

ROBERT ASHLEY



PERFECT LIVES
an opera

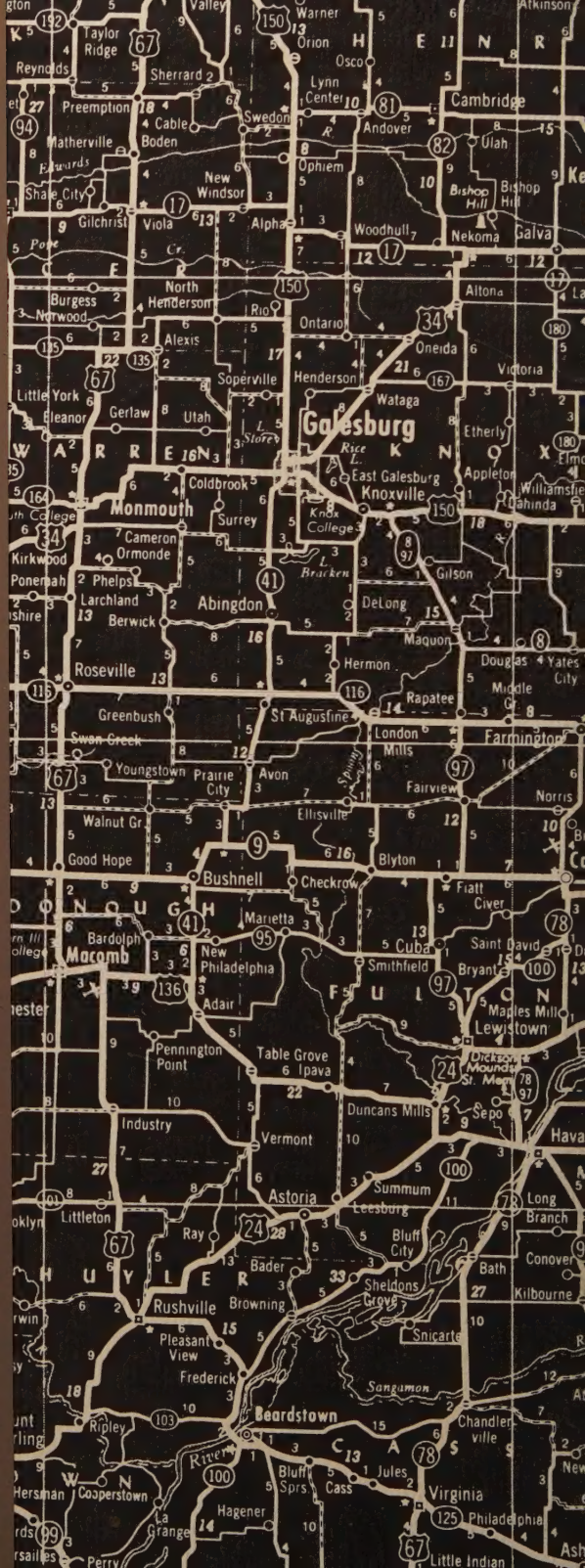
PERFECT LIVES

Robert Ashley's Perfect Lives forms the middle of a trilogy of operas that traces the history of the movement of consciousness across the United States, east to west.

As Ashley tells it . . . An over-the-hill entertainer, and his somewhat younger pal, Buddy (The World's Greatest Piano Player), find themselves in a small town on the Midwest circuit playing at The Perfect Lives Lounge. They become friends with the son and daughter of the local Sheriff, and the four hatch a plan to do something that if they are caught, it will be a crime, but if they are not caught, it will be art. They've set themselves a kind of metaphysical challenge.

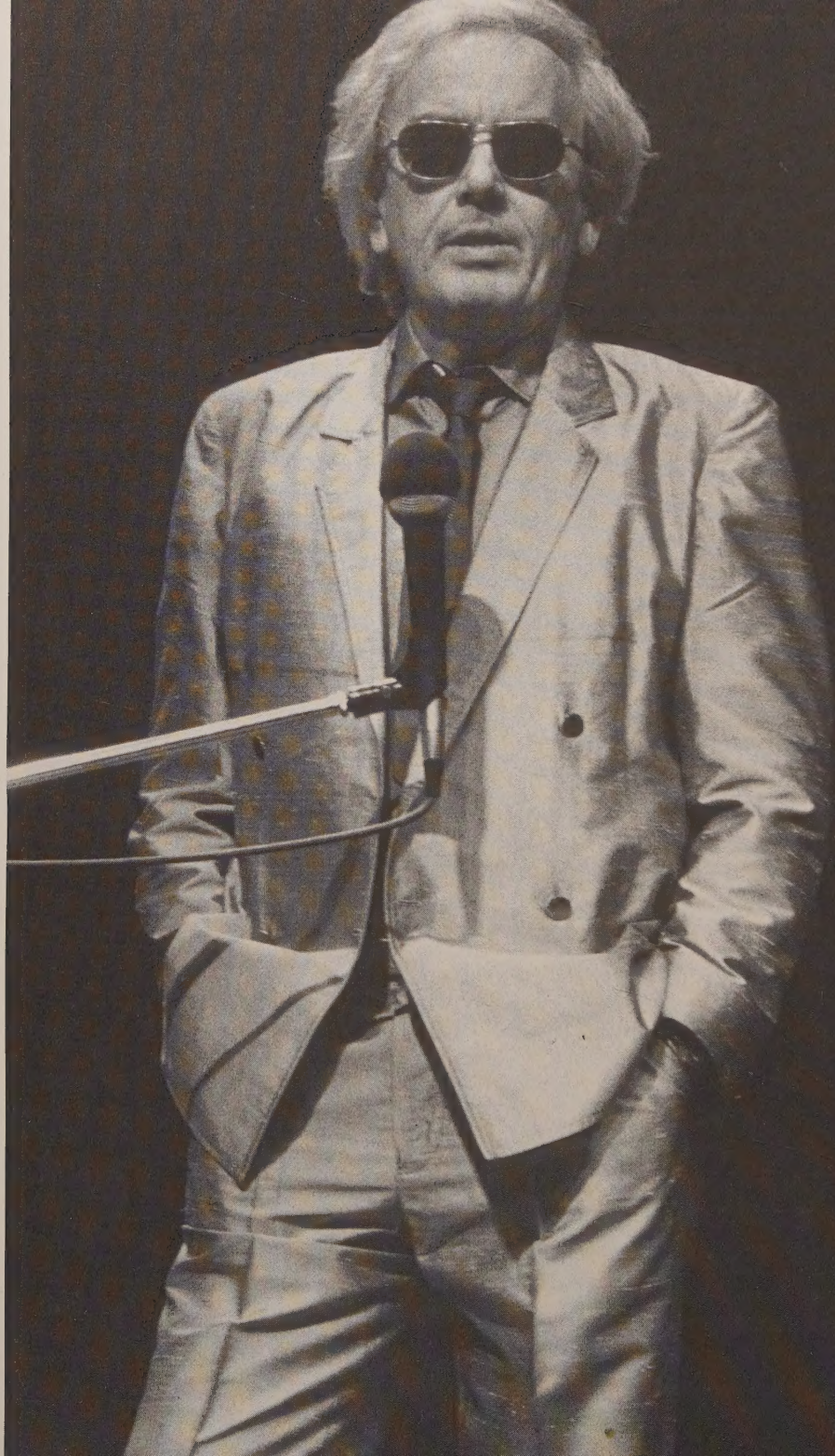
It is discovered that one of the tellers in The Bank, Gwyn, is going to elope on a certain day with Ed, and they have to go east into Indiana. The four decide to take the money out of The Bank, put it in the elopement car, and return it the next day. At the same time, the seedy-looking older guy and his pal with two dogs (Permanence and Impermanence) come into The Bank and the dogs pretend they are fighting.

The Bank Manager goes into the safe and discovers that the money is gone. He announces that there is no money in The Bank, and because of the symbolic meaning of that moment the five tellers, Jennifer, Kate, Eleanor, Linda, and Susie, all see something. They each have a religious experience. Kate sees *Perfect Lives*, Eleanor falls in love at first sight, Susie quits because she's interested in opera. Everybody's career is totally changed. And there is a question of whether or not this is actually a real event.





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PERFECT LIVES

PERFECT

LIVES

a n o p e r a

ROBERT ASHLEY



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the support of the following persons and organizations: Mimi Johnson, Director, Performing Artservices, Inc.; Mary MacArthur Griffin, Director (1978-1984), The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance; Carlota Schoolman, Producer for Television (1974-1987), The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance; and Howard Klein, Director for the Arts (1973-1983), The Rockefeller Foundation. The television production of *Perfect Lives* was commissioned by The Kitchen Center for Video, Music and Dance and produced in association with The Fourth Channel, Great Britain, with the support of The National Endowment for the Arts, The New York State Council on the Arts, The Rockefeller Foundation, The Ford Foundation, and Beards Fund.

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ISBN 0-9627767-7-7 casebound

Published in the United States of America by Archer Fields Press and Burning Books.

Distributed by D.A.P. (Distributed Art Publishers)
636 Broadway, Suite 1208
New York, New York 10012
Tel: (212) 473-5119

FIRST EDITION
First printing, 1991

The publishers wish to thank Tom Hall, Jean Frascina, Barbara Golden, Sheila Davies, Jon Livingston, and Jorge Fick for editorial assistance, and to thank Nancy Canning and Ann Tanenbaum. Special thanks to Phil Harmonic for granting use of the cassette recordings he made of Robert Ashley's informal lectures at Mills College in 1989, excerpts from which comprise a portion of "Robert Ashley Talks about Perfect Lives." This book was funded in part by the California Arts Council.

Frontispiece: Robert Ashley as The Narrator. Photo by Bruno Bruni, courtesy of Lovely Music, Ltd.

For Mimi

PREFACE

Robert Ashley describes *Perfect Lives* as a “comic opera about reincarnation.” It *is* comedy in a classical sense — dramatic, literate, with an affinity to ancient Greek comedy and its origins in fertility rites (“These are songs about the corn belt . . .”), culminating in a lyric celebration. The perfecting of these seven songs in a form for televised broadcast in 1984 took Ashley, with his collaborators on the music and television production, more than five years of work in a fairly intense form. The songs themselves evolved out of material he had been gathering in his mind and on paper prior to 1978 when he was commissioned to create “an opera for television” by New York City’s The Kitchen — modestly originated in 1971 by co-founders Woody and Staina Vasulka as an art space on Mercer Street. By the time this work was commissioned, The Kitchen had become one of the most notable producing and presenting organizations in the world for new music, dance, art, and video; Mary MacArthur Griffin was The Kitchen’s director and Carlota Schoolman its television producer.

When Burning Books approached Robert Ashley in the fall of 1983 with the idea for this book, he had already conceived of it in print

as a combination score and libretto. He was in the process of designing a system, with the help of Charlie Rizzuto, using diacritical markings as a scoring device. They achieved a solution to the problem they had set for themselves — a way to indicate rhythm and meter for the singing or saying of the words. Regrettably, we found that the inclusion of scoring elements made the language too difficult to follow: It seemed essential that the reader be entirely engaged by the story, that it be read again and again, that the words become known. As it stands, this book contains the complete opera libretto and includes only those scoring elements that do not intrude upon the flow of words, elements indicating changes in voice. However, aside from the purely literary aspect of the narrative, *Perfect Lives*, a major opera by one of America’s most important composers, needs also to be available with music notation in order

that other composers, singers, and musicians might arrange their own performances. At the time of this printing, the libretto score can be obtained through Lovely Music, Ltd. in New York.

Though Ashley is best known for his experimental theater and large-scale performance works, for his innovative use of language in musical settings, for his years at the forefront of the avant-garde, he is a pre-eminent writer. This is a complex narrative; its impulse originates from a profound — archaic perhaps — understanding of the forms and purposes for artistic expression; and it communicates directly with the parts of the self that are unchanging. The desire here is not to tell you how to approach *Perfect Lives*. It speaks of its own sources and resources. Its originality and richness are clearly apparent, though as with any great work of art there is more to it than you receive on first meeting.

Charles Shere writes: “A work of its own time — which *Perfect Lives* definitely is — is always ahead of its time to its first audiences. . . .” He compares Ashley’s opera to Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass* for being solidly within its tradition but misunderstood, and for the way it will “expand continually the more it is experienced, and the more it is commented on.” He compares it as well to *Finnegans Wake* for the way it invokes a “universal resonance” within each narrative particular.

Shere states that Robert Ashley has achieved a work whose own life will continue into the future. But, it is also true that *Perfect Lives* is accessible: it is generous, not esoteric or elitist, it speaks to each of us now, giving what we are able to receive, in the way of *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Divine Comedy*. You will not find Robert Ashley’s peers among his contemporaries. And like Dante’s masterpiece, *Perfect Lives* is, on one level, a long love poem.

Those of you familiar with this opera have anticipated seeing it in print. Two other operas, *Atalanta (Acts of God)* and *Now Eleanor’s Idea*, complete the monumental trilogy of which this one is central. Ashley is prolific, inexhaustibly perfecting what he doesn’t quite yet understand. What Tom Johnson wrote of Ashley in *The Village Voice* in 1978 continues to be true: “By the time people begin to figure out what he’s doing, and how important it is, Ashley has usually gone on to something else.” Those of you unfamiliar with *Perfect Lives* will undoubtedly encounter surprises. Ashley is ingenious, an arresting thinker and a supreme lyricist, and if you let it, his writing will teach you how to read it, how to hear it.

This volume also includes selections from a series of talks at the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College in 1989. Ashley spoke impromptu, as is his custom, reading

aloud and drawing from his recorded works for an audience of artists and composers—many of them current, or former, students at the center that Ashley developed and directed until 1981. When Robert Ashley talks you listen vigilantly, perhaps not understanding his extraordinary ideas, perhaps not following his unusual mode of expression—for this is a thoroughly original mind—but finding yourself intrigued, set against your own rigidities in thinking, disturbed, inspired, paralyzed for the moment by a desire to understand, by the necessity to keep trying. . . . Then you find that you are becoming aware of

the workings of your *own* mind and sensibilities. “And that’s what makes you original,” he says.

Questions: What is a p’monkey? And is the opera actually a letter written to erstwhile friend, G. Bruno, back in the sixteenth century? All I can say is that there was a Robert Ashley—this is documented—in audience at Bruno’s Oxford lectures, who later published translations from French, Spanish, and Italian, including the work of Le Roy, which he titled: *Of the Interchangeable Course or Variety of Things in the Whole World* (1594).

Melody Sumner
April 1991

°	When the ozone	°	when the band starts playing, °
°	changes, °	when	there is lightness
°	In the air, when	°	finds °
°	the perfect husband °	the	perfect wife,
°	The physical body	°	greet the change °
°	of ourselves °	as God,	
°	(Well said.)	°	Gwyn, P'monkey Bride, °
°	we ask the questions: °		deceased,
°	Cold as the stone	°	of the case with °
°	or whatever °	the	polychrome
°	Hard surface	°	surrounded by °
°	in which you rest °	°	bouquets,
°	Or	°	as they say °
°	(Bowkays) °		down south,
°	Why are there always °	And you, Ed, °	
°	more languages? °		tall driver
°	Vegetarian	°	who says there is °
°	and theosophist, °		no death, sir,
°	It is Allowing,	°	Why hasn't Chinese-ness °
°	to allow, °		spread?
°	Why are the Chinese	°	in China, while those who are °
°	mostly still °		not struggle
°	Against their reputation?	°	us from holding °
°	Who prevents °	Chi	nese ideas

Sample page from libretto
with scoring elements for voice.
From *Lovely Music, Ltd.*
105 Hudson, New York,
New York 10013.

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SYNOPSIS

Raoul de Noget (no-zhay'), a singer, and his friend, Buddy, "The World's Greatest Piano Player," have come to a small town in the Midwest to entertain at The Perfect Lives Lounge. For some reason, unexplained, they have fallen in with two people from the town, Isolde (nearing thirty and not yet spoken for) and her brother, "D," just out of high school and known as "The Captain of The Football Team" (his parents call him Donnie), to commit the perfect crime, a metaphor for something philosophical: in this case, to remove a sizeable amount of money from The Bank for one day (and one day only) and let the "whole world know that it was missing."

"D" is currently Assistant to the Manager at The Bank. He learns that Gwyn, one of the tellers, intends to elope with his friend, Ed. "D" is asked to "come along" with Dwayne, another friend, who has a problem speaking (that is, he speaks, but has trouble being understood). "D" knows the key to opening the safe. The plan is, then: to take away the money in Ed's car to Indiana (goal of the elopers), to keep it in circulation, as it were. They leave at 5 AM.

While the lovers are in passage, Raoul and Buddy, with Buddy's dogs and, separately, Isolde enter The Bank at midday. The dogs create a ruckus ("like a noise from Hades")

that gives Isolde the excuse to get a bucket of water from next door to throw at the dogs and miss and soak the Bank Manager, who goes into the safe for a change of clothes, only to discover that The Bank “has no money in the bank.” As part of the plan, Isolde has phoned the Sheriff’s Office, disguising her voice (her father, Will, is The Sheriff, and his wife is Ida) to report an accident “out on the highway.” There is no “accident,” of course, and, recognizing the meaning of the decoy, Will puts it all together later under Ida’s questioning.

