your pillowed
dreams to sing a bloodsong of yourself
and your unnecessary tears.
Yes, even as you tamp the cellophane,
Distend its thin red ribbon, cleave and shell
It, tear the foil or burst the paper seal
And tumble four small smokestacks in your hand;
Even as you snap the lighter-top
Spin trigger-wheel till flint and methane catch
Or bend back and uproot the cardboard match
To spark the fire in your fingers' cup;
Even as you burn the filters down
Between your jaws' and knuckles' yellow grins
To savor each inch of carcinogens
And send its crenelations to the ground,
And suck the minutes off your life by tens:
You'd give it up to burn them at both ends.
Less than negative numbers and
More than infinity
This is the google-plex
Of disaster
In the family of my foes.

Taste the tar
And sense the tobacco
If you can;
If you’ve known,
And if you’ve even had the chance to see
My life is self-destructing
Before the angry eyes of
Crowds. Indifference.
Who is going to retrieve
The broken shards of
Broken glass?

No I wasn’t wearing clean
Underwear Conscience
When the Mac truck hit.
Post-Modern Kitsch,
Pop culture
Suck my

Fingers can’t even touch
Your twisted nose
Striving to smell the smell that
Smelled of perfumed soap and
Pink birds of paradise
Streaking the once tan
Tan of my body.

Stop and Stop.
I can’t control the language.
I can’t explain the prose.
It comes, and I touch it,
And it leaves.

So many more conjunctions
Pass beneath my pen, but
Nothing lends direction.
The thesis of my thought is
The explication of mediocrity.

I don’t want to legitimize
And justify the impetus
That spurs these tired lines,
But nothing seems to bring me
Solace and all the ‘lively’
Poems lie

In my face, on this carpet
With the ash from a thousand
Burned cigarettes flaming
In my eyes. Explanations.
Explanation is the raison d’être of
Nothing much at all.

My existence, your compliance;
They’re really quite good friends.
But even still we never
Shook hands.
A simple butterfly
Kiss with the warm feel of
Lashes

Like Patagonia,
Sweet wool on the bed of my sleep
Where we slept and made love...
A vague emotion, a cliché act
But light and wholesome
Was your touch.

Feminine and soft
And consoling, more than
Words and paper and smoke
Or any other blind fix.

I will return;
This is the second coming:
The Gospel according to
Survival
In the Darwinian sense of suppression.

No more to say; nothing
To ask but vapid imagery
Like the wasted base, yellow
Face of a bland Nabisco treat
And the empty eyes of T.J. Eckleburgh’s
Eyes.

Great—Mr. Hooper
Also rises
Though his libido often
Sets into the
Abyss of green-dark
Water-
Logged memorabilia.

* You are the sensual crux of my misunderstanding
In the brilliant mind of translucent distortion
Burning in the pea-tree dish of discussion
Wherein our barbs read like flirtatious intellectualisms
Read
Read
Read in the past tense.
Read by your contorted inner voice screaming
So dully for help.
Sink into it; Let it take you. So you can say I hate being Sober? What? Who are you? How can you do this to yourself? I will escape. I will leave the bonds of Contention: the constraints Of boredom To enjoy the placidity Of sweet surety so sure in its Silence. Conversation Tepid, but, yes, it's reassuringly Fluid.

Can we talk about the weather And your dissertation On Medea and the possibilities Of adoption, or should we Stop and try Wit?

Walking to your house the leaves Turn, the light-post gleams in Halogen opacity, and The stage is set for The comedy: A Mid-Autumn Night's Nightmare in this theater of Self-pity. *

The young man goes to sleep Now and the quite of his Dream is good; Much better than the Cacophany of the Epiphany That spurred the Luminous words.

Enough. I'm sorry. It was your fault. You told me not to play it Too, too, too hard. Sing.

Again Here it is There it was. But even if just for a moment It was really quite enough to Tide

Me over and you there. What you talkin' about Willis Johnson goes to Washington, And the young boy stays home.

Lights. Camera. Action! Let's play a game. You're the bitch and I'm The tall, dark, and handsome, Quite type. Do you think it will Work?