Among the tellers (Jennifer, Kate, Eleanor, Linda, and Susie) who are witnesses to the dogfight, and the terrible discovery, and who understand what happened from different points of view, so to speak, only Susie noticed that the dogs “went out together,” and she’s not telling. Eleanor fell in love at first sight with Buddy, who because of his fancy style of dress is often mistaken for a foreigner (“There’s no doubt the Mexican is in it. The doubt is if he’s Mexican.”) That was at 12:45 PM (“remember that!”). And in The Bank at that time are Helen and John, innocent bystanders from The Home, doing business “on a holiday.” That is, they have fallen in love (in The Home), but they are not allowed to marry, or “one will lose the privileges.” So, every other weekend they take adjoining rooms at the motel right off The Park (where, by coincidence, Raoul and Buddy live, and where we first meet Raoul trying to order breakfast on the phone). This is just the beginning of their weekend, and at 3 PM we see them in The Supermarket, shopping, a little jangled, set against each other by the excitement, but far from down and out.

Sometime later, in The Bar, Buddy and Raoul on their “day off from music” have come to celebrate, little knowing that there they will meet Rodney, The Bartender,

whose wife, Baby, aspires to Boogie Woogie ceaselessly and without much success (“happy she is, the traveling salesmen say, but boogie woogie she is not”) studying the video tapes (“The Lessons”) that Buddy takes around (to music stores). Rodney is philosophical, especially about Baby’s talents, but skeptical about Boogie Woogie. And “now he’s met his nemesis . . . face to face.” They talk.

Meanwhile, back in time (to the evening of the big day), Will and Ida, in The Living Room, solve the puzzle, perhaps even to the motive, but it’s too late. Somewhere in Indiana, with the money hidden in the car (unknown to Gwyn, of course: “Gwyn’s not guilty”) and certain of their success, Ed and Gwyn and Dwayne and “D” have found a Justice of The Peace who will perform the ceremony (“I handle speedtraps, elopements, true signatures and the like”), and who recognizes in Gwyn something so urgent (“and why is the Bride-to-be so — uhn — what’s the word?”), something so dramatic — (“She is a p’monkey, sir.”) — that he is transported to somewhere in the past, to another ceremony, to another Bride-to-be (“Lucille,” who speaks in tongues), to a confusion of time and place where other (famous) marriages are enacted: “Snowdrift,” abandoned at the altar; and so forth. And while we pause to eat the wedding cake, his humble situation (“right off my bedroom is my office”) is transformed before our very eyes, as it were, into The Church (“the church of the great light”). And we are satisfied.

Meanwhile, back in town, in The Backyard, a few friends and relatives have gathered, as usual in summer, to picnic, to celebrate the changing of the light at sundown. And watching from the doorway of her mother’s house, Isolde counts the days.

—R. A.

PERFECT LIVES

*These are songs about the Corn Belt
and some of the people in it
... or on it.*

I THE PARK



Throughout the opera, the
chorus appears in italic type and
the narrator in roman type.

THE PARK

(Privacy Rules)

a fact of course as one agreed no doubt true enough allowed

in accord so right I'd say well said

a fact

. . .

a fact

. . .

a fact He takes himself seriously.

Motel rooms have lost their punch for him.

The feeling is *a fact* expressed in bags.

There are two and inside those two there are two more.

It's not an easy situation, *a fact* but there is something like
abandon in the air.

There is something like the feeling of the idea of *a fact*
silk scarves in the air.

There is a kind of madness to it. *a fact*

The kind we read about in magazines.

One of the bags contains

a fact a bottle of liquor.

A sure sign of thoughtfulness
about *a fact* who one might have been.

He pours himself a small drink in a fluted
plastic glass *a fact* sans ice.

He thinks to himself, if I were from the bigtown,
I would be calm and debonair. *a fact*

The bigtown
doesn't send its riffraff out. *a fact*

He sits on the bed,
of course both feet on the floor.

He studies the ashtray and tries to rule out preference, pre-
ferring *of course* over not preferring,

but he prefers, gravity, (*over what other state?*) pre-
ferring in this case, *of course* earth

(*the earth, as they say*), preferring
some state over non-state. *of course*

Now he grips himself with determination,
even knowing that it causes sadness. *of course*

He is determined to be what?
of course He is determined to be serious,

not for the first time, and, not for the first time, there is the feeling
of course of a mistake.

But too late, he has arrived, and there are rooms
and all rooms *of course* are not the same,

some better than others, obviously, a better view, a better layout, better
shower, softer bed, not *of course* so far from

noise, more like home, etcetera, etcetera,
(very abstract). *of course*

as one
...

He *as one* lifts the telephone
from its cradle.

His determination *as one* gets stronger, if no clearer,
even as he faints in its force.

Were it not for our momentum, *as one* the inertia of our actions,
the constant inspiration of our habits,

we could not continue. *as one*
The will is almost nothing, he thinks to himself.

At the sound of the first ring *as one*
he hangs up.

He pushes down the button *as one*
and listens to the silence of the object in his hand,

and, then, he hangs up. *as one*
Very dramatic. The phone

as one rings immediately. *one two three four*
five six seven

as one He brings this cloud of conditions with him.
He is at the center of a ball of hot stuff

that we *as one* haven't put our minds to yet.

. . .

And, sitting on the bed *as one* in the motel room
is no different.

Somewhere in another room *as one* in range,
somebody got it and phoned him.

It happens all the time, *as one*
really.

A kind of restlessness in that range. *as one*

. . .

as one

. . .

agreed He sits and thinks about
obedience.

agreed He has resolved that of the two kinds, the kind that takes every
message of order, rule, law, as error,

agreed that loathes the buildings,
that contradicts the inner voice,

(that resis . . . t . . . s, in short) *agreed* is his, and that the other kind,
how could it be?

He is unhappy with the world. *agreed*

He works with the forwardness and the backwardness.

He works with what things are ahead of us *agreed* and with
what things are behind us. I guess the other kind would be

to work with things that are alongside, the attachments. *agreed*
Obedience is impossible for him.

agreed At the same time he is cooperative
and indeed solicitous.

agreed No one in the world would mistake him
for a real person. (Obedience, etcetera.)

The other kind *agreed* works with the things that are of the alongside us,
the attachments. At the same time he is cooperative.

The numbers on the telephone, the parts *agreed* of the book, the notes of the scale—
they are the same, are they not? They come

from the sameness of the idea of *agreed* the outsideness not the along-
side the outsideness the differentness.

It is a problem, being cooperative, *agreed* and,
at the same time, refusing obedience,

carrying the load of the idea of *agreed*
differentness.

no doubt He wants.
He handles himself in the morning.

no doubt It's just like for every other man.
The fantasy is the distance,

the reluctance, *no doubt* the reticence, the otherness.
The fantasy is the uncleanness.

So, getting up gets to be *no doubt* a problem for
a sensitive person like him.

The problem is *no doubt* to run that gaunt-
let again. (*remove problem remove gauntlet*

*remove run remove is to) no doubt (re-
move the remove that)*

Leave this. *no doubt*

Make this whatever.

He lights the motel room with a slightly blue body light. *no doubt*
When he is alone, he forgets sometimes to walk.

He just moves. Sometimes they touch, sometimes they don't.
no doubt And everything in between.

As sometimes he forgets to combine talk with thinking, and
just thinks *no doubt* or just talks.

Especially I think it happens in those rooms. Who knows why?
The way it disconnects *no doubt* from what's just outside

is predictable, is it not so? It never stops being a mystery.
We have talked about it. *no doubt*

When he says hello, you hear a long whining sound,
which is his voice and the hello. *no doubt*

It is as different from whatever (the way one might remember)
no doubt as a sound a cat would make.

He is not unusual in this, I think. He is absolutely unin-
habitable. *no doubt* A thankless star.

(*remove star remove thankless
remove a) no doubt*

Replace with:

He has a special way of speaking, *no doubt*

but it seems only to make him more like other men.

no doubt

true enough

. . .

This is one place and here every kid is armed. *true enough*

So where y' goin'? Huntin'.

Only sometimes we don't see the guns. *true enough*

Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

The town and always references to down and up.

true enough Down from Des Moines. Up from somewhere.

Missed my chance. Didn't even see it.

true enough Thought it was a threat to house and home.

Why'ncha come up to the bigtown? No thanks.

Looking back. *true enough* Didn't get the up and down part.

How could I have missed it?

Get a grip on yourself, he says. *true enough*

Working against time is another thing he says.

Here I am working against time. *true enough*

true enough The pencil fairly flies as he makes out his simple requests for breakfast. Room service, courtesy of the company.

true enough This is a record.

I am sitting on a bench next to myself.

Inside of me *true enough* the words form. Come down out of the tree
and fight like a man.

two gees in eggs.

This is not a record. *true enough* This is a story.

I want to say something about myself.

I am not sitting on a bench next to myself, *true enough* whatever that means.

I am a city of habits.

I am completely knowable in every way. *true enough*

I recognize superstition in every form.

The an(g)ger of the words wakes me in the dream of myself. *true enough*

I imagine there are two men on the bench.

The exchange between them will not be seen.

true enough They will not put it forth to be seen.

And if I make something of the situation to show a difference between
the two men, the differ-

ence *true enough* will distract the true onlooker.

But the film fogs, you know. One

gee in fogs. *true enough*

And, add a dish of prunes, if they are in season.

true enough

• • •

true enough

• • •

allowed

• • •

allowed

The men are in the park in the small midwestern town.

That is, the bench *allowed* is in the park.

We know from what has passed that the men are on the bench. They are old by doctors' standards. *allowed*

The park graces the courthouse of the county. The courthouse has about it the simple air of failure. *allowed*

allowed An abandoned outpost.

The park has sidewalks, fences, trees, grass

allowed and a statue of a man and a horse at war. Or ready for war. They are alone with their intentions.

allowed The sculptor has made the horse look stupid. The man's jaw is firm.

The time is late morning *allowed* in early summer. The sun shines.

In this scene there are two shots: *allowed* the park and all its details,

frozen in time, broken on the right edge *allowed* sometimes up to two-thirds

across the frame by the body of a person, *allowed* very close, blurred, moving almost rhythmically.

We have just begun, and already we are stuck. *allowed* Working against time, as they say.

The camera is obsessed with what it sees. *allowed* The park. The ragged edge.

Nothing moves. Except the edge.

allowed The edge moves.

It's as if there is no other place. His

mind races. *allowed*

One gee in fogs. Two gees

in eggs. *allowed*

...

allowed

When the two men spoke, *in accord*

they spoke about permanence and impermanence.

They noted that there were certain things which *in accord* were impermanent

and other things to which the term impermanence did not apply.

Thus, they came to make a great division between that which is *in accord*

impermanent

and that which is permanent.

Everything in the transitory category turned out to be *in accord*

the particulars of our existence,

and these were divided into physical, mental, and others

in accord which were neither physical nor mental.

Among those particulars which were neither physical nor mental they listed

attainment, *in accord* aging, and coincidence,

On the permanent side of this great division of reality was a notion

they referred to *in accord* as space.

And by that term they meant neither conceptual space

nor space *in accord*

as given (*Noel*) by our senses.

They meant connections. *in accord*

They decided *in accord* that such space is irreducible
and not transitory,

and that it exists as long as *in accord* one is alive.

They wondered, naturally, what becomes of it.

This impasse is no help at all. *in accord*

Consider his situation.

For instance, he is expected to be *in accord*

positive and helpful about breakfast.

In the order of things, it is more important that she know about
in accord the prunes than that the shot should change.

And what about the problems we see in him? He is still
sitting *in accord* on the bed, both feet on the floor.

The small drink in the fluted plastic glass sans ice is hardly touched.

The phone *in accord* has just stopped ringing.

In his mind the two men are frozen *in time*

on the bench. *in accord*

The horse looks stupid.

The warrior's jaw is firm. *in accord*

so right Incredibly slowly our view begins to slide.

His idea is that the transition

always *so right* takes one by surprise.

Always.

There is no way *so right* to—prepare.

He imagines absolute awareness on the other side.

He wonders, *so right* as we all do,

how it comes to you that the light has changed.

so right

We were distracted by the fluid right edge.

There is an absoluteness to surprise, he thinks. *so right*

He applies this simple thought to the problem of how to move the shot.

Incredibly slowly our view begins to slide, *so right*

but begins is a problem.

We are enchanted by the park and all its details, timeless, broken on the right edge by the body of the person, *so right*

very close, blurred, moving rhythmically.

so right How can it begin to change? How can the beginning go unnoticed?

How can we pass from one state to another?

Is it possible, *so right* if one already has a certain experience of life,

to start directly on the path?

Or *so right* is there danger involved

in trying to do advanced practices without having the proper foundation?

They came to believe that unless one has actually *so right* gone through the preliminary experiences,

conclusions may be drawn on the basis of insufficient information.

And that these conclusions may produce just the opposite effect *so right* of the one which is intended.

In other words, one never knows.

And so the view begins to slide anyway, *so right* as they say,
sliding eastward, turning eastward.

The particulars moving left to right across the frame. *so right*
A parade of sorts.

And it comes to rest, finally, on the road, *so right*
the street that holds the park.

We are still obsessed. We are not relieved.
I'd say This view is no different. How could it be?

Except that we have moved off the body of the person, very close and blurred
I'd say and every edge is raw.

And there is some machine approaching, wider than it is high, as they say,
a pack of motorcycles,
a herd of elephants, *I'd say* a tribe of bedouins,

something from the east, barely moving in a cloud of haze and heat and dust
in utmost telephoto, gold and green *I'd say* and flat.

The idea of the slit.
The eye of the needle. *I'd say*

. . .
I'd say

. . .
I'd say

. . .
I'd say

. . .
I'd say

. . .
I'd say

II THE SUPERMARKET



THE SUPERMARKET

(Famous People)

this shot is called remembering the enormous
field the fence we are on the inside
looking out moving left it takes all day
the move is too smooth maybe we are dreaming
move along the edge contained caged
nostalgic we are remembering
a fence is like a mirror it depresses the cows
it makes us remember
looking out look up and down looking for something
looking for something interesting
now turn left still on the inside still
looking for something interesting
now turn left the fence is still there keep looking
keep looking for something interesting
now turn left again still looking still
looking we are looking for food

time to go
friendly shoe
friendly sole

it's different being old alone and being old
together for instance when you're old alone
it's hard to remember that you're old or that
you're alone *remembering is a problem* each
and every thought has a future but the past is
always slipping away *remove but start with*
he thinks of himself as taking part in
the dawn of civilization so much is expected of him
for instance he thinks verbatim our work with
our bodies is to move rocks our work with
our minds is to dignify eating *museums're a
good example* in her what c'n be seen c'n be seen
clearly like a slogan she wonders for instance
whether it's her way to make a new thing or to
rearrange the old things she's fond of truth
that's always a problem every other weekend
they take rooms adjoining they regret the
rooms they want something more but how to find it
remove but style is important after all
say what you will about it for instance who wants
to return disembodied stuck in the library
we do that's part of the problem but style
is right up there for instance they are more
dissimilar now than when they met in the old
days they were look-alikes it added something
now they turn to differences to talk about

that's a danger to society i would say
then i'd say something like what the heck
'n finally i'd just be indifferent
remove the but in but style is right up there
remove the and in 'n finally i'd just be
indifferent that should clear it up

welcome home
dressed in red
told and told

he gets attached to ideas a certain arrangement
of words like a certain arrangement of the furniture
can be good enough to suggest happiness in a way
she is more likely to be attached to the furniture itself
when they lie in bed he is longer than she but when they stand
he's not taller *remove but* more than
she he's something the poet says we seem to have folded too many times
together they regret more than anything more than the rooms we have
mentioned more than the chances they missed individually
their own embarrassment at the pauses they catch themselves in
the falling apart together that one should judge
herself himself whatever seems cruel
let's say is cruel maybe
regret is not the word maybe resent is the word
they the pair of them resent someone who doesn't
recognize that they are being cruel to themselves and
insists upon it at the moment th'person they have in mind

is the supermarket manager more than anyone they notice
he counts on cruelty among the oldsters to keep things in order
there's something about the honor system and the mirrors and the spies and the
finality of the checkout that keeps the oldsters subjugated definitely
cruelty to oneself is a hard flaw to confide
i am cruel to myself is it possible to tell from
looking in the mirror that you are for instance stupid
food raids on the rise supermarket managers
counted on in the emergency *do they think it grows on*
trees if this keeps up *etcetera etcetera*
compared to cattle in India by well-known scientist himself one
recalls pre-war problems with food supply
now they are everywhere international congress told
the old ones grazing
at ease

proper fold
extra teeth
in a bowl

they would like to marry they think of it politically
what a word and why marry neither of them has
an estate to speak of he owns four pairs of socks
two of which he wears in confusion all four of
these two pair are in the grey range there is a pair of a
lighter color that he dislikes finally there is the pair
in black for special times that he is wearing now
t'go into shoes and pants t'say nothing of shirts and coats
is just more of the same and she's no better off

a little more defiant maybe *it's not clear at all*
why do they keep on facing backwards looking at the state
the state has made him stop short in mid-sentence
to think it over the state has given him the embarrassment
the pauses are provided by the state *not exactly*
gratis it could be different she thinks
there could be for him for instance robes of honor
robes of our tribe priceless things
outside the mind not emblems real things
from father to son *from father to son*
if this is sunset the sky could be on fire
it could be ceremonial instead it's grey and he's
stuck again paused facing the choice of succotash
thinking it over *those are her thoughts* his are different
naturally either because the socks are his not hers
or because of the succotash and how close he is to it or because of her
failing eyesight or because of God *who knows or*
gives a shit and to top it all off that was ten minutes ago
she backed into the soups while he thought about the succotash now they are
in the aisle between the canned fish for us and the catfood
the difference a decimal point of rat hairs and other things
also the cans for us are harder to open
we protect ourselves against all possibilities
never know
tuna fish
casserole

maybe this is a good place to think about horizons
looking up remember that in the west where the
sky is or appears to be a thin almost transparent
cap upon it *the dome of heaven the poet says*
there was a fashion in supermarkets a few years
back of chest-high shelves nothing in those
stores blocked the view if you were of an age
and not otherwise different you could be standing
in the choice of baked beans or in the choice of
cleansers or in the choice of pet accessories
or in the choice of pickles or in the choice of
sundry drugs or in the choice of wines or in
the choice of breads or in the choice of plants
or fruits or autoparts or meat whatever and
see in all directions i've been in one almost
as vast as its own parking lot all vista
pure vista to the walls wall to wall blue vista
illusion blue of the fluorescents alternating light and
dark a kind of miniature cosmos pulsing
throbbing vital filled with music almost
unimaginable now that i think of it a kind of
small Versailles made of food for us and the
cats and dogs and what we need to clean up after
food and other stuff i understood that one could
live completely in that space that that could
be one's only vista that all the problems one

could need were there for instance it embodied
the struggle in this case the test of strength
between the bad guy bankers in the east and the
good guys out west it was clear that they were
different one from another the brotherhood and that we were safe
cows and small planes against horses and yachts
those were the good old days the air was pure the bankers
dressed like cowboys the plains rolled westward
th'cowboys the real ones heated the ground with their bodies
to sleep they were sullen and some spoke Spanish in a
way the poets spoke of *oh well*
it couldn't last the contradiction of the ground-plane
all perspective and the head-plane free in all directions was the
contradiction of the bankers and the idea of banking
chalk one up for easterners yachts lead
one to nothing whether you buy more under high
horizons is trivial compared to this so-
ciety was at stake our destiny was contradicted in
all that freedom perspective is a picture of
all that freedom all that
the way it should be the straight and narrow
freedom all that freedom all that freedom
whew it's useless we move rocks there's
all that freedom all that freedom all that
still the indignity of food
freedom all that nice thought Jack

*way beyond
looking down
from the hole*

taking it up from there
she noticed that as it goes away from you
it gets smaller only if you let it
and that some people are cynical about this
for instance in a situation where an
illusion of say depth is employed
a falling into
often a false back that comes away leads
to another hole slightly smaller as in a boyscout
cup *that's supposed to be funny* it's
not suggested is it that this the falling
into is an exception *how could that be funny*
or that what is hidden from our view by the surface
of the world is indeed infinite or
for instance the view of the Mojave from the deck-chair in the
shade next to the swimming pool in Palm Springs
now you're talking it's getting hard to read
those books i thought it was my eyes then i
realized it's my mind i dont like things that
can't be eaten i dont like for instance rocks
vegetables are okay fruit is intended for those
in charge they like fruit i think it agrees
with them it stands there noddng smiling

confident slightly troubled an aura of slightly
troubled something of grave concern a huge
huge mistake has been made *think of it as a matter
of water* the desert is the cocktail of the
earth if you know what i mean the cities are
the vegetables the mountains are the fruit
i'm always surprised aren't you about how
distant the mountains are in every way they
seem owned *and the oceans are the meat*
right now we're having problems with the picture we see two grey
lumps under the bridge in an old movie looks like she might have been a shoplifter
once weight one hundred twelve pounds dress size eighteen
she steals *that explains it* she's old and looks
irish she wades in water even in the supermarket
here she steals the light she goes downhill fast
she never calls in sick overhead vultures circle
*the poet says like berserk greyhound buses at a
distance* it's a hard situation to be philo-
sophical about and he's no better *etcetera*
that's what you get for getting old just a little town in the midwest
mixed farm country and this is just your average supermarket
pedal entrance and turn left the problem with the
picture is as usual the actor or in this case
the actors they want to be married but if they
marry one of them will lose the privileges
that's a stately sentence so they live as

they live and every other weekend take rooms adjoining
and regret the rooms that's the trouble with
the picture *optically it's a bowl of cherries*
he used to eschoot close-ups now he eschews them
he eschews close-ups for political reasons
one only the wide shot will accommodate the picture
of the masses *two* the close-up is aggressive and
looks for victims *three* the close-up precludes
theorizing *four* finance and perspective are with-
out doubt and one way of solving the problem of where
the lines converge is to zoom-in as they say
the close-up is the equivalent of the credit-check the
first thing to go in a money crisis is optics
he eschews close-ups for political reasons now
that he is old he eschews fit too loose but then i quote
personal existence in the world is not an immediate function of the
higher conscious life *end quote* inquiry is the key
long pause she has reached the end of her rope
he has reached down into the depths of himself *that's one*
difference between them they want to know as
we all do which way is up they want to know
whether the sheep is in store for us or behind us
an important question i would say *whatever that means*
they want to know if having been as good as
you could be here one morning late into the
night struggling for breath halfway out of sleep

dreaming wildly all out of control you should
ease yourself into oblivion with an extra dose of
say nasal spray you can expect to make another
round as an honor say to the Himalayas a national
treasure in the lowlands a movie star a man without
a country or will it be a sheep *long pause*
if not the sheep *long pause* the corporation
and the bodies of the corporation like the bodies
of the family imagine for instance the moment of
long pause enlightenment for this
supermarket imagine the feelings of this supermarket
encountering itself for the first time in the mirror of conscious-
ness the supermarket recognizes its potential *it*
chooses it chooses its manifestation
it makes a mistake it chooses the mirror this
supermarket is stupid this supermarket wants itself
in the form it finds itself this supermarket has
some problems imagine yourself can of succotash in hand
part of th'material body of the supermarket in the
checkout line you are about to be exhausted
symbolic writing fills the skies *ufo's linked to*
weird animal mutilations (p)age eight Cher
my strange relationship with Sonny centerfold how
to make your life more meaningful (p)age fifty-two how
to make your marriage more exciting (p)age thirty
indeed how will the supermarket reconstitute its

astral body its illusion of itself if you
go home and eat the succotash or in the car eat the can of
succotash break the law heave the empty on the highway
keep 'em bending over it helps their spines driving
under the influence of succotash he threw away the can your honor
and kept driving with the contents in his stomach
one atom from the imitation of the astral body of the supermarket split
part in your hand and the other part god knows where now
excuse me we can't even say these things with the children present
can we for instance knowing that somewhere near here
one hundred thousand beings are imprisoned tortured (pause)
we name the reason that's our problem
next thing you know the supermarket will want (*long pause*)
fame next thing you know the supermarket will have
works *werke* and they will be sold or lost
or given away forever disbursed never to be
reconstituted in effect immortality for the
supermarket foreverness one of the great super-
markets of the past *clogging the present* for
instance she i think is a few years older than
he it isn't easily measured now but she knows
she thinks (*long pause*) i've lost
awareness of the feeling of his age because
i've been his age is that it's rare that
she allows herself to think this way but he
must be aware of my age *remove but*
a future for him for instance

*how are you
say hello
take the role*

well what is important to say two people are
in the aisle between the seafood and the pet
supplies *the catfood huh* they have one cart
it's hard to tell which direction they're taking they're a long way
from us in the picture they're almost at the other end
on both sides of the picture the shelves converge on them they're
arguing they're not spring chickens in fact
one is a man the other is a woman she is more
agile than he also she is more determined
but that's hard to be sure about *a wise use of*
but now we zoom in slowly as we approach
we come to know more and more about their situation
this is the effect as they say that allows
us to address someone by their given name
for instance what is important to us is that
this is not very interesting i know they
live in a home for old people one of the require-
ments to live in the home is the requirement
to have no immediate family by marriage you can't
have a husband or a wife the other is no guns
allowed these two people met in the home *how*
wonderful they fell in love they want to marry
you can see what their problem is every other
weekend they check out separately which is allowed

and they check into a motel in town they take
adjoining rooms this has been going on for years
everybody knows it *this is not very interesting*
i know we should be talking about something else
or maybe they should be perverse *something*
one thing we do know is that no one is near them
no one wants oysters no one wants catfood
maybe this is just a coincidence but i dont
think so *remove but* even the man the store
has hired to watch the shoplifters is staying away
we know which one he is he's looking at th'olives
he has his hands in pockets (it takes one to
know one) in a larger town he would be of some
race but remember where we are *remove*
but they keep asking themselves the same question
and the answer always comes back the same

home is home

love is love

how i've grown

III THE BANK



THE BANK

(Victimless Crime)

Gwyn works at The Bank. That's her job.

Mostly she helps people count their money. She likes it.

...

But today, today, today, today's her wedding and she leaves home at five in the morning,

down the stairs, out the door, off the porch, around the corner and

here we are with the motor running. Where does she think they think she's going at five in the morning

in case they didn't know, with Ed and Dwayne and me in the car. An'

this is the car that's full of holes. You don't borrow the family car, when you leave in the dark,

even if you are going to Indiana. So, today, leave in the dark, car

full of holes. No destination or flowers or ring. Ed and Gwyn in the front seat, and

Dwayne and me in the back. If they are engaged,

it's someplace in the middle of the night that only they can know, and they bury their tracks.

That's love. I'm sure it's night, the engagement.

Starry skies is where Ed takes 'em. *He's no fool.* Now, one hand on the wheel,
and the

other in Gwyn's lap, he drives (us) toward an understanding.

I wish to do that one more time. This time to be with Ed and Gwyn.

They want to get married, and they ask me to come along.

And I know the reasons why. Ed admires me. I am

The Captain of The Football Team. I listen. We speak about . . . the-

osophy and eating only vegetables. Also, my sister and Ed's friend, the
nameless one,

work out in the basement of the house we use for services on Sunday.

Soyburgers and Atlantis are the themes. Soyburger dreams of a lost civilization
are my fate. We are drawn together in the dream. Well, actually, Ed,

I think I'm just the shadow of the dream. It changes, right? 'n so cosmic is the
scale that just a

glimpse is all it takes to break my heart. *Gwyn elopes.*

She calls the Bank Manager the night before and tells him that tomorrow won't
be just another day.

She tells him that she's feeling sick. Or, rather, . . .

feels a sickness coming on. Even the Bank Manager gets it then.

She wants to take a day off from work. She wants to begin in a car full of

holes, just like the one parked there in the sideshow yard to represent the point of exit

for some gang or other . . . *Ma Barker and the Boys* . . .

for true believers in the people's men and women of the car.

The Myth of The Limo. The seats are stained with some sort of stuff.

This is scary for the kids who've seen 'em rolling in the dust for Jesus, except that in Ed's car

the holes are in the bottom, not in the doors and windows.

So here we are in May, on our way to Indiana, Ed and Gwyn in front, the lovers, and in back, Dwayne and me.

Gwyn, I understand now, and I need forgiveness. Well, actually, all I need is another chance, if that's not asking too much.

This time there is no fear, no shame, no caution. My heart is so full there in the backseat with Dwayne.

This time I throw myself at the feet of your recklessness. I learn, finally. *That's something.* And I give the blessing.

At this point, Gwyn, heedless, usually, a Queen (The Royal Family of Nerve), turns on the auto radio to get a song. Click.

I love-d you like an old time melody

...

I love-d you like a dot dot dot symphony

...

*Music bringing back a memory becomes the time
stops another treasury I say*

*Oh my I say what a shame I say what did I do
I say who's to blame I say I love-*

*d you an-d an' then I call-d your name an'
I say I would do it again*

An act of demodulation has, as you know, more than one set of consequences.

Like the tiny fishes eating at the bottom of the sea, we eat the airwaves,

I mean, Gwyn and Ed and Dwayne and me. And in that act we can be found,
y'know, or

else nothing has a meaning. (Short pause for thought.)

Our demodulation registers among the great transmitters in the east atop the
giant fundamentalist

hotels, where everything is black and white and check-out time is

6 AM. And southward to the delta, where my father said he missed school
because of obligations to the state. He studied

surveying with his father, whose hero was George Washington who surveyed
this land and

who believed that we could not survive until we moved the capital to
New Orleans. And

north, too, to the river's head, where John and Babyface and all those boys and their girls

wintered. And west, of course, to what dangers we have left behind.

Where the eddies of our demodulation fill The Bank (*around 12:45 PM, remember that!*) And in The Bank at that time,

there is a commotion, as they say, the Manager is soaking wet. The older sister of his assistant (*there by chance?*)

missed the dogfight with the bucket from next door, and soaked him.

Everybody's laughing. *That's a relief.*

And it has been discovered that
the money is not there.

This is one consequence of our demodulation, the measured one, and the other is the song, itself, inside the car. Click.

You coo coo you coo coo too yeah I coo coo for you well I coo coo for you too
...

You coo coo you coo coo too yeah I coo coo for you well I coo coo for you too
Segue to a firm voice that says:

That was coo coo. (*Short pause for thought.*)

This little incident on the radio convinced Gwyn that we were on the right track, or road. She urged Ed on. Where does she think they think she's going in case they didn't know?

There's Ed and Dwayne and me in the car that's full of holes, wind, noise
and the cargo of danger more dangerous than

the danger of the road and the dangers of no destination and the dangers of
the return.

Gwyn is so beautiful wrapped in danger.

She is wrapped in scarves against the wind and noise, and wrapped in the
danger of her under-

taking. When she turns to us we can see just her eyes.

When she turns to us there is danger wrapped in scarves, there is the danger
of her eyes. The danger of why Ed is not alone with her,

why Dwayne and I must be with them until the final moment, when they
have decided

together that she is no longer with us.

She is only with him, and we are with them.

We go out together, the four of us, the four of us

planning to change things, to rearrange things among us so that for ever after,
when I talk to Gwyn, or when Dwayne talks to Gwyn,

there will always be the scarves hiding the smiles, and no longer ever or
ever, for me or Dwayne, will Gwyn be naked in the

Summer dress. When we get back from this one those days are gone forever,
the days of Gwyn naked in the Summer dress are gone for me and Dwayne.

When we get back from this one, she will be clothed forever in scarves
and in the Summer dress, she will be clothed forever.

So, today, today, today, today we leave in the dark in the car full of
holes, no destination, or flowers or ring,

Ed and Gwyn in the front seat and Dwayne and me in the back. If they
are engaged,
it's someplace in the middle of the night that only they can know and
they have

buried their tracks. That's love. A night engagement in the dark of
scarves and danger. Starry skies is where Ed takes 'em.

He's no fool. He knows the danger of the stars. An Atlantean
returned knows the danger of the stars.

He has seen two of them, larger than the moon,
locked in light, locked in

an exchange of something. The heavens were on fire.
Earth shakes. Enormous wind and noise.

He remembers that, then, at that moment, which was final and
inevitable after a generation of vain hope

and the smell of icons burning, we conceded.
We allowed. We allowed ourselves.

The heavens were on fire, and there was enormous wind and noise.

The two of them, larger than the moon,

were locked in light. *Boy, that was something.* Everything was . . .

scarves. No one was naked in the Summer dress.

And each of us turned to someone, turned to face someone.

If there are lessons, that was the lesson.

The two of them were locked in light. The heavens were on fire.

Earth shakes. *Enormous wind and noise.*

And each of us turns to someone. The turning is like see you later.

See you later Perfect One. See you later All Night.

Two ways of see you later. One way is see you later somewhere. See you later,

Ed. See you later, Gwyn. See you later, Dwayne.

The other is see you later Perfect One. See you later All Night.

See you later Perfect One. *Take it with you.*

See you later All Night. How's your mom? So, there is the

both of them here in this wind and noise.

Earth shakes. Ed's car with holes plows the heavens, and

Gwyn turns to Ed and says, See them

up there locked in light. *This must be it.*

See you later, Ed. Then, just slightly more,

she turns to Dwayne and me in back and says, See you later,
All Night. See you later, Perfect One.

Ed's car with holes plows the heavens. Now, one hand
on the wheel, and the other in Gwyn's lap,

he drives (*us*) toward an understanding.

I wish to do that one more time.

This time to be with Ed and Gwyn. Perfect One steps
down. Does not take it with him.

They want to marry and they ask me to come along.

And I know the reasons why. Ed admires me.

I am The Captain of The Football Team. I listen.

I am the audience, as in:

The Builders, the hundreds of them, fed on garlic, wished the
stones in place, then polished them, and then they had an

audience with the Perfect One to hear him say Nice Going.

And they answer, together, as closely fitted as

the stones, *it was nothing. Another day, another garlic.*

It's all yours now. We're going home.

And among them, the builders turned to one another and said
a different kind of see you later.

Not see you later Perfect One, or see you later All Night,
but, see you later, Ed. See you later, Gwyn.

In back, Dwayne and I are drinking beer. Dwayne knows. Dwayne knows
the dangers, the dangers of the cargo and the destination.