Of that there is enough. ENOUGH. I know, it's just...

That they say if you do it enough You're Schizophrenic. I only took three.

Sing. Oooh, sing, Child, sing. God bless the Delinquent who's got his own. Wintertime; This livin' ain't easy, And the Blues are just another Man's wail.

I think he left. I think we're alone. Just me and you and your thighs And your stockings and the Feel of your Surety.

Liquid oxygen still Cool to the touch but tart To the tummy. Can you dig Yourself a hole and stay There for longer than your Memory demands?

Telemachos had an easier time of It than I. Surely she did— Deconstruction of my prepositional References to a truth or truth game In which the object is to Stultify. Imagine That

More. I think I need More wine scotch and soda Whiskey sour Kamikaze Molotov Cocktails for me and my friends at 8. I hope you'll be there. You will. You always want More.
Lissalithograph Meritt
You will not believe me when I tell you I am a member of a gang. You think you know what a gang member looks like, and I am not it. When you think of a hood, you think of New York and leather jackets or else you think of Detroit and ski parkas, or else you think of Los Angeles and plaid shirts buttoned only at the neck. You think of someone who is poorly educated, who has been before juvenile court, and who will pump gas when he retires. His voice—think of what it sounds like—is not one you have heard over your family phone lines. You may have never met your hood in person. In fact, for one such as him to even touch one such as you is in itself a kind of violence.

You will find it hard to believe that we, with our smart haircuts and fine clothes, are in the same league as him. That is an enormous advantage, especially if you happen to be a shopkeeper, an officer of the law, or the father of a young girl. After all, you and I probably went to the same school, or you knew someone who went to mine, or I know someone who went to yours. Among the four members of our gang, we speak seven languages, not including English. Mike has been accepted to Duke law. Dublin (his given name) turned down a position with Morgan Stanley. Any of us could have chosen a more conventional life, complete with water cooler and secretary. That we did not choose a conventional life, none of us, is a source of great power.

You think I am boasting but I am not, I am only telling you the truth. Our white cuffs, our well-inflected voices and our confident handshakes are like the combination to a lock. That lock guards a vast preserve of territory which is large, as far as we wolves are concerned, virginal. You probably have a burglar alarm which guards your home. But your alarm only works when it is on, and you would not have it on when Mike, Dublin, Wink and I entered you home. You would have invited us. You would have been upset had we declined.

I think of it as a preserve. We all could have lived on that preserve. We all might, someday.
I will tell you about our first hit, the night that changed us from a group to a gang. It was at a wedding, although that’s running ahead of myself. We were living in New York City. Dublin and Mike had jobs painting rooms and I think I was working as a typist. Wink’s apartment was our headquarters; Dublin and Mike visited almost every night. Wink liked to cook. His style was italien unorthodox: spinach salad in olive oil with pretzel-crumble garnish, penne in a sauce made from equal parts bechemel and marzipan (try it sometimes), veal sauteed in butter and Budweiser.

Dublin brought wine. Mike brought bread.

I was living with Melissa Kupright, the daughter of my economics professor. She liked to be called “Mel,” sometimes “Lisa,” never “Missy.” She was something. We’d only gotten together in the last few weeks of school; she had a boyfriend. Things really took off. It was pretty bad; we had, you know, pet names. At graduation, there was probably more of her clothing in my room than hers. I worried about her using the subway at night.

A friend of Mike’s named Terrence Small was passing through town. Mike and Terrence had played squash together in college. Terrence was on his way to Georgia for a wedding. The bride was the woman he’d dated his first three years of college. He showed us a picture of her. She was plump in a vigorous way, with a long neck, thick eyebrows, blue eyes. She looked like she might have played squash. He showed us a lace doily from their second going-out anniversary, which he had kept folded in his wallet. He placed it on the counter and smoothed it out. It was yellowed, but its creases were white. He talked loudly. I think it was Wink who said, It sounds like you don’t want her to be married.

Wink was right. Terrence didn’t. He didn’t and he didn’t even more the more he drank. He did a little pantomime of the wedding with bar favors: a red swizzle stick with a napkin on top for the bride and a cheese-filled pretzel for the groom. Daah, duh, da-daah, hummed Dublin, a wedding march, as Terrence navigated the marriage couple down the bar, through spilt beer, over coasters. Daah, duh, da-daah, hummed Dublin.