How's your mom, Dwayne? When you see her, say hello for me. Tell her
The Perfect One says, Hi. Click.

I loved-d you more than you could ever believe

...

I never would'a thought there was so much love in me

...

*word carved in stone is everywhere stone crumbles
word returns t'air I say*

*Oh my I say what a shame I say what did I do
I say who's to blame I say I love-*

*d you an-d an' then I call-d your name an'
I say I would do it again*

So, here we are in May, on our way to Indiana, Ed and Gwyn in front,
the lovers, and in back, Dwayne and me.

Gwyn, I can love now, and I need forgiveness.
Well, actually, all I need is

another chance, if that's not asking too much. This time
there is no fear, no shame, no caution.

My heart is so full there in the back seat with Dwayne.
This time I throw myself at the feet of

your recklessness. I learn, finally. *That's something.*

And I give the blessing. What are we

doing here? Next thing you know, I hear another voice say:

Under the eyes of God and all His messengers

and The Governor of the Sovereign State of Indiana,
who shall witness this holy thing, this matri-

mony, this elopement? More even holy than you think, Asshole.

Last night around ten-thirty from The Diner

she calls the Bank Manager at home — *at home!* and predicts her
own sickness. This is the Legendary Bedside

Ceremony! Clyde, I am wounded and I see the cloud ap-
proaching, and I want that we should marry.

Oh, Bonnie, I love you, I love you, I
love you and I am without regret.

I say in the face of all eternity that I love
you and I am without regret.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Asshole. I shall witness
this matrimony this elopement.

Under the eyes of God and The Governor of the Sovereign State of
Indiana, I have come here with Dwayne, and while he's

far from perfect, he is reliable. Somewhere
in himself he is pure and reckless.

He is someone you can count on. And in the backseat
full of holes, when Dwayne smiles, I am not

afraid. Let's get married.

Oh, Ed.

We are all separated by (quote) the space (unquote).
We talk to ourselves.

Is Ed's sister Wynn? Does Ed leave Wynn for Gwyn?

Is Dwayne's name Tom? *These records are*

hard to work with now. What is clear is that Gwyn is
not involved. Except that this is the day of the day

she is to be married for the first time, and she's a little nervous.

She sees the sickness coming.

The phone call from The Diner. Stay out too late as usual. Go home and
go to bed at midnight and they'll know something's up for sure.

So, on top of all the other things we have to do, the planning, the road maps, the gas-up, what do you wear, do you need a ring,

there is the question, finally, where are we going? It's not as if we have a destination. Indiana? That's not a destination.

Where do we stop and declare our intentions to marry Ed to Gwyn, over and above the fact that, when we are caught, Ed's balls will go for sure,

and probably mine, too. The Captain of The Football Team can't just shrug his shoulders and pretend it is a coincidence

that he is in Indiana when the Justice of The Peace asks: And who witnesses this ceremony, this elopement, this holy matrimony?

I am just there I don't know why and I hear him ask this question and Ed is my friend and Gwyn is a

friend of my sister's and so I say I will Asshole and that's the way it

happens, I swear. Anyway, we know that Gwyn's not guilty.

She has never helped them count their money very well,

but it would be stretching things, the tale, to think that today she is involved in crime. What we can't figure out is where it goes (*or went*).

A large amount just disappears like magic. We're pretty sure we know the time of day (12:

45 PM), and in the bank at that time, in addition

to the silly farmers and their silly wives, there is a Mexican in a fancy suit,
there is a seedy-looking man, there is the older sister of the Manager's
assistant, there are The Lovers From The Home, doing business on a holiday,
and there is that fight between the dogs.

Introducing Jennifer

Jennifer dreams when she's at the window.
The sun beats down on a marketplace and they've got her in chains.

Here in the shadow of the palms, I serve.
It's not bad, y'know. You learn a lot.

This man, for instance, stays close to home.
See his hand? The heart is magnified.

The dark one wants something of me I can tell.
And the other one's a traveler. *Jenni-*

fer works at The Bank. That's her job.
Mostly she helps people count their money. She likes it.

In Summer, when it's really hot outside, The Bank is like
an oasis. Underneath what it means is what it means.

What they were serving was like glue and very sweet.
Smoke and the smell of coffee filled the air. I like the getting up and down
part really. . . . to think, the closer you watch the less you see.
Jennifer dreams when she's at the window, but they all saw it,

Jennifer, Kate, Eleanor, Linda and Susie.

Introducing Kate

Kate works at The Bank. That's her job.

Mostly she helps people count their money. She likes it.

Kate's the one that stays up late with the man that put the cameras in, a reader. For instance, you will lead a long and happy life. Look, the line here says you'll give

yourself heart and soul to a guy that puts in cameras.

C'mon baby, I have hours of you, you're the late show, you're the one.

You've got the part. I love you, Kate, and it says here that it's time for you to love me, too. Tomorrow put a note where I can see it. Say,

yes, I will be yours. Hold up a sign that says I love you.

Now, speaking of hold-ups, this guy has it on the tape, they say.

But what? A dog fight in a bank? A

Mexican? The Old Folks From The Home? *What kind of shot is this?*

The closer you watch, the less you see.

Kate's the one that stays up late on the porch swing with the guy that put the cameras in.

Between the two of them she's seen it all.

The night sky in Summer, and in Winter, herself.

Every night, except for weekends, the screen test. Herself.
Introducing Eleanor Elea-

*nor works at The Bank. That's her job.
Mostly she helps people count their money. She likes it.*

In her mind she's been here since the beginning.
I mean, she's the first of all the girls here now.

Things are much less formal than they used to be.
But I think I'll always be here, at least for now.

Her specialty is transferrals.
Gold and other valuables, including deeds.

She knows it all. And I don't think she's even
blonde. But then I don't come in here all that often.

Last year she had an operation of a sort.
In almost the middle of the night, navigating by the stars, away from the tents, as it
should be, The Captain of The Football Team removed her . . . (uhn)
what is that? or, maybe, exchanged one thing that has no currency

for another that has no currency.
Introducing Linda Lin-

*da works at The Bank. That's her job.
Mostly she helps people count their money. She likes it.*

Look, you'll have one child, and he shall be named Junior.
The line of life is protected by the line of travel. Eleanor is Lin-

da's closest friend. They have something in common. When they're together though, it's at a distance for them both. We measure memory in distance. That gives you something to

think about. If what's remembered is more recent, is it more yours?
F'r instance, they sold their car to a jerk that didn't pay. *Oh, Junior.*

Now, she is annoyed at what the fates have given her. Same old problems. The supermarket groceries, the car that needs a paint job, you have to cross the wires to start it.

Oh, Junior. Drive home. Take in the groceries. Take a nap.
Where's the car? It's out in front. No, that's the old one. Wha'd'ya mean the old one? That's the one we sold.

'N what's it doing out in front? My god, I took the wrong one.
The one we own now's still in the parking lot. I wonder how he got his groceries home?

Her baby is named Junior Junior.
Her husband is named Junior. He says football was

too romantic in the old days, and he's glad they play on Sunday, now.
Introducing Susie Su-

sie works at The Bank. That's her job.
Mostly she helps people count their money. She likes it.

Susie saw the dogs. Linda saw the Mexican. Kate
saw the man we're calling X. Susie saw the dogs go out together.

That's important. She wonders if the dogs speak Spanish.
Like the waiters in the Chinese restaurants in Spain. She's started listening
to the opera . . . f'r thrills. He sings,
Miss Italy, I adore you. That's what she likes. If only I could understand
the words.

Miss Cremona, I adore you. From the parapet I shall throw my-
self, if our love is unrequited. I want the world to know it. I adore you. Je t'adore.

Amore. Love. The Mexican was like a flash of darkness against the
blazing sun outside. The dogs were like a noise from Hades.

The silly farmers and their wives, like an I-
talian custard, froze 'n the yoke. Susie's on a jet for someplace. They'll

never believe this story. She saw the dogs go out together.
Speaking Spanish. She loved the suit. It almost didn't

touch him. And she loved the light blue shoes.

...

Our love supposed to burn eternally

...

Like a fire inside it like to burn a hole in me

...

*Fire burns everything down to dust consumes
itself captured smothers us I say*

*Oh my I say what a shame I say what did I do
I say who's to blame I say I love-*

*d you an-d an' then I call-d your name an'
I say I would do it again*

Meanwhile, let's go back in time to somewhere else.
Somewhere, along the trade routes, in an obscure stop,

The Wolf
composes himself.

First, obligation number one.
A letter to the last landlady

who owns a charming studio with view of
downtown city. (*question mark*) privileges.

utilities. transportation
near. children not okay.

good for thinking.
So, this is it, huh?

He remembers that, then, at that moment which was
final and inevitable after a generation of vain hope

and the smell of icons burning, we conceded.
We allowed. We allowed ourselves.

The heavens were on fire.
And there was enormous wind and noise.

The two of them, larger than the moon were locked in light.
Boy, that was something. Everything was scarves. No one was naked

in the Summer dress, an' each of us turned to someone,
turned to face someone. If there are lessons, that was the lesson.

(quote) Mrs. Romano,
I have your note. My answer is a little late.

I am a traveling man.
You know the type. Etcetera. Etcetera.

How is everything at home.
Next year. . . 'sanother big one.

And,
if I pass that, I'll live forever.

'til then, there's just this machine,
my books, my shirts an' me.

I eat standing up.
I never cook. The smell of things heated is

too much for me. The phone rings maybe
once a day. Sometimes I don't feel like talking.

Sometimes I do. Women
visitors are rare. So, if my neighbor down below

heard heavy walking, it must be something
in the pipes. I never walk.

The Wolf knows what he's doing.
(signed) The Wolf (unquote).

Sometimes a letter is like a song.
I must remember that.

Now, third obligation *(number three)*,
the telephone *(the future)*.

I must call up Isolde.
Who is Isolde? Well, for now, Is-

olde she's the olde' and the Kid works at The Bank.
Then, there's Buddy and the Dogs (my life).

Have I counted four things or five? *(The singer learns to
travel light.)* Isolde, I do declare my love.

I'll settle down. Isolde. Isolde.
I love you. I truly do.

Let's retire after this one.
We can live on what you make. Your income'll

be enough for both of us.
And I will make you happy, if I am home,

when you come home at night.
And, if I'm not, maybe it's worth the wait.

Now, I must call.
(quote) Hello, Isolde, it's me. I love

you. Etcetera (unquote). Click.

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*I love-d you like an old time
melody*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*I love-d you like a dot dot dot
symphony*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*Music bringing back a memory becomes
the time stops another treasury I say*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*Oh my I say what a shame I say
What did I do I say who's t'blame I say I love-*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*d you an-d an' then I call-d your
name an' I say I would do it again*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*I love-d you more than you could ever
believe*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*I never would 'a thought there was so much love
in me*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*Word carved in stone is everywhere
stone crumbles word returns t'air I say*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*Oh my I say what a shame I say
what did I do I say who's to blame I say I love-*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*d you an-d an' then I call-d your
name an' I say I would do it again*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

Our love supposed to burn eternally

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*Like a fire inside it like t'burn a hole
in me*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*Fire burns everything down to dust
consumes itself captured smothers us I say*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*Oh my I say what a shame I say
What did I do I say who's t'blame I say I love-*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*d you an-d an' then I call-d your
name an' I say I would do it again*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

*I say I would do it again
I say I would do it again I say*

YOU COO COO YOU COO COO TOO YEAH I COO COO FOR YOU WELL I COO COO FOR YOU TOO

IV THE BAR



THE BAR

(Differences)

This is a close up.
An arm.

Big muscles
Gone to seed.

It moves.
But first,

We read,
Rodney.

The design
Looks Chinese.

Flashpowder
Tattoo.

In the beginning
There were rocks.

And on those rocks with harder rocks
We learned to make a million bruises.

To spell out things like:
We Were Here and Watch Your Water.

They only moved it,
The idea of bruises adding up to something,

From rocks to skin.
A tendency toward motion pictures.

In this case on the forearm,
Slightly gone to seed: Rodney.

In a garland of roses and with a flag.
Forty-eight stars.

The good old days.
Flowers, flag and Rodney in a military style.

A one-man Arlington.
Good luck, Rodney. Write when you can.

I'll be here when you return — unchanged,
Faithful, still desperately in love.

We were
Made for one another.

Remember, we were close, and
When the arm moves, finally, making room for other things,

We start a long, a slow,
Release from Rodney and his history.

A pulling back, as they say.
Widening the shot. An unfolding.

The world streams in the edges.
I know what I'm doing.

This is heaven. No, not yet.
This is just the bar.

And Rodney is the bartender
Watching them come in as we watch Rodney.

At 11 PM on a Tuesday
Afternoon, after a successful day at work

Not exactly *at* the office, but at work,
Day off from music, what's better than a drink?

Just a little one to celebrate.
Also to be seen. You know how that is.

So Rodney's not the star. Star
Enters now, with a friend, a slightly seedy older man.

And smiling. And why not smile?
A job well done is a job worth doing.

Around us in the bar
We hear the sounds of life,

Things
Like:

...

I say,
Don't you read the Bible, man?

And: Place like that'll make your
Skin loose.

And: *You never know where they are
On this portable equipment.*

And: *Just one more time, then
Put it in the joke museum.*

And: *She wanted her savings and
Whatever she could get on credit. I said,*

*Ma'm, it's not my neck, but what can an old fart like you
Do with all this money on a Friday morning?*

And: *'Cause if you're gonna talk about the future you gotta talk about
Right here. This is where the future's at.*

And: *After they was gone she came an' took over.
You know how them women are.*

And: *He never told me how he'd do it,
An' I sure ain't about to ask.*

And:
Twenty-two . . . ?

And: *He's been standin'out in back there
Every night for a year or so.*

*He's never the same
After he came back, y'know.*

And: *Well, I've done it three times, and
Three times is enough, I'd say.*

And:
Wuh'she's a cute little thing.

Things like that.

Rodney, on the other hand, is less idealistic.

A little knowledge dot dot dot.

Rodney has seen the world.

Now, don't forget the star and his friend,
Who are strangers at this bar — the other one —

And for reasons we are yet to understand
Bring out the worst in Rodney.

Something about them makes him . . .
Suspicious. If it's not the suit or shoes or shirt

Or the contract between the star
And the other man, it's gotta be the dogs.

He says, right off we don't
Serve fine wine in half-pints, buddy.

...

Little things do wear out your welcome, that I know.

One is clothes, the perfection of the body.

Another is shoes, your distance. And the carriage
In your shoulders, your self-respect.

Not so much the color of the skin or hair, now.

Lightness is another *(they use to call vivacity)*.

Another, prob'ly least, is talk, including breath.

(Enzymes graded on a scale of five.)

Seven paces from the door to bar and it's gone,
My welcome.

I'm no brown survivor, here, from a lost civilization.
No mingling, please.

Just, for instance, words from a gentleman behind
The bar — a sort of prisoner: we

Don't serve fine wine in half-pints, buddy.

...

How could he know that that's my name? Or that
Half a pint is just enough for me.

Move closer to the bar to reassure him. Notice,
Thanks to this strange light, the feeling:

Don't keep from yourself the need to do good.
Songs, yes. Earnestness of purpose, no.

So, with his message I adjust my body some to calm him.
We're all in this together, aren't we?

Hi, my name is Buddy. If I could help you make the
Load a little lighter, it would be my pleasure.

We've all felt that it's hard, at least harder than
We think it should be, and we look for change.

It's my way — it's been given me — to move among
The people, and to know our nature.

So, I should not hesitate to share my thoughts
And my experience with you.

For instance, to begin from the beginning, as it
Should be:

...

There is only one Self. That Self is
Light. The Self is ageless.

The body has four forms, times,
Eras, four ages.

But the Self the one and only Self is ageless,
Without age and without aging.

The Self is without coincidence, being
The only thing the Self.

The Self is without attainment,
Being perfect.

The body has four ages. First is the
Seed, and mainly we remember. . .

And only have ideas about that form because our con-
sciousness the reflected light of the Self

As the moon is the reflected light of the sun the Self
In its orbit about the earth the body

Now in this age happens to reflect on that
Part of the earth, the body, in the region of,

The age of *(dot dot dot)*
The branches *(pause)*

That is, the seed, the age of the seed,
Is the age before the body is

(Quote) separated from the other body before
Birth, as it were, that's simple.

Then comes the age of the root, 'n their beauty
To our eyes is in their gnarledness,

'N the great emotions that they represent in their great
Heat that they need the coldness of the earth

To not explode from their own heat there is so
Much of it. *(pause)*

That's why childhood is like the root in its
Gnarledness and in its heat, 'n

That's why children have to have a home when they are children
To absorb the heat and to relieve—no,

Not relieve the pain of gnarledness, I almost spoke wrong—
To make life possible in that age.

After childhood age of the root, comes the age of the
Trunk, 'n that lasts some thirty years.

That is, if childhood lasts some fourteen years,
Then, in the same way

The age of the trunk lasts some thirty years,
Maybe thirty-five.

To continue *(dot dot dot)* in the orbit
Of the consciousness about the body

There is a passing now from the region of the
Trunk into the region of the branches.

I said earlier, if you remember, that the consciousness
Now is in the region of

The branches but that was a form of speaking
Too soon. *(pause)*

To be precise, it's passing now from one
Region to another,

It's on the crest, above the highest mountains,
So, one reason we remember

And only have ideas about the form that's called the
Seed, as I said earlier,

Is that we are so far from it in time.
We are as far from it as we can be.

Another reason is in passing
From one region to another

There is a sort of swoon that happens so we are
Just awakening in the branches now

And things in general are still
Foggy.

I brought up this idea, the idea of
The Tree of Life,

To have something to compare the Self to. We were
Talking about the Self.

We said the Self is without coincidence
Being singular.

We said the Self is without attainment
Being perfect.

And we said the Self is ageless being
What I don't know.

The word eternal is a mystery to me.
I don't understand that word.

I can't say the Self is ageless
Being eternal,

So, I have to find another way of seeing, another way of
Understanding that the Self is ageless,

'N the way I've found that works for me is,
I say: Im-

agine the Self shaving for the first time:
No. Im-

agine the Self learning to walk:
No.

So, the Self must be as ageless
As it feels.

Has your self changed?
No.

Do you remember when your self was other than it
Is? *No.*

The Self is ageless. The Self is without co-
incidence.

And the Self is without attainment.
These things we know.

The light of yourself, Rodney is all a-
round you for us to see.

You say to me, We Don't Serve Fine Wine In
Half-Pints, Buddy, 'N

That sound is just what we expect . . . and
Need.

We take sound so much for granted, don't we?
It's the sound of God.

We Don't Serve Fine Wine In Half-Pints, Buddy
Is the sound of God.

'N I'm allowed to use that word, be-
cause I'm brown.

...

Does this break Rodney's heart?
No.

More than one part of Rodney is
Hard as stone

When it comes to things like
God.

No, Rodney has heard it all.
His chart today says:

Problems of children
Or other loved ones

Are likely to require the use of
Marital resources.

Worry (*strange word*)
Is likely to be greater.

Care with spending on creative project
Is necessary.

A speculation
May be disappointing.

By concentrating on
Routine activities

Depression
Can be avoided.

In other words,
Keep moving is Rodney's chart.

And he interprets that to mean
The money Baby spent

On lessons at the music store
Will not ensure her place

Among the greats of boogie woogie . . . or even,
Get her playing at the bar.

Happy she is, the traveling
Salesmen say,

But boogie woogie
She is not.

Thirty lessons guaranteed to merge
The left hand with the right.

In one ear and out the other hand,
Across the great divide.

Some got it and some don't,
She says at night.

I got it.
Poor Rodney. Art Widower.

He lost it to the left hand memories,
The structure.

He lost it to the right hand
Blue notes.

I got it, Rodney's Baby says.
Boogie woogie all the way.

She goes down to The River when she can . . .
The Holy River where the notes came up from New Orleans.

Because It's There, The Doctor says.
She is enchanted.

She has learned that short ideas repeated
Massage the brain.

...

CCEE CCGG CCBB CCGG
CCEE CCGG CCBB CCGG

Always.

Especially in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon,
And always through the night . . .

CCEE CCGG CCBB CCGG
CCEE CCGG CCBB CCGG

Industry.

How it differs in the cows, Rodney thinks,
Who simply stand there looking out.

Vast pauses between cow events
Are illuminated by the crashing of the cosmos:

Chew Crash Blink
Chew Crash Blink

Crash Left Foreleg Forward
Crash Left Foreleg Forward

Crash Rear Rightleg
Crash Rear Rightleg

Forward Crash Chew Crash
Forward Crash Chew Crash

Blink Crash
Blink Crash

Etcetera, Etcetera, (Phew!)
Etcetera, Etcetera, (Phew!)

Meanwhile, back at the trailer camp,
In a cloud of cigarette smoke,

She studies the video tape.
Boogie woogie rocks the Airstream.

You're So Beautiful, But You Gotta Die Some Day.
Gimme 'Little Lovin' 'Fore You Pass Away.

Rodney will not pass away.

Rodney's fortune is invested in the Airstream.

With double bedroom, bath, kitchenette and living space
Sold through the fisheye lens in easy payments

Now recently enhanced with magnum organ double
Keyboard speakers and video cassette.

Continuing education from the music store.

Thirty easy lessons. Just do as I do. Watch.

CCEE CCGG CCBB CCGG

CCEE CCGG CCBB CCGG

Always.

Boogie woogie is the vessel of the eternal present.

That's the only way to use that word.

She speaks of nowness. Everything is now, Rodney.

Be with me now. *Now.*

Gimme 'Little Lovin'. Nowness is all. Rodney's going

Crazy. His sense of now is rusty.

The Airstream and its obligations, six nights at

The bar, the magnum double keyboard organ,

Patterns in a tapestry of one crash among—

No, not among—in the line of

Crashes to eternity, separated by. . .

(Buddy, could we have The Cowlick, please . . .)

Blink Chew Left Foreleg
Blink Chew Left Foreleg
Forward Blink Etcetera
Forward Blink Etcetera

It has not occurred to Rodney that he could lie down with animals.
The bar is bad enough.

Now he's met his nemesis, nemesis-es,
Face to face.

This brown fellow in his eight-hundred-dollar suit,
His priceless shirt, blue shoes made of the sky,

And with a smiler at his side, has just come in
The bar on Rodney's shift. Oh, boy.

Brown fellow Buddy speaks again: The moment . . .
Is forever.

Structure is a performance of minding, what is
Ahead of us and what's behind.

The drone and all its forms must amplify the
Moment to career dimensions.

It is the necessity of practice
For those who are engaged.

Otherwise, i.e., if you are not engaged,
Out of work,

At your leisure, call it what you will,
The moment has its own dimensions.

You can find it . . . uhn . . . anywhere. It is
The abyss of . . . The Click.

Thunder, my teacher said, is but a click. That
Took years to understand.

Aimlessly I wandered on the plane of time.
I planned (*dot dot dot*)

Intersections. I drew intersections. Each was
Less clear than the last.

Friends in physics (beg your pardon) said,
It's simple. Bend the plane.

I said don't you watch the movies. That's been tried.
And there was no relief. The Spanish tried it.

They curved their mustache to the plane of time,
And there was no relief.

It only leads to laughing. Laughter is relief
For those who are engaged.

I was engaged. *Engagé*. Big deal The Click says.
Thunder.

Endless thunder on the rolling plains comes back
To us in town like news.

It's bigger than we thought. The pressure drops . . .
Wyoming to the Mississippi.

There is still time. Insert: Call the groom.
Dress the bride.

This is the envelope of The Click. It lifts us
In our own air.

It makes us pure. It is our ceremony.

It is our reason.

In Wyoming it is heard upward, if that's the word,

Forever.

And sideways on the plane to at least

The Mississippi, The Holy River.

Imagine the great curved plane, the plains,

And all its markings.

We Were Here and Watch Your Water in markings

On a scale of centuries.

The earth is drawn upon. Drawings,

Like lipstick on a mirror,

In a scale of centuries, to be seen and

Our presence read through the lens that is . . .

The moment of The Click. Lens to lens.

Touching. Self to self.

The inside, if that's the word,

To the outside.

Upward, if that's the word,

Forever.

Forgetful of the plane, its markings, the

Intersections, the plans.

Forgetful of the versions, the performances:

You may kiss the bride.

Lips to lips. Plane to curved plane.

A proximity of markings.

The nearness of markings, which is why they were

Abandoned as our work here finally,

In favor of smaller things,

Like bruises.

Markings on a scale of centuries are simple

Process. Deliberate.

This is the beginning and this here is the end.

Drawn on the plane of intent.

Big deal The Click says. Look directly at the lens, please.

Smile. There you go. (Short pause.)

The Self speaks only to the Self. The inter-

change of light suffices.

It is sufficient to every moment of the world.

It is all connections.

It is all moments of the universe.

It is flawless and all perfection.

It is visible and emanant.

It is devotion and without impatience.

It is understanding, all compassion and delight.

It is riches.

It is all permanence.

It is the silence in the body incarnate.

Limitless and manifest, it is the
Rightness of our imaginations.

It is the fire, measureless.
It is all presence.

It is what we know and it is complete. The inter-
change of light suffices.

It is the knowable and unbounded.
It is fullness and without desire.

It is the decided. The interchange of
It is the decided. The interchange of
Light is final and suffices.
Light is final and suffices.

Just a sip or two and Buddy talks this way.
The gift of chemistry.

It was invented and within a generation everybody
Had it. That's in the record.

Faster than aviation. Faster than money.
The news went round the world.

Cooking is obsolete. You don't have to burn the
Chicken anymore to get heat.

It comes in bottles.
Right here at the bar.

Yourself, poor as a churchmouse, can blast
Open with sheer heat

The sacred doors
Between the left and right.

The-vir-gin-spin-ster-mu-sic-in-the-cas-
tle welcomes with open arms

Thecigarsmokingtongueanditsmighty
Plans for past and future.

Hot diggity. Oh, boy.
We can have kids.

And they will speak a seamless merger
Of poetry and sound.

The great stories shall be told again.
For instance:

He saw her and burst into flames . . .
spontaneous

. . . *combustion*. Another case of
Sheer heat.

The instruction booklet with the video tapes
Says the following

In small type. An apology of
Sorts, one thinks,

For the isolation one feels
In learning,

Exaggerated or just amplified
By the actuality of isolation

In the Airstream, locked in the plane of intent,
On which . . .

Markings of the history of boogie woogie

Stretch out in all directions,

(I think that's the way history stretches out)

Quote:

Television is neither true nor false.

It's industry.

Seven Five

Seven Five

Three Two

Three Two

Television made without industry. . .

Alone, in a word . . .

Six Four

Six Four

Three Two

Three Two

Can cause a sinking feeling.

There can be a loss of trust.

Six Four

Six Four

Two

Two

Fear not darkness, i.e.,

Not industry.

Nor your own . . .

Desire.

Everybody works to be a part of industry.

To be a part of industry is to be real.

Six Four
Six Four
Three
Three

If you're a part of industry, both in your
Industriousness and in the nature of your work,
There is a chance that everybody will like your work,
Because it is a part of industry.

And things that are not a part of industry
Are not possible to like.

Seven Five
Seven Five
Two
Two

Likeability is less important than
Recognition by the industry.

Six
Six
...

'N that's a reason to be serious.
Unquote.

...
One wonders, naturally,
What the average boogie woogie student thinks of this.

But, then,
Maybe that's Buddy's charm.

...

This is a close up.
An arm.

Big muscles
Gone to seed.

It moves.
But first,

We read,
Rodney.

The design
Looks Chinese.

Flashpowder
Tattoo.

In the beginning
There were rocks.

And on those rocks with harder rocks
...

V THE LIVING ROOM



THE LIVING ROOM

(The Solutions)

't this point, Ida, steering by the stars and wondering again about why they came to be together, checking always left and right, remembering the old jokes, like: your problem, Sheriff, is you're famous. my what? and it's such a lonely job. well, you picked it. you could've been employed, like your father, etcetera, etcetera, underneath the windows 'n up against the doors, the drifts . . . whiteness stretches out in all directions, inside, a landscape of attachments only, as in, she says they come in two forms: one's a sort of wrap-around, a layer of something over the layers that we put on and most often, strangely, noticeable when the top layer we put on is belted. the other form is most like lint. to quote her in her own words, quote: . . . in a certain kind of light a piece of something on a person's clothing . . . (unquote). *gosh, how scary.*

now, seated at evening, she faces due east,
i.e., placed in space and still aflux in time.
he, on the other hand (that is, her right),
faces pure north, i.e., set in time and
totally adrift in space. huddled at the lamp,
nine PM, gosh, they have done this forever.
a typical two-shot . . . with dialogue:

...

she says: well, Will, how's your day today?

he says: it was too much for me.

she says: at the risk of everything, what's the answer?

he says: i've been practicing how to say it right the first time.

she says: could you give me a f'r instance?

he says: one says, when i see those birds in cages,
i know they're sad. two says, that's a mistake. birds dont get sad.
that's just the way they look when they cant . . . fly. one says . . .
wisely. . . well, that's what sadness is. *(pause)*

she says: why do people live in such conditions, Will?

(long pause) he says: to get away from leaders, Ida.

she says: have you seen the headlines? *he says:*

besides the note we found two buttons, almost like a clue.

one said indifference misspelled
the other said mind over dot dot dot.

she says: you mean, i.e., who are they?

he says: what we know is . . . she lives in town, 'n he's been here
before. what we dont know is how they spend their time apart.

she says: why do we do these things, Will?

he says: i think the answer is: names.

we do things to test the power of . . . names.

she says: re names, c'd you give me a f'r instance?

he says: raoul de noget or fingers . . .

toussainte de monde or everywhere. those are names.

...

she says: you look tired, Will. could you take a day off?

he says: i'm like the mayor of the trailer park, it's true. i
count five, but i know there are four.

she says: well, Will, where did the money go?

he says: somewhere out of town and back.

she says: is the courier one of us? *he says:*

do you mean one of the explorers? *she says:* yes.

he says: well, someone knows the ropes.

she says: who are the four, Will? *he says:*

one, the mastermind, wh'se connection is somebody local with a european name;

two, his buddy, wh'se origins are not local, who by our standards may not have origins at all. three, some local woman with a european name. and the fourth is an insider.

she says: who is the fifth, then? *he says:*

i keep counting five, but it must be my imagination.

she says: how does romance fit in, Will?

he says: mainly it takes . . . time. it

keeps them here. it's something that you just outgrow.

she says: what's expected of you then? *he says:*

do you mean, as a citizen? *she says:* yes.

he says: only that you act out possibilities.

she says: and are those attached to you? *he says:*

yeah. f'r instance, that you might be a pitcher.

smoke it by 'em and die young. the best of both worlds. *(no puns, Will.)*

...

she says: this is something y'talk about among yourselves?

he says: no, you know, it's too noisy in the daytime — es-

pecially when you're moving, and at night everybody's too tired.

she says: so how do people get the news? *he says:*

like food — on the run. in the situation we're in now
y'dont read . . . y'look.

she says: are there examples of self-denial?

he says: yeah, f'r instance, when two people own, say, fifteen
chairs in common. that cuts into your sitting down time.

she says: what are the side effects, Will? *(pause)*

he says: zero. everything's up front.

she says: are there things going on that one cant see?

he says: well, retirement has its dangers.
things definitely happen . . . at night.

she says: like? *he says:* like those
things you notice in the morning. *she says:* 'that inevitable?

he says: only after y'start noticing.

she says: there must be a positive way of thinking of it.

he says: either it's something that's not permanent, or
it's something that just takes getting used to.

she says: what happens when the children get together?

(long pause) he says: they tell . . . jokes.

she says: that's better than breaking bottles, isnt it?

(long pause) he says: depends on . . . the joke.

. . .

she says: is there enough work for everyone?

he says: well . . . we encourage repetition.

there are no limits . . . on what a human being can do.

— take the example of the minorities. *she says:*

how do you measure things like that? *he says:*

endurance mainly. . . keep on comin' back.

she says: again, c'n you give me a f'r instance?

he says: well, f'r instance, there was a man who . . . re-

membered everything. they finally had to lock him up.

she says: i suppose there are tricks of the imagination.

he says: yeah. things are bound to get off sometimes.

she says: are there qualities that you discourage?

(long pause) *he says:* short sounds and flags.

she says: are there other kinds of limits?

he says: we only count what you can accomplish when you're

concentrating or when you're smiling or when you're doing your best.

she says: is that a matter of economy?

he says: well, in the old days you might cry in the kitchen

to realize there wouldnt be another fresh tomato for a year.

but that's all changed now.

she says: so what form do ideas take, and

. . . are there other groupings? *he says:*

well, your eyes still smart and . . . in the music

if we break it down by sevens, . . . we get. (. . . excuse me)

*one two three four five
one two three four five T*

*seven eight M-one recess difficulties
the home smells ten D*

*fourteen fifteen M-two
manhood guns fifteen B*

*football back seat twenty-one
business thrills twenty D*

*twenty-two M-three recess more difficulties
the flaw in him twenty-five G-one*

*twenty-eight twenty-nine M-four the room
sleep and words thirty G-two*

*confusion thirty-five thirty-six
the young marrieds problems thirty-five H*

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questions of things forty N conscious-*

*forty-two forty-three M-six the city food
ness two never heals forty-five P*

*forty-nine fifty M-seven
third party feelings second thoughts fifty S*

*the end or
the transfer one more time*

*five T the home smells
seven eight M-one*

*ten D manhood guns
recess difficulties fourteen*

*fifteen B business thrills
fifteen M-two football back seat*

*twenty D the flaw in him
twenty-one twenty-two M-three recess*

*twenty-five G-one sleep and words
more difficulties twenty-eight twenty-nine*

*thirty G-two the young marrieds problems
M-four the room confusion*

*thirty-five H questions of things
thirty-five thirty-six M-five systems out-*

*forty N consciousness two never heals
side forty-two forty-three M-six*

*forty-five P third party feelings second thoughts
the city food forty-nine*

*fifty S the transfer
fifty M-seven the end*

it can be broken down further, at least to the month maybe even
to the day.

i admit th'understanding frightens me a little. right now i'm most
interested in conjunctions:

fifteen, thirty-five and fifty. the next one comes up soon. look out.