Mike said, “don’t you, Terr?”

“Speak now, or forever hold your peace,” I said.

“I want to stop this wedding,” Terrence said.

“You heard the man,” Wink said. He took the cheese-filled pretzel in one hand. “No wedding.” He squeezed. He opened his hand. Bits of pretzel and cheese fell to the bar. Terrence leaned over in his stool to mash the bits together with his thumb. He knocked over a beer, which flooded the whole counter. He mashed for a long time. When he was done, he pulled the picture of the bride out again and gave it a loud kiss, like you might give a lottery ticket.

At half-past four that morning, Terrence, Wink, Mike, Dublin, two bottles of JD, a hip flask of Lundy’s Hard Cider, four pillow cases, a length of copper piping from a radiator and I all got on a train leaving from Grand Central Station to Alabaster, Georgia. We were not sober when we left nor were we sober at any point along the trip. I knew, if not consciously, that it was important for us to remain drunk: drunkenness was at once motivation and excuse. It was also fortunate that none of us knew the groom.

He, the groom, turned out to be a fine-looking man of about our age, who wore a tuxedo well, who we learned form an eager old woman with a South Carolinian accent, had twice led the Emory lacrosse team to the league championship, and who had the misfortune to take a smoke break alone in the rear parking lot of the church. The four of us and Terrence enjoyed the amenities—braised veal medallions, shrimp encrusted in coconut, champagne - our presence, our condition and even our open bottle of Canadian Club, purchased at a liquor store outside of Alabaster, unquestioned. We were friends of the bride. We were friends of the groom. We were smiled at and smiled back and were generally charming. Mike, the most handsome and most charming among us, chatted with man who looked like he might have been the father of the bride while I made time with a woman with long honey-brown hair who had known Mel in boarding school. Dublin and Wink looked for a suitable place to change into our pillow cases.

We filed into the rear parking lot just as the groom headed back inside. Mike stood rear guard, Wink, Dublin and my suit jackets in a pile around his feet. We felt we had to have our arms free. Here we ran into our first big problem: we had, of course, cut small eye holes in the pillow cases with Dublin’s pen knife, but one of the unfortunate properties of pillow case fabric is that it shifts if you walk with it over your head. Even Mike, who stood still, told us later that his eyeholes tended to close up, the sides of the slit brought together by the weight of the hem. We were,
in a word, blind, and between that, our blood alcohol count and the groom's rugby training, it seemed for several seconds as if he might defeat us all. We were attacking him from all sides, snapping at him, like a pack of dogs, Wink swinging the pipe over his head, Dublin and I striking from either side, but the groom was holding his own, ducking, pushing, sweating. He kicked Wink in the stomach, knocking him to the ground.

Then Dublin got his big forearm around the groom's throat. The groom struggled but could not get free. Wink stood up. He brought the length of copper pipe back like a gold club and swung into the groom's genitals. It made a sound like a body hitting a water bed. The groom made no noise at all other than a sharp, high exhalation as he collapsed.

Before that moment, I had often wondered about what you may consider a platitude, namely, Do you hit a man when he is down? You do not hit those who are weaker than you except to keep them in line. That is called honor. You do not hesitate to hit a man who is up and capable of hitting back. That is called courage. Those points are well-defined. What about a man who is on his knees, grasping himself, his breath coming in bursts, perhaps bleeding from the nose and both ears, eyelids fluttering from the effort of consciousness, one of his index fingers bent over the rest of his fingers at a broken angle, the other hand raised to beg you to stop? He is certainly weaker than you and he is not out of line. Yet he might strike back, metaphorically speaking, in that he might draw attention to your enterprise. Do you side with mercy, or with practical concerns? I might someday have to decide that question. I did not know the answer.

Wink answered it for me: Without hesitation, one takes a copper pipe and hits that man as hard as one can, preferably in the temple or the back of the neck, so he does not make any more noise before passing into unconsciousness. Mercy is a decision one makes beforehand.