*(he keeps saying look out to himself. he'll be standing by the
stove 'n making coffee,
'n he'll say: look out.)*

she says: then, why do people swear?

he says: the thing itself is called Tourette's Syndrome,
named for Gilles de la Tourette. keep in mind he's french.
one, unnamed, thinks that areas on Gilles' right were breaking
into language,
where in other times, he would have suffered mere hallucinations.
my theory is that it's just exploration, . . . as in:
why does everybody hum, except for assholes, when everybody
doesnt sing?
this way assumes that things are more or less okay, except for —
drives, as in the gradients between the sunday drive and
that south-pole issue th't keeps the playwrights on their toes. in
this theory the important element is (quote) the opportunity (unquote).
f'r instance, only yesterday i decided for myself: no more incidental music.
as soon as i made this plan, the phone rang. the voice said:
there's money in it for you. i restrained myself from saying:
hot diggity. instead, i said: oh, boy,
i am totally, exclusively, completely'n only into —

as they say — song. who's gonna write the words?
the voice said: well, what we had in mind was something more abstract.
i said: do you mean as in music that supports action that is
unexplained? the voice said: yes. i said:
do you mean i find music from my own motives, and while that
 music is performed
people in costumes will jump around on stage?
the voice said: that's more or less the idea. i said:
fuck you man. next time you're in the bathroom, hang yourself. that's
what i mean by the element of (quote) opportunity (unquote).

she says: does this happen often? *he says:*

well, people on TV say: i just went blank.

she says: 'n how does that affect you? *he says:*

i never believed there was such a thing. then i realized there are
 people who will say:

if you order that fish, y'have to eat it. so, my ideas keep changing.

she says: 's it possible there was no money to begin with?

he says: anything is possible . . . but the fact is:

for one whole day it was gone. it was there. 'n then it was gone. 'n
then it was back. unchanged. *she says:*

are you investigating the chances of an inside job? *he says:*

if we're all in this together, all jobs're inside jobs.

she says: then, who decides what's acceptable?

he says: almost . . . any amount is acceptable.

it almost always happens between the words. words

explain the stage business. pantomime is a special case.

it suppresses words. therefore, it can tell us only what we know already.

it's probably the oldest of all ideas.

she says: so, where is the resistance?

he says: only in the name. he would say:

not gibbon, gibbons! gibbon is a baboon. i didnt think there

was a difference except in sound but that's the way he wanted it.

she says: how did you get to know each other?

he says: i crawled into her room at night.

she says: how did you get out? *he says:*

shinney down the rainpipe, mostly, but one time her father caught me 'n

i had to jump.

she says: 's there anything you call therapy? *he says:*

just a good long walk. *she says:* what other kinds of feelings are described?

he says: there is the feeling that the other is voracious, that

you are in the presence of some devouring force the other is the

instrument of,

and there is the feeling of resentment against that force.

she says: would you call this an alienation.

he says: this is . . . truly a nation of aliens, not the only one, but probably the biggest. so, i guess we would call it an alienation. a friend of mine says it's not a nation at all, that they're all aliens. he points, as a f'r instance, to the redman, as he calls himself, patient, modest in his ambitions, and apparently, just a visitor from asia.

she says: and what about the public property? (*sigh*)

he says: that's a hard one. all i can say is:
in the morning some tiptoe, 'n some dont. (*sigh*)

she says: 'n what about the (quote) mysteries (unquote)?

he says: it's agreed that the main causes are
(quote) wearing out (unquote) and (quote) getting in an accident (unquote), but i think that everybody's worried now about the telephone.

she says: what kinds of tests do you use?

he says: there's (quote) prayer (unquote), of course, but just because we have it we dont have to do it always. dependence means a loss of sensitivity. i dont want us to get cruder 'n not pray. i want us just to practice waiting, because i feel that we could receive a message 'n be relieved of prayer.

she says: 'n how is music related to all this?

he says: well, unlike the movies, which is a corporate idea, or an example of a corporate idea, here there is no plan to speak of. one flake follows the next. each is slightly different, and . . . first thing you know, you've got a pile. like that pile over there. here today. gone tomorrow. only to be replaced by something else we need. but in the movies, or the corporate idea, take two is . . . the main approach, up to and including the thing itself, intact. when you finish the movie, you show it to the person who's in charge of opinion, and you listen to his opinion, which is judgment. this approach is pure, in that the flaw in the aesthetic structure, that is, the certainty that opinion is rampant, that opinion has no bounds or limits, that, finally, under the pressure of opinion, the work would never be completed, is answered, not in apologies to opinion which would only weaken opinion as a standard, nor in the option of another kind of structure — f'r instance, that the maker of opinion should have some notion about what to do —, but in the logic of — if logic is the word — the relativism of opinion. that is, the answer to a bad opinion is to assert that, finally, opinion is nothing. people respect this idea. f'r instance, a teacher once said to me, when i told him i had never had

a favorable opinion about the products of the chrysler motor company, 'n could he understand that, he said, yes, that's what sells cars.

she says: then who do you think was in on the plan?

he says: as i said, the mastermind's the seedy-looking older guy.

there's no doubt the mexican is in it. the doubt is if he's mexican.

then there are the locals. there is somebody not unlike our D. somebody who works at the bank 'n has access to the inner secrets.

then, there's somebody connected to that connection in some way,
maybe even

an older sister, like marie isolde, wh'was the communicator.

then, there were some involved in travel, innocent of what
they're up to,

maybe like those two kids that went off yesterday and eloped.

maybe there were others, but i dont think so. i think that's it.

she says: how is it that you know about the elopement?

(pause) he says: the clipping service.

she says: are we to believe, then that sometime

two nights ago, someone (*remember D*) knowing that the sound
code . . . to open the safe is somehow embedded in . . .

(oh, my, that we should have to use that word in this connection)

a telephone call to the bank manager from the diner

as in the call the whole town knows his wife makes sometimes
(— it has to be something that he says) (— or thinks) ar-
ranged another call or took advantage of another call
to make a recording to open the safe and then
secreted the money in someplace purely dangerous, as, f'r instance,
a moving vehicle of unknown destination for a period of . . .
time, more or less, as in, say, music, 'n
then replaced the money after showing the whole world that
it was missing?

he says: yes. 'n more than that

that person sent the message about the location of the missing money
in the form of the message that it was missing, i.e., a-
bout 12:45 we got a call for an accident out on the
highway. also, at 12:45 we got a call a-
bout two dogs fighting at the bank, but we had this accident
out on the highway t'take care of, 'n nobody was (to our knowledge)
getting hurt at . . . the bank, so we put off the dispatcher.

she says: was that a good choice? *he says:*

there wasnt . . . any accident out on the highway.

she says: we are to believe, then, that the dogfight
was an excuse, a performance, a version,

that the accident of the water thrown on the bank manager
(she said, i remember now, it stopped his motion, but
left his passion totally intact, i.e., G.P.)
was no accident at all . . . (*well, it wasnt on the highway*), that
this was done to cause the manager to go in . . . to the safe
for a change of clothes, in order to discover that
the bank had no money in the bank? *he says:*
yes. *she says:* 'n who would know
that his change of clothes was in the safe? *he says:*
he's the boy. . . scout master after all. *she says:*
can you believe that dogs would stoop to such a thing?

he says: well, Ida, it's hard (*oh, Donnie.*)

(such as the music is, such are the people of the commonwealth.) (*oh, boy.*)

one two three four five
one two three four five T

seven eight M-one recess difficulties
the home smells ten D

fourteen fifteen M-two
manhood guns fifteen B

football back seat twenty-one
business thrills twenty D

*twenty-two M-three recess more difficulties
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fifty M-seven the end*

VI THE CHURCH



THE CHURCH

(After the Fact)

The subject is dismount, *as in:*

Dismount's gonna be the death of me, *or:*

Lancelot dismounts 'n shakes it down, *or:*

To arrive is to dismount. *Joke.*

...

Arriviste come up the hard way, sans horse; *as in:*

I walked from somewhere to Jerusalem, *t'see the city.*

There were hot days, cool nights, and the itch. *Oh, God.*

To be who you are is to avoid the itch: *as in:*

Who knows dot dot dot. *Y'know.*

So we arrived, *nous sommes arrivés*, almost without the itch.

It has just begun in me, *or on me, depending on your background.*

And Ed is in his suit. *God knows what tortures he is*

Feeling. And Dwayne? *How can Dwayne itch?*

Dwayne c'n barely talk. *And Gwyn?*

Do I dare ask? *Do girls itch, Gwyn?*

Where are we? What is this? Twelve hours in the car.

The beer is gone. My head hurts.

*We are part of something larger than ourselves.
That's an insight that you pick up on the road.
Now in the case of Snowdrift, it was different.
She was a pal of Gwyn's, and we called her that because
In winter in your car at night it was easy
To get in her. Joke. I saw her, years later,
Standing on the church steps in her bridal gown.
I was only driving by— so much for winter—
And I knew, without knowing anything, that some
Awful thing was happening. It's true.
He just did not appear. A knight
Disgraced. Banished forever from the table.
I dedicate this one to you, Snowdrift.*

*Long live the Avant- Whoa!
Long live the Avant-*

*Long live the Avant! Avant-Garde.
Whoa! Avant-Garde.*

*Leave at five, arrive at five, with a license,
Finally, to do what? Why are we here?
We're here to marry Ed to Gwyn. That's where we are.
We've found it and we will make it happen.
Now's the time. It is ours.*

Start with the givens is my motto. I am Noel Givens,
Justice of The Peace. Right off my bedroom is my office.
I handle speedtraps, elopements, true signatures
And the like. (*Well said.*) And you, my dear, seem
Frightened. Where are you from?

I am from Wheatlake City, Convex County, and my name is Gwyn.

That's a good answer. And you, Sir, you're tall enough
To be called strapping. What's your name?

*My name is Strapping. Ed Strapping. And these are my
Friends, Dwayne and The Captain of The Football Team.*

I'd look for better looking friends, if I were you.

And, why is the Bride-to-be so (uhn) what is the
Word? *She is a p'monkey, sir.*

*I dreamed one evening long ago of marrying
A p'monkey.*

So, she's the answer to your prayer. And
You, Gwyn, you feel how about this union?

*Those jokes don't bother me, Your Honor. I am
Transparent to the wishes of my Lord. I am put here and it
Pleases me to serve Him. My soul feasts upon the rising
Of the sun. It is His presence. The great arc of the day is
The truth of my life. I learn from it, and I am humble in
That knowledge. And in the evening my body sleeps.*

Well said. Now, what about these characters who are with you?

You, Dwayne, what qualifications have you?

Well, it's not exactly that I have trouble with the words, you know.

It's just that listening to the way it's done I get the idea that

Sometimes it doesn't go together. There is a something and a something,

Then I get the idea that it's not exactly what I thought it was.

Do you know what I mean?

Well, roughly. I've read that stuff, and I know there's some

Problem. But I think you'll outgrow it. And

You, you must be The Captain of The Football Team.

What an honor. *That's right, Asshole.*

I came all the way from home for this.

I have come here with Dwayne, an'while he's far from

Perfect, he is reliable. Somewhere in him-

Self he is pure and reckless. He is someone

You can count on. And in the backseat full of holes

When Dwayne smiles, I am not afraid.

Stay with that style and you will win the Nobel Prize.

Now, let's begin. Do you Ed, take this

P'monkey, Gwyn, to be your lawful wedded wife,

To have and to hold in sickness and in health,

'Til death do you part?

There is no death, sir. There is the everlasting God

Of myself. Think upon yourself, it says.

Give loyalty an' affection to yourself. Blessed is

He, who is a lucky person. Or she.

I lay in bed one night and learned to trust.

It is so clear now there is perfection, that within

Whatever realms we know there is no cause. I am not

Self-taught. It is allowing. To allow.

You're fairly tall to be saying things like that.

And you, Gwyn, d'you take strapping Ed to be your lawful

Wedded husband, to have and to hold in sickness and

In health, until there is no parting?

Yes. You were born just as you

Are? Yes.

Your mother and your father were normal?

Yes. Normal p'monkeys?

Yes. I take it I am right that

They think you are at work. Yes.

We seldom have a case here anymore, where the

Parents are consulted. *(Oh, God.)*

Last night I saw on TV that in China, even, *the determinisms are*

Disappearing. Evidence all over shows *there is a schedule,*

That things are not as endless or evolutionary *as we thought,*

That principal events, like majestic mountains *in the landscape*

Of time, are marks of origin *or destination*

For the form we take now. For a long time *that bothered me.*
For instance, the question of *the sounds we make:*
I asked a friend of mine, who had married *a Chinese man*
Against her family's wishes — they being *not-Chinese,*
Of course — whether there is any idea *in science*
That convinced her on the question of: Why most people *in China*
Are Chinese. And I saw *on TV*
About the business at The Bank, and that the note *was not signed.*
Is it possible the non-signer didn't even *think of it,*
That it's just not something he would ever do? *I thought*
To myself: What about the Mark of Zorro? *Zee.*
He was different from us, we who live here *on the plains,*
The plains of Earth and the plains of Time, *as I said earlier.*
My friend and I were sitting in an alcove *of a house*
That was a dream reinhabited. That is, *the visible inhabitants,*
Our friends, shared the dream with others, *who seemed*
Always just missed. Tangible, *but off schedule.*
The wife who's always in the kitchen is *an example.*
And I saw on TV recently that *a woman*

Whose family had been persuaded to buy *a house*
That is lived in by a ghost — *forgive my language* —
Thought that was only proper. She was quoted *as saying*
That she thought they could co-exist, *as it were*.
Think about the alcove. They are the fondest things *in architecture*,
Bulges from a time when bulges were *in fashion*.
Around us there was a party. The tangibles were *in a din*.
Those were the days when I worked with loudness. Loudness was *the condition of*
The music. It was there and loud, and then I signed it: *Z*.
So, I knew what I was doing. But in the middle of *this din*
She poured her drink on my head. *That was a shock*.
I was amazed to think that she thought she would have an edge *on me*
When it came to thoughts about the question of *being Chinese*.
I was amazed that she would believe in her experience. *Science definitely*
Needs some help. I wanted to know, of course, why *Chinese-ness*
Didn't seem to spread. She might have answered: *Well, it takes time*.
First there was one or two. Now, there are — *a billion*.
Instead, she insisted that I be, *self-taught*.
Such is our use of drugs.

...

At this point in the ceremony the door to the great case
Upon which the Bride has entered, strapped in white against the polychrome
Hard surface of what will become the underside,
Swings open, and there in the niche, the doorway,
Facing us, the congregation, stands Lucille.
Her hair is the color of the sunset.
She steps toward us, the congregation.
It is an awesome moment.
From either side the Bridesmaids, left, and the Groom's Ushers, right,
Step forward to remove her from the shell, the alcove,
To take her and the polychrome hard case apart.
A table appears with a giant cake, on which the
P'monkey Bride and her Groom, in this case, Gwyn and Ed,
Are reproduced in miniature. The cake is lifted
From the table, and Lucille is placed upon the table,
And the cake, which was made by God to fit her
From the chest to hips, is replaced on Lucille.
Her hair falls in splendor, sunset
Reflected on a great cascade. The table
Carries her. It is formed to her,
And she is perfectly at rest. She has the kind of
Gracefulness and repose we see when people sleep.
The mother of the Bride appears, proud and fussy,
And moves the table to the congregation.

And they are fed. They are fed from the cake.

*They eat the cake. The congregation of the watchers eats
The cake. Each watcher eats the cake. They eat the cake.*

And, while this is going on, the Groom's Ushers
Take the polychrome hard case from its vertical
Position, the way it entered in a silent glide, with the
P'monkey Bride strapped in white against the polychrome
Hard surface and inside, as they

Say, Lucille,

And turn it to the horizontal.

They place it on the altar. They make in this arrangement
An horizon of a sort, framed by the glorious
Bouquets. *(or Bowkays, as they say down south.)*

The presence of flowers. And on either side
The Bridesmaids and the Groom's Ushers are
In mourning, if that's the proper word.
But first, let's listen to the marriage sermon.

You can be married without a partner. In tennis you're playing against yourself.

The other person is a convenience. Same with talk.

Different rules: same truth. Conversation must have come . . .

Before marriage. Let me see if I can say it.

First, the rule: Don't Talk To Yourself.

Why is that rule? That rule is a reminder.

That talk . . . is not a part of understanding.

Sound is part of understanding. And among arrangements of sound,

We have talk, which is a habit,

(Well said) preceding mechanical knowledge,

Older than what has come after. So, in talk we face . . .

The abyss of . . . the question of . . .

Arrangement, which, coming after what came before,

Has been, in my idea of things, sanctified,

First in . . . the arrangement of conversation,

Then in . . . the arrangement of marriage,

Finally, today . . . in mechanical arrangements.

Finally, we could, except that there is no Cause in our way of . . .

Understanding things, believe that what has followed in the succession of,

First, agriculture, and then, religion, and

Now, technique . . . I mean the gift and need to extend the

Principle of arrangement to our circumstances, precisely. . .

To our physical circumstances, - - - has followed from the simple

Question: the question of . . . arrangement; and, precisely,

The arrangement of sound. When you stop to think of it,

Sound is the only thing we can arrange. So, the rule

Don't Talk To Yourself has many meanings.

One is: stop arranging things when you're alone.

Another is: don't use for yourself what belongs to all of us.

Second is the rule: Speak Only When You're Spoken To.

It follows the first as marriage followed conversation

And as religion followed agriculture. That is,

It is the rule of the second stage or second era.

It allows that the question of arrangement

Is not an abyss, but a dilemma.

We are enjoined to regard the arrangements and

To choose and further to arrange. (*Well said.*)

Make Sense is the third rule,

The rule of today, in the age of technique.

How far it is from Don't Talk To Yourself to Make Sense.

It is the distance of the history of our understanding. From

Don't Talk To Yourself, which is an eon,

During which eon we found conversation and pretense

And the abyss of the question of arrangement, through

Speak Only When You're Spoken To, which is the second eon,

During which eon we suffered through marriage and religion and the

*Anguish of the question of arrangement as a dilemma, to finally,
Now, Make Sense, which is the third eon,
During which eon we have accomplished ourselves
(Or invented man, as The Philosopher says)
And accomplished technique or the way to mirror the question of arrangement
In our circumstances, precisely in our. . .
Physical circumstances. And what is the guide to our technique?
Why, sound, of course. How can one describe the arrangement of things,
Or the idea of arrangement, except in terms of sound?
And, that is why, finally, we sing. (Well said.)
Take for instance, the story of the slow one and the fast one (or,
The turtle and the rabbit, as they say). We have an intimation of
A mode of arrangement that is not of sound. We might call it
An arrangement of proportions. For instance, at the longest
Distance we can run, there is not much advantage
In time saved (as they say) to running.
What advantage there is is only sanctified in sayings,
As in: a little goes a long long way, or:
A miss is as good as a mile, or: a bird in the hand is
Worth two in the bush, or: losing builds character,*

Or: the straw that broke the camel's back.

None of which is true, of course, no matter what standard you are using.

Language has sense built in. It's easy to

Make sense. To make no sense is possible,

But hard. Language does not have truth built in.

It's hard to make truth, which is to stop the search.

(Well said.) The truth is that running

Lets us come to the huge face of an arrangement

That is the arrangement of proportions, as we've called it.

Remember that the story of the turtle and the rabbit

Is a story, but be careful, even so.

What came before agriculture and conversation as

An understanding of arrangement was straightness. In other words,

Don't Talk To Yourself followed some other rule of

The arrangement of sound that corresponded to or coincided with

The arrangement of space that we call straightness.

In straightness there is no notion of, for instance, contiguity

Or adjacency, except in the simplest sense of

Next to the path. That would suggest . . . (This is hard!)

The arrangement of sound that corresponded to or coincided with

The arrangement of space that we call straightness did not include
The notion of harmony. The arrangement of sound in a world
Designed by straightness may have been prior to the arrangement of sounds as
An experience external to ourselves, or as an experience
Of something external to ourselves. It may have been internal.
The sound of ourselves. Not prior to the idea of arrangement—in fact,
Including the idea of the arrangement of the things of ourselves.
Think on yourself, it says. Listen is just as important.
Now going back to Dwayne and the problem of how it breaks down
Before our eyes, Dwayne says: It doesn't. What we have agreed on,
The link, dissolves, goes into an arrangement that means something
About freedom. (Not too well said, Dwayne, but something.)
The story of the huge face of *an arrangement,*
The arrangement *of proportions,* is told in *the story of*
An arrangement of *our circumstances* on the occasion *of a marriage*
In this town (*or mirage* as they say *in France*).
Here there is *the idea* in the form of *an image* that
Can be called *before the eyes* of the mind that *a marriage*
(Or *mirage* as they say *in France*)
Should be *announced* or performed in *circumstances*

Of least *gravity*. Now, the closest we can *get to that*,
Since there is *nothing really* to jump off of here, *no way*
To understand *the jump* or falling, is in our *empathy*
With the atmosphere, *or the air* as they say. It's *almost*
The only thing there is *around us here*. In other words, *the perfect husband*,
In the physical body *of ourselves*, wishes for *the perfect wife*,
The air, *a lightness*, a relief. *This lightness comes*,
As you well know, *in change*. Change (*Change!*)
Is God. (*Well said.*) The change, *or relief*,
Or Allowing, *is shown* in the storm, *so that to be married*,
To act *in the arrangement* of religion and marriage and *Don't Talk*
To Yourself, *is to receive* the lightness from *the perfect husband*,
To go through *the changing of* the atmosphere, *or air*,
To a state *of lightness*, which precedes the storm *as marriage*
Precedes *mechanical arrangement* and technique. (*Well said.*)
Why are there always *more languages*? Why hasn't Chinese-ness *spread*?
These are the questions *we must ask* ourselves on the occasion *of marriage*.
When, for us, *for our sake*, she and he or whatever *combination*
Are hurried from their *daily life* to the church *to be there*
When the ozone *changes*, when the band starts playing, *when there is lightness*

In the air, when *the perfect husband* finds *the perfect wife*, when
The physical body *of ourselves* greets the change *as God*,
(Well said) *we ask the questions*: Gwyn, P'monkey Bride, *deceased*,
Cold as the stone *or whatever* of the case with *the polychrome*
Hard surface *in which you rest* surrounded by *bouquets*,
(Or *Bowkays*, as they say *down south*,)
Why are there always *more languages*? And you, Ed, *tall driver*
Vegetarian *and theosophist*, who says there is *no death, sir*,
It is *Allowing, to allow*, Why hasn't Chinese-ness *spread*?
Why are the Chinese *mostly still* in China, while those who are *not struggle*
Against their reputation? *Who prevents* us from holding *Chinese ideas*
In Indiana? *Go ahead* and say something silly. *Dwayne says*
There's a problem, *that sometimes* the sound and the word *get disconnected*.
I think that's *what he says*. And The Captain says that *Dwayne is someone*
You can count on. *At this point* in the ceremony, when *the rudimentary*
Question comes, *if any man* or any woman *knows any reason*
Why these two, *Ed and Gwyn*, that God has brought together (*to perpetuate*
The change, *if I may be so bold, Asshole*) *should not be*
Joined in *Holy Matrimony*, let he or she or whatever *speak now*
Or forever *hold the peace*, The Captain says to Dwayne, *go ahead and say it*,

And Dwayne says, *inimitably*, not to stop it, but *to clear the air*,

Dwayne, my name, is three sounds in one word or
(*Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . .*)

Three hills or bumps, a kind of inter-something, where you can't get
(*Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . .*)

Them apart. The words mean Two, or Twoness, two things:
(*Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . .*)

Dwayne, two-one, but there are three sounds and you can't get
(*Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . .*)

Them apart. I keep saying to myself: Dquayne Djuayne
(*Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . .*)

Duwayne Dowayne Dewayne Dhwayne Dwayne.
(*Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . . Dwayne . . .*)

I can't figure out how they got together. (*Well said.*)

This is the last one I am going to do, *I swear*,

This ceremony in which the lid, the polychrome *hard lid*

Is fitted to the case and the p'monkey *Bride*

Who began, remember, at five in the morning, the other *end of*

The day, in the car full of holes, begins the ride *again*.

She has come into the church, the place of the great light, and *approaching it*

She swooned into the arms of the driver, *the tall*

Driver and theosophist and the bane of *vegetables*.

She swooned, and from the swoon two things emerged, *as usual*:

First, the pure and —'um, naked— essence, *that is*,

Lucille, who is consumed by *the watchers*,

That is, the congregation, *that is*,

Us. (*Well said.*)

The second part is the p'monkey Bride *in the hard*

Case called polychrome now closed and blessed *and departed*.

It is important at this point to understand without *fear of darkness*

And isolation that the polychrome hard case is *no more*

An imposition— (*this is hard!*)

—Than is her p'monkeyness. I think *that's right*.

In other words, the ceremony is just that. We are *satisfied*.

I remember, now, the cake. While the cake was in my mouth *I forgot about*

Why are there always more *languages*

And why hasn't Chineseness *spread*.

Meanwhile, Ed, whose future we know too well— *or is that*

The Captain of The Football Team, The Divided Man— *just stands there*,

A driver out of work, a believer in Atlantis— *which also*

Went below the polychrome surface— *just stands there*

In his driving gloves, hands almost to his knees, *the makings*
Of a great teacher. At this point, his mind turns *to his clothing*
And how it fits. The suit. Now he has worn it for almost *forty hours*.
That is, he left home early two days ago with the suit *in the car*
From the night before so as not to worry his mother *with the idea*
That he might not come home again until he was married. *He changed*
At school. (*At what?*) So everybody saw him with the suit *all day*
And assumed, naturally, that he would get married. To whom *there was no*
Question. That was yesterday, as they say, then *last night*
He was too emotional to think about the suit, *except to think*
How good he looked, and before you know it *night turned*
Into day, and he drove to Indiana *or wherever*
He is now, still wearing the suit *and was married*.
The theme is: When you're married *the top should*
Fit the bottom. Maybe match is the word. (*It's done.*)
The last glimpse I had of Lucille was from the altar.
I was looking westward through the congregation, and I
Caught her eye just as she had arisen from the table.
She brushed the crumbs off and stood there for an instant
In the doorway, looking. The consummate performer.
Then, more recently she's turned up in my life

To remind me of the cake again. This time
In winter, summer, whatever, sleeping in the streets and
Always in a kind of grey-green parka. There is
Something between me and Lucille that just won't
Go away. She is always so determined. I'm sure it's
Just with me. I'm sure she's charming with the rest. And
She is always framed. This is something I've cooked up.
She is always framed. Under the box-elder, first.
Then in the case with the polychrome hard lid. Now in the
Doorway. And, more recently than now,
In the parka in the doorway as the doorway. As the
Parka is all parkas, as the parka has
Always been there. For instance, the parka of the flowers
In the field, the whatever-they-are flowers in the field.
That parka comes back as whatever-they-are flowers in the
Field of experience or passing it on. As in: no wonder the rich
Pass it on. Sorry. No wonder it flows in the family rivers.
No wonder we see it, the whatever-they-are flowers
In the field of the movie of passing it on. I am enamoured
Of the television passing on the movie of passing it on.
That's a joke. (*Whoa, Lucille.*)
Then, after the whatever-they-are flowers, the backyard, or
The case with the polychrome hard lid. Those are almost the same.
Then, the doorway as the doorway, as the parka is

All parkas. The point of Lucille,
Now I know, is the way out, if you know what I mean.
The way out of passing it on. That's why she
Has a parka. I'm no different from whoever's seen this
Apparition in the past. She always wears a parka.
Insert here a picture of an Eskimo. You are the
Way out from passing it on, Lucille. And the parka is
Just a sign. So, I'll take grey. Let the Spaniards
Have the creamy yellow stuff. (*Whoa, Lucille.*)
The whatever-they-are flowers were yellow. Then, the
Doorway was darker, if you know what I mean.
But it was still filled with light or some other
Immateriality. Like color. But now it's not.
(This is an interruption. Now listen carefully.
What I'm telling you is true. While I am typing this, whatever it is,
The phone rings. Iris, from downstairs, wants to use the
Typewriter. This is the first I have worked on this account in almost
Six months. It was hard to start. And I have to work through
This machine. I have decided that. So this
Machine is important to me in a way that you can understand, if you
Think about it. So, what is the meaning of Iris? She's not
Too far from Lucille. The one of the whatever-they-are flowers.
Lucille Yahnke. Don't forget the Eskimo
And the parka. Say Yahnke to yourself.

Maybe I'm not supposed to be telling this. I mean
The part about passing it on.) Where were we?
The now Lucille. I mean the parka of the now Lucille.
(Now listen carefully. This is another interruption.
While I am typing this on the machine that Iris wants to use—
And break—it has been creamy yellow. Like the first Lucille.
Or the parka of the first Lucille. Then, when I typed,
Quote, the now Lucille. I mean the parka of the
Now Lucille, unquote, the sun went behind the cloud.
And what was creamy yellow turned to the grey of the now Lucille.
I guess I'm on the right track.) The now Lucille
Stands in the doorway and looks out and smokes cigarettes with filters
And minds her bag. And thinks about her appearance.
The parka is grey or green. She looks upon,
I think, the same things that I see.
I don't believe it's different. Her mind works just like
Mine does. Does work upon itself.
Does contemplate itself. That's why she has the halo.
Or the parka with the hood up. Because her mind
Does contemplate itself. Now I've got it. Lucille in the
Halo of the whatever-they-are flowers in the field of passing it on,
Then in the doorway of light or some other immateriality,
Now in the doorway of the store across the street, smoking
Cigarettes with filters and looking out upon the mirror and

Thinking about her appearance, they are the same, not
Just because of the halo, though that alone would be enough,
But, deeper, because, alike, her mind
Does contemplate itself. All around her is
Passing it on. The ruins. First,
Architecture. Then, agriculture. *(Now, what?)*
Of course, I'm speaking just generally. I don't have time to do all
This in detail. Because, if you could see the now Lucille,
You could understand why sometimes I get scared.
Scared is not the word. Impressed is the word.
I am impressed. Let's go back for a minute to the picture
Of the Eskimo. Imagine the Admiral, after all that
Suffering, finding, finally, the pole, the place
From which it's all down hill, so to speak, and there,
Looking through the camera himself, checking the machine
Upon which his immortality may rest,
He sees the Eskimo. And on the Eskimo the
Halo of the parka's hood, and around the halo
There is no — passing it on.
(Whoa, Lucille.)

VII THE BACKYARD



THE BACKYARD

(T' Be Continued)

Intro two three four five six

seven eight nine ten eleven twelve

thirteen fourteen fifteen sixteen seventeen eighteen

nineteen twenty twenty-one twenty-two twenty-three twenty-four

twenty-five twenty-six twenty-seven twenty-eight twenty-nine thirty

thirty-one thirty-two thirty-three thirty-four thirty-five thirty-six

thirty-seven thirty-eight thirty-nine forty forty-one forty-two

forty-three forty-four forty-five forty-six forty-seven forty-eight Section

A five count two three four five

She makes a double life.

two

She makes two from one and one.

three

She makes a perfect system every day.

four

She makes it work.

five

She stands there in the doorway of her mother's house

six

looking at the grass and sky and at where they meet,

seven

never once thinking thoughts like

eight

it's so like a line,

nine

or, the difference is so powerful,

ten two three four five My

or, which way shall I take to leave.

Mind five count two three four five

My mind turns to my breath, one.

two

My mind watches my breath, two.

three

My mind turns and watches my breath, three.

four

My mind turns and faces my breath, four.

five

My mind faces my breath, five.

six

My mind studies my breath, six.

seven

My mind sees every aspect of the beauty of my breath, seven.

eight

My mind watches my breath soothing itself, eight.

nine

My mind sees every part of my breath, nine.

ten two three four five Section

My breath is not indifferent to itself, ten.

B five count two three four five

She never thinks of possibility

two

or of how probable it is that they have come together.

three

Those thoughts never enter her mind.

four

Nor do thoughts of sports.

five

She has no desire to improve her muscles.

six

For her piano playing is the only mystery.

seven

It's so beautiful, and how they do it no one knows.

eight

She gets catalogues of every sort in the mail.

nine

Everything imaginable is pictured.

ten

She finds her way among the pictures without hesitation.

eleven

Happiness is just around the corner.

twelve

She is entirely without shame.

thirteen The numbers are made of rubber or something like that.

fourteen They stretch.

fifteen They never lose their shape.

sixteen They are ageless.

seventeen They don't need repair.

eighteen two three four five Section

They need attention and respect.

C six count two three four five six

She thinks about two things that I know of.

two One is elevation,

three and that comes clothed in light, so to speak.

four She loathes the dark.

five She sleeps in light.

six She likes highness.

seven Four thousand one hundred twenty-eight feet here.

eight Four thousand two hundred eighteen feet there.

nine And the body of the house itself.

ten Fourteen dollars and twenty-eight cents here.

eleven Forty-eight dollars and twelve cents there.

twelve The other is proportions.

thirteen Coincidence isn't a mystery to her.

fourteen The margin is always wide enough.

fifteen Forty-two or forty with twenty is always sixty-two or sixty.

sixteen And I mean forty-two with twenty can be sixty as well as sixty-two.

seventeen And the other way around.

eighteen Just as ten and twenty can be thirty-two or thirty.

nineteen Or twelve and twenty can be thirty.

twenty She stands there in the doorway of her mother's house and thinks these thoughts.

twenty-one That fourteen dollars and twenty-eight cents is more attractive than fourteen dollars,

twenty-two because of the twenty-eight.

twenty-three No one likes or dislikes zeros.

twenty-four two three four five six Section

And that forty-two or forty is fixed, in some way.

D five count two three four five

She thinks about her father's age.

two She does the calculations one more time.

three She remembers sixty-two.

four Thirty and some number is sixty-two.

five And that number with ten is forty-two.

six She remembers forty-two.

seven Remembers is the wrong word.

eight She dwells on forty-two.

nine She turns and faces it.

ten She watches.

eleven two three four five Section

She studies it.