We were able to rejoin the party without event. Wink removed the groom's wallet and threw it into an adjoining field, to make it look like a robbery. We kept the pillow cases. No one asked. I almost convinced the woman with the honey-brown hair to leave with me, and Dublin got into an argument about the Redskins' defensive line, all before they found the groom. A week later, Terrence mailed us each two hundred dollars, our side of the bet. I don't know what happened between him and the bride. We were in New York by midnight.

I slept it off at Dublin's, which was closer to Grand Central than my place. I walked back to my apartment in the sunshine and warm air of an April New York morning. It was Sunday, and there was everywhere the sound of church bells. I did not feel guilty; it did not occur to me until much later - while watching a Bugs Bunny cartoon, of all things - that I might be expected to feel guilty. To the contrary, I felt very good. I had slept on Dublin's coffee table, because Mike and Wink had taken the sofas, but my body felt charged with purpose.

Mel and I made love that afternoon and it was wonderful. I felt the sensation men must have felt since the beginning of civilization: that of the hunter returning from the hunt, the warrior returned from the war, Odysseus returned to his Penelope. I was a conqueror, and it gave me an energy between us I had never felt before, with anyone. I began roughly, tearing her clothes and pushing her hard into the mattress, but she calmed me. My body was hot; her body was cool. I am reminded that that is how clouds make lightning.

We hardly talked. She didn't ask where I'd been the night before. I was seized again and again with the urge to tell her everything, but caution won out. We lay on the bed for an hour or maybe more, exhausted, with the windows up. In that light, with her head on the pillow, I thought I could spend the rest of my life with her.

After a while, we got up and she made lunch: orange sections and four peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches. I cleaned up. She did the Times crossword puzzle while I flicked a Pink Pearl eraser back and forth on the kitchen table.

"Let's do something tonight," she said, looking at me. "I didn't get to see you at all yesterday."

"If I have time," I said.

"If you have time," she said.

"I'll have to see," I said, "I might have to do something."

When Wink called me before dinner I went out without hesitation. He didn't have to say what was in the plans. We spent the night out on the streets, tearing, smashing, and breaking without pattern or plan. Whatever we saw, that was what we hit. It was like a fever. No one stopped us.

You may wonder how it is that we four educated individuals that you would trust could be moved to such behavior. You might ask questions like: Did we have disturbed childhoods? Might we be the product of closet alcoholics, broken marriages, wife beaters? You must think that we are eight boys wilding in Central Park. But no, we are the lawyers, the joggers. We are just like you, or like you once were, or like you could have been. I had reached a junction. For the first time in my adult life, I was acting without fear..."
of repercussion. I had found my calling.

It is a wonder we were not caught those first few weeks. In time we got smarter. We set our stories beforehand, in case we were captured and questioned separately. We had a lookout at all times. We studied police beats to determine which nights were safe and which were not. I don't want it to sound like we were limited to street crime. There was nothing easier than getting invited into an elderly woman's apartment, and then there was nothing easier than discreetly brushing her timepieces, her china, her memorabilia into our travelling bags. Our specialties were foreign-owned grocery stores, bicycle couriers, and the homes of our friends.

Love has its advantages and disadvantages. I never had to tell Mel a thing, which turned out to be both good and bad. bad because I had no way to justify spending so much time away from her. Sometimes I couldn't leave her, even though I knew I should. She would look at me - her eyes so large and sad - and say, OK, leave, I like to be left all alone. Sometimes she'd lisp so it would come out, "left all lone." She would flip her hair to cover part of her face and peek out from behind it, and pull her shirt up over her chin like a little girl. And sometimes I wouldn't leave.

I could call Wink or Dublin to tell them I planned to stay in, but sometimes it was too late to catch them. Sometimes, my decision to stay in ruined their whole evening. Sometimes, they went ahead without me, which was dangerous.

That was the case on Mel's birthday. Wink had a plan to hit a bread factory. He'd worked it out for the four of us. I was supposed to meet them at midnight. Somehow Mel and I got so tipsy and wrapped up in each other that it slipped my mind, and at midnight I was in our bed with her asleep on my chest.

The doorbell rang a little after three a.m. They were angry, I could tell from the moment I saw them, angry at me. I invited them in. They were winded. A night watchman surprised them. Dublin had to hit him with a tire iron. The watchman was a big man, so it had taken quite a blow to knock him out, two in fact. It was almost murder. It wasn't a risky situation for them, since how could they be traced? But it wouldn't have happened if I'd been there, Wink said. It was my fault.

He watched me for a few moments. Then he laughed, and we all laughed. I got out some schnapps from the pantry and some cards. Wink got up and excused himself. We played Bacardi, which is a poker variant, but Mike was too good, so we switched to Egyptian Rat Screw, which is like gin rummy. Mike won two hands in a row before I got into the swing of things. Then I pulled some back for myself. Wink got back, and just as he sat down, Dublin got up and excused himself, so Wink took over his hand. Wink played well, even viciously, and the game got intense. We played through the deck twice before Dublin got back. Then it was Mike's turn to leave. Wink and Dublin had taken much too long to have been just using the bathroom. What happened, I said, did you have trouble getting up? Wink and Dublin looked at each other and howled.

It wasn't until Mike returned, zipping up his pants, that I figured out what happened. I was too drunk to do much. Dublin and Mike held me down while Wink explained their side of things. The four of us were like a raft, he said, four strong planks lashed together. We had entered serious waters. If one of us drifted, we'd all drown. There could be no drifting, he said. Nothing could come between us. We were together, now.

I remember going to my room and tossing my things into a suitcase but I don't remember what Mel did.

I woke in Wink's apartment. My shoulder was sore from where Dublin had pinned me to the sofa, but the soreness felt good somehow. It was a reminder of purpose. I missed Mel like crazy at first, and I often thought I'd call her, but I didn't. I didn't know what I'd say. Wink made breakfast.

"I'm thinking it's time we took some risks," he said. "It's about time."

"That's a good idea," I said.

"I'm thinking, after last night, that you ought to take the first one," he said. "Stick your neck out."

"Sure," I said. I was glad for the opportunity to prove myself. It was a Saturday morning, and there was no telling what we might do that night.
Victoria etching Kostadinova
March 10, 1992

Dear Kathryn, Editor:

Thank you for sending me Lit 3.2 so promptly. It arrived in my mailbox with an old 1906 edition of Euphues from a book dealer in New York, and my mother’s latest scavengings from the thrift shop in Long Island, which always helped me to blend into the surroundings at Yale.

A couple of things are immediately obvious. First, your output device was not the Linotronic 300. O’s have diagonals here, curves are jagged. There’s a piece of resolution enhancement software called JAG which might help you get better output from the LaserWriter. But, quite frankly, I’d chip in a sum for you to output on the Linotronic, because with the print quality in 3.2, glossy paper betrays you. Second: nonetheless, nice choice in type faces. Your Bodoni looks lighter than last time — perhaps it’s even the Bauer Bodoni or Bodoni Book that I recommended to Brad and Alex so many months ago — and that’s all to the good. It’s wonderfully legible, and it has that great under/overdressed quality which is Yaleish in the extreme, like the poor little rich girls with the Brearley manners who wore Ann Taylor jackets with their torn faded jeans. Third: artwork is very good. Keep it up.

Now we get to the sticking points. You need better proofreading. Comments follow....

[Interuption - p. 4: “Graduate school in New Haven.” Ah, that great circumscpection about the Y-word, as if it were the YHVH-word. Albertus Magnus, perhaps?)...

[Clown - about as sentimental and elegiac as an overripe mango. Further, we have the beginning of the Great Nipple Theme, with “nipples the color of apricots resting on their slow downward slope.” The nipples will return, underneath the man’s undershirt on Ana, page 32. A phenomenon restricted to male writers. Prurience, or perhaps they just want us to know that they know what nipples look like [...]

[Now then. The theory section. Damn it, but there’s too much of it. And, for the most part, it reads like a parody of me. Sayre is a name-dropper par excellence, and the tone of his piece is all mixed up. Is he addressing real people? No. Is he addressing the “educated general reader,” that relative of the oryx? No. Is he trying to be sesquipedalian (“common parlance”) while retaining his roots with the reference to “most great bands?” Quite likely. (The intertext, incidentally, which is never mentioned in either Sayre or Schnitzer, is Paul de Man, “Confessions,” “Profession de foi,” &c., Allegories of Reading. Yale U P. Starobinski is mentioned on p. 18.)

(Incidentally, why does Schnitzer refer to Sayre as “Nathan” all the way through his response? Is he being disrespectful, or has he gotten the names mixed up, or is he doing what Bill Clinton does by calling Brown “Jerry” (disrespect plus something else?)? In any case, the Sayres seems unremittingly self-conscious, taken up with itself, solipsistic after the manner of so-called “Yale intellectuals,” at worst derivative. Why should anyone give a flying fig about what went on in that Rousseau class? There are good reasons to do so, (including the professor, Dr. Susan Blood), but both authors take them for granted, don’t make them clear, leave them unstated as obvious. Both authors think that the whole world will take an intense proprietary interest in their fishbowl. Give me a good Philistine any day of the week. (Perhaps you could try reprinting something from Our Lady of Fatima.) The Schnitzer is a much more serious piece of work, and its derivative moments are certainly understandable. People twice Schitzer’s age make decent livings expounding the Gospel According to St.
Paul. Thus, sentences like:

"This hesitation, this complication in the temporality of the origin of the 
Reveries, manifests itself throughout the form of the text, and the focus of
any exegetic effort therefore must be to uncover what is at stake in this
attempt to inscribe a moment of origin which itself cannot be entirely
accurately known."

This sentence could be traced back to n de Man essays — "The Rhetoric of
And yet, there are odd distortions sprinkled throughout, perhaps the poetic
equivalent of the "mosaic" pattern of adaptation, from Sources, that little
booklet everyone got with registration packets. Why is the hesitations
manifest in the form of the text? Why can't the originary moment be "entirely
accurately known?"; I would think that it could not be known at all.

There's an interesting parallel to the Steve Rich piece — "Such an idea
presupposes as form is transparent to an essence, rather than relinquishing
form from presence, to have as meaning only its expression." Once again,
the concept of "form" comes in at the point of greatest obfuscation. I've
been reading and writing in this mode for years, and I can't figure out for the
life of me what this sentence means. How is "form" different from
"essence?" How can "form" be "relinquished from presence?" This
doesn't make sense. It belongs to the same sort of academic writing
which speaks of "subjectivities" instead of "characters" — jargon changes, but the
New Criticism doesn't. Note also the prevalence of "-ality", "-ize," and "-
vity" words — a fellow who would "ironize" his own trousers, instead of
pressing them.]

[Good piece by Diana Senechal. This is really fun to read, and the moral of the
story is done to a turn — just right.]

[Grunstein piece quite all right. Nice descriptions. Of course, the occasional
self-reference — "twenty-one year old." And how does his narrator assume
that he'll become authentic, a non-tourist? Ashrams? Yogis? Here, the Great
Nipple Theme recurs.]

[Who are the Founding Fathers? Jefferson and Madison, who made free
speech a reality?]

[Thank you for thanking Master Ivo Banac, who has supported the Yale
Literary Magazine vigorously since its new beginning. I'm not sure where he
got his faith from, but I'm grateful for it; he was smarter than all of us put
together, and if he believed in the Lit, there must have been a good reason.
Don't forget the Lit's history, especially post-1989. Pass it on to the younger
heads. And make sure that the Lit always has people like Brad and Blue
around; without that element, in design as much as in content, it'll all become
much less interesting. "Phooey on all white-shoe college boys who edit their
own literary magazines." — more or less, J.D. Salinger, Franny and Zooey.]

FINIT HAEC LABOREM

That's it. It's entirely possible that, after this magnificent flood of mixed
praise and abuse, you will wish to discontinue the Jonathan K. Cohen
Memorial Lit Subscription Fund. If so, I'll send in my $16 and pungle. (A real
word! See mark Twain.) I'm grateful for all the work you've done to keep the
Lit alive. Good luck on the next issue!

Sincerely,
Jonathan K. Cohen