E five count two three four five

It is the key.

two The mystery of the balances is there.
three The masonic secret lies there.
four The church forbids its angels entry there.
five The gypsies camp there.
six Blood is exchanged there.
seven Mothers weep there.
eight It is night there.
nine Thirty and some number is sixty-two.
ten And that number with ten is forty-two.
eleven That number translates now to then.
twelve That number is the answer, in the way that numbers answer.

thirteen two three four five

That simple notion, a coincidence among coincidences is all one needs to know.

Mind five count two three four five

My mind turns to my breath.
two My mind watches my breath.
three My mind turns and watches my breath.
four My mind turns and faces my breath.
five My mind faces my breath.
six My mind studies my breath.
seven My mind sees every aspect of the beauty of my breath.
eight My mind watches my breath soothing itself.
nine My mind sees every part of my breath.

ten two three four five Section

My breath is not indifferent to itself.

F five count two three four five

She waked at ten.

two

She remembers ten.

three

She left the dark at ten.

four

She waked in light.

five

So forty-two or forty or forty-four is fixed.

six

Fourteen dollars and twenty-eight cents is more attractive than fourteen dollars.

seven

It's just that way.

eight two three four five In-

The firmness of it is a consolation.

sert six count two three four five six

two two three four five six

three two three four five six Section

G six count two three four five six

Three men have loved her.

two

One a decade on the average.

three

Uncertainties are wrong.

four

In this scene there is one shot.

five two three four five six Section

Giordano Bruno comes to mind, whoever he is.

H six count two three four five six

She is in the doorway of her mother's house.

two She faces south.
three We see it two ways.
four First is the house behind her and the great northern constellations.
five She looks away from difference and discrepancy.
six Magnetic north, true north, the north star path . . .
seven It's too like the calculations.
eight Except that ten and forty-two are fixed together.
nine We are looking west.
ten She is on the right edge of the shot.
eleven She is earth.
twelve We are the sun.
thirteen People are gathered in the backyard.
fourteen This is the celebration of the changing of the light.
fifteen They do it as often as they can in summer.
sixteen They come to talk.
seventeen They pass the time.
eighteen They soothe their thoughts with lemonade.
nineteen They say things like:
twenty She never had a stitch that she could call her own, poor thing.
twenty-one And, Carl's still president over at the bank, ain't he?
twenty-two And, now, if I was doing it . . .
twenty-three And, she didn't cook much, never really had the time, you know.
twenty-four And, I wouldn't say that, not at all.

twenty-five They are the planets in this scheme of things.

twenty-six Giordano Bruno's shot.

twenty-seven The problem is the arc.

twenty-eight The changing angle of the shot.

twenty-nine It defies geometry.

thirty The drawings of a many-centered solar system, when we meet them
in the books,

thirty-one make us avert our eyes.

thirty-two two three four five six Section

Heresy is heresy.

I six count two three four five six

We make one great weird curve from the east edge of the backyard
looking west —

two she is on the right edge of the shot —

three across, following the equator of the backyard, to the west edge,
looking east.

four Now she is on the left edge.

five At some point midway, we face,

six both looking at the center.

seven The center is between us.

eight two three four five six Section

Except that for the purpose of the shot, or in the interests of economy,
she doesn't move.

J five count two three four five

She's standing in the doorway of her mother's house.

two The doorway to the back porch.
three The backyard is the south.
four Behind her the great northern constellation rises in the majesty
of its architecture.
five Well, maybe that's a little too much.
six Let's just say that contradictions are behind her.
seven And in the backyard, god, this set of circumstances
eight that is indescribable with our geometry.
nine A picnic of sorts.
ten A celebration of the changing of the light.
eleven And we glide through that chaos
twelve facing her,
thirteen watching her,
fourteen studying her.
fifteen Not circling her, remember.
sixteen Circling, but not circling her.
seventeen She is circling.
eighteen We are circling.
nineteen Now she is on the left edge.
twenty Caught, still, in her accounting of those three decades silently.
twenty-one She is so beautiful.
twenty-two A (quote) pre-industrial (unquote) equation.
twenty-three God, this is sentimental.

twenty-four two three four five Section

K five count two three four five

This is the hour of the mystery of the barnswallows.

two

One, where do they go in daytime?

three

Two, do they never rest?

four

Three, when you buy them in the store, made in China, on the end of strings,

five

they do exactly what they do alive.

six

Four, how is that possible?

seven

The idea of the changing center is not in anything we make.

eight

Our toys run down.

nine

On the other hand, of course, the Chinese are said to not take pictures.

ten

At least, not of the outside.

eleven

Six of one, two times three of one, five plus one of one,

twelve two three four five Section

nine minus three of one, half a dozen of another.

L five count two three four five

It would be perfect if, as we made the great curve

two

through the heavens of the backyard,

three

providentially or accidentally, depending on

four

your point of view, each of the planets would move exactly

five

in the path and at the speed and with the purpose

six two three four five Section

of the expression of the other idea.

M six count two three four five six

Maybe that's too much to wish.

two Giordano Bruno.
three I think they burned him.
four He was too positive.

five two three four five six Section

Fight fire with fire.

N six count two three four five six

two In this shot he is right about the larger order, whatever that means.
three There is the sun and earth and some center that they share.
four All other facts in this heaven,
five One has climbed a tree,
six Two are eating watermelon,
seven One always says it's getting late,
eight One succeeded at the plant,
nine One works at the bank,
ten The specialists.

ten two three four five six Section

They are places hard to fix upon the memory.

O six count two three four five six

two Sundown, one, the time it disappears.
three Gloaming, two, the twilight, dusk.
four Crepuscle, the twilight, three, the half-light.
five Twilight, four, pale purplish blue to pale violet, lighter than
six dusk blue.
Civil twilight, until the sun is up to six degrees
below horizon, enough light on clear days for ordinary occupations.

seven Nautical twilight, until the sun is up to twelve degrees below horizon.

eight Astronomical twilight, until the sun is eighteen degrees down,
more or less.

nine Clair de lune, five, greener and paler than dusk.

ten two three four five six Section

Dusk, six, redder and darker than clair de lune.

P five count two three four five

Dear George, what's going on?

two two three four five

I'm not the same person that I used to be.

End two three four five

six seven eight nine ten

eleven twelve thirteen fourteen fifteen

sixteen



*Selections from a series of informal talks given by
Robert Ashley in 1989 at the Mills College Center
for Contemporary Music in Oakland, California,
and from other conversations.*

ROBERT ASHLEY TALKS ABOUT PERFECT LIVES

COMPOSING MUSIC

is the process of constantly making a decision about when you're going to update what you've just done. When you play the note, or sing the note, or *push* the notes down, you have no choice . . . you can only get so close, and then the note appears as a real thing outside of you. At that moment, you've got to decide whether you're going to reconsider that note, or go on to the next thing. My point of view on all the pieces I've presented is that they are variations on how much I allow myself to reconsider. Some of them are a direct output from whatever that organization of mind is that produces the music. Others are elaborate, elaborate reconsiderations.

For example, the first episode of *Perfect Lives*, *The Park*: Those words were not changed, except for the most trivial aspects, from the moment I sang them to myself. But I didn't know then what role they had in the opera. In other words, in writing *Perfect Lives*, I had this practice: I'd go into a room, close the door, and start singing. And then, when I couldn't retain that image any longer, when I'd lost it, as it were, I'd stop. But until I'd had the experience of doing it for a couple of the episodes, I actually didn't know that *that* was producing a coherent form. I thought the sound of the individual chords and the melody were nice, but that I would have to go back

and rebuild it. I didn't realize, at first, that I actually *had* something, even though I had a kind of child's faith in it. It's like learning to do a flip. I'd always thought it could be done that way, but I'd never had the experience of trying it. Because of the conservative idea toward what music is in our society, I'd been taught that I shouldn't do it that way. But that's *exactly* what I should have done. Having had that experience, I can tell you that with most of the things I do now, I start at the beginning, work to the end, and I *never* think twice.

YEARS

ago, I became interested in the notion of involuntary speech. My way of approaching *Perfect Lives* evolved out of that interest. I had been observing people—particularly in New York—and noticed that many many people were talking to themselves, publicly. Since I talk to myself privately, there seemed to be only a thin line between *their* madness and my madness. (Except that I thought of mine as music.) At the same time, an idea that I was trying to confirm for myself was that there may be no problem, no discontinuity, between the thinking mode in music, and the way you correct that mode to make it something that everybody else recognizes. It's the question of the origin of consciousness.

As I said, the first thing you have to face when you compose music, is how soon, and in what way, you have to reconsider what you've done. An ideal is not to have to reconsider at all. Few composers go that far. Beethoven is a hero because he never *stopped* reconsidering until somebody took the piece away from him. Once you opt

for reconsidering, there's really no reason to stop. . . . But you all know that when you *talk* you just open your mouth and the words come out, as I'm talking now. Basically, I don't know what I am going to say, and I'm as interested in it, or as disinterested in it, as you are. It's completely original to this moment, and we can all share in it.

The problem is to find a way to take what comes. Many composers were working on this idea when I began. What developed were different strategies for taking what comes. Then, at the time that I was thinking about making *Music with Roots in the Aether* (this was around 1970), everybody that I wanted to talk to, people of my age generally, were all dealing with a radical turn toward conservatism. I watched people dealing with it. From my way of seeing things, what I call Reaganism started in music long before we got Reaganism in politics. Naturally artists get there first. We all had to deal with it in ourselves. And everybody reacted in their own way. But practically, we all retreated from a belief in how far you could go thinking on your feet. Extemporization, as a form of wisdom, collapsed. Everybody got into the form of composing called reconsidering.

IN THE FIRST

place, you as a composer have a rather large vocabulary going. You've got to know what to do with it. It's not what you've been taught—in the conservative sectors—that you have a *poverty* of materials. You're all healthy, you're all strong enough to make sounds until the end of time. The only problem you have is deciding whether your sound is any good. What I'm encouraging you to do is not to think about that

too much, not to reevaluate too much the sounds, but just to examine them, and see what the structure is. See what's actually there, before you start this process of trying to ask yourself whether Nancy Reagan would like it, or Mrs. Bush. Just take the whole big chunk first, and then break it down. Follow what you know about it to where it goes. . . . The music's there. I'm not trying to be weird, but *it's there*. I was taught that I didn't have anything, and it was my job to work hard and get something, and that's just not true.

FOR ME IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE

to make anything interesting if I make it by myself. I have to have a band—a group of people—to make music with. I want to tell you how to go about getting a band together, how I did it.

I wanted to be serious about making music, not to be one of those people who has an ironical relationship with it. I had a catalogue of ideas that I had arranged in three groups: The first group is *Atalanta (Acts of God)*. It concerns itself with three men. The idea of that opera, the schematic thing I had evolved, was to try to make musical ideas that would hold up in anecdotal form, anecdotes that naturally related to our roots. The second group is called *Perfect Lives*, and that was a collection of other kinds of narratives that were not big enough to be anecdotes. They weren't attached to anything. When I was putting them together I realized they were mainly things that people had *said* to me, or ideas that were very particular to a person I knew. It was a collection of sayings. In the last group of operas, called *Now Eleanor's Idea*,

the unit of storytelling gets to be even smaller. It is more and more broken down. Those last four operas are much more abstract.

I started with the middle opera, *Perfect Lives*. I had to make some compromise about how much realism I could put in, since I didn't have a large production budget. So I reshuffled it until the basic theme was an over-the-hill entertainer and his somewhat younger pal on the Midwest circuit, who find themselves in a small town, playing at the Perfect Lives Lounge, telling stories about the people of the town. They become friends with two local characters, the son and daughter of the sheriff. The four of them hatch a plan to do something that, if they are caught doing it, it will be a crime, but if they are not caught it will be Art. The idea is that the son of the sheriff, who is the assistant to the manager of the bank, will make it possible for them to take all the money out of the bank for one day. And then they will put it back. They've set themselves a challenge, but it's outside the realm of crime; it's not like Bonnie and Clyde. There's a kind of metaphysical meaning for the removal of the money.

The caper is: The four discover that Gwyn, one of the tellers in the bank, is going to elope on a certain day with Ed, and in order to elope they have to go east into Indiana. Their town is located right on the Mississippi River. The assistant manager discovers that the manager calls home every day (because he thinks his wife is having an affair), and the calling home contains the sound information that will open the safe. They decide that they will take the money out of the bank, put it in the elopement car, and bring it back the next day. The stories in *Perfect Lives* are all stories about encounters between people who, to various degrees, know what's going on. . . .

That idea simplified for me the basic production, and limited the size of my “band” to four characters: a narrator, Raoul; Buddy, The World’s Greatest Piano Player; and the two locals, Isolde and her brother “D,” who also double as the lovers, and all other couples in the piece.

I HAD DECIDED

I wanted to be able to score the possibilities for the television direction of *Perfect Lives*, not to decide what the imagery should be, but to allow those two things to go together: the words/music, and the imagery, in a way that would not be like MTV—although MTV didn’t exist then—but to get away from 1950’s experimental collage.

I started working with the idea of a template of durations that obviously, predictably, went from the largest to the smallest unit of the subdivision. I wanted to be able to take care of the biggest form and the smallest form in the score.

What I came up with was measures whose length corresponded to a certain character or characters in the opera. Not as a Wagnerian thing, but so that when we were dealing with a certain character there would be a consistency of intentions on the part of everyone involved: the video person, “Blue” Gene Tyranny, me, the audio mixer, everybody. It amounted to taking something like male/female, negative/positive, in alternation throughout the piece.

Everything throughout is at seventy-two beats per minute. The seventy-two was chosen because it allows for very simple calculations to make the relationship between film, video, and the music. And that seventy-two beats per minute goes through the whole of the three operas: *Atalanta (Acts of God)*; all of the seven episodes of *Perfect Lives*; and all of the four operas of *Now Eleanor's Idea*.

Because of the two, three, four modules, I could do very simple calculations about things like frame sampling in the video and ways of changing the feel of the seventy-two in the music. But, of course, the challenge is to keep the seventy-two from getting on your nerves. I thought that could be solved in a variety of line lengths.

For instance, the first episode consists of lines that are 13 beats long. Those 13 beat lines are made up of 8 beat lines and 5 beat lines, with the 5 beat line always appearing as the second of the pair. The second episode continues throughout with the same 5 beat line. And, the third episode is in 9 beat lines, continuing the 5 beats and adding a 4 beat line (to anticipate the symmetry of the way the opera ends), and those combinations of 5 and 4 alternate throughout the episode whenever the narrative jumps to a future time in the plot.

In the fourth episode, the 4 beat line is joined to a 3 beat line, and these 7 beat combinations alternate, 4s and 3s, 3s and 4s, according to which of the two characters, Rodney or Buddy, is speaking in the dialogue. At this point in the opera, the plot “turns around” (into the past tense, as it were, since we have gone beyond *the moment* which is at the heart of the plot).

The last three episodes use symmetrical kinds of meter. The fifth episode is a 4 beat line in triplets, the beat divided into three parts. And the sixth episode is a simple 4 beat line. The 72 is divided in twos, which can in turn be divided by triplets. This is the most “intense” form of putting syllables to music . . . there are the *most* syllables per line and the most extreme syncopation of those syllables.

The seventh episode returns to a combination of the symmetrical and the asymmetrical, but in a different way. The “half” of the 72 beat unit (the eighth-note of the previous episode) is used in groups of three—in other words, a triplet at 48 beats per minute—and that triplet is used in both 5 beat lines and 6 beat lines.

It’s much easier to *draw* a description of this plan or to demonstrate it musically than to describe it in words, and it would probably make more sense, too. It is important as a way to organize the tempos of the opera. I arrived at it only after an *enormous* amount of discussion with myself.

I was still trying to figure out how to make a score template that a video director wouldn’t be offended by, so we made rather arbitrary divisions of the screen; we “mapped” our monitor screen for each episode and tried to shoot everything according to those maps.

The basic *idea* of that plan, of the visual templates, is that it starts from—that is, in the first episode—the simplest division of the thing, in two . . . and it keeps adding possibilities with each episode. . . .

"BLUE"

and I worked according to the plan. I began working with Peter Gordon to get a better idea of the sound. Jill Kroesen and David Van Tieghem started singing with us. Then I got a chance to do a half-hour television pilot, titled *The Lessons*, and I decided I'd do a sort of index of all these templates, both the visual templates and the audio.

We went to Galesburg, Illinois, with Carlota Schoolman and John Sanborn and shot the outdoor locations. We started doing camera on the performers, to see if this thing was really going to work: to try to make the piano playing look like the landscape, and to try to make the landscape look like the person singing. In other words, we were performing it and working on it at the same time.

Between 1978 and 1983 we performed *Perfect Lives* twenty-seven times live in the United States and in Europe. In 1982, the band and I were invited to perform in London for a week's run at the Almeida Theatre, and while we were there Peter Greenaway made a documentary film about the opera for British television. It was then that we sold the rights to Great Britain's Fourth Channel, and *Perfect Lives* received its broadcast premiere there in April 1984.

WHEN I STARTED

this opera, I had, naturally, the foolish idea that I would do symbolic tempos. This immediately suggests metrical modulations, and other kinds of things, all of which are too hard to do. There was a period of about six weeks when "Blue" and I were

working every day, trying to work out this problem. Finally, one day I decided to make everything be at the seventy-two. That became the plan for “Blue” Gene’s keyboard improvisations. He made up the harmonic substance of those measure combinations.

When we’d finished, we had one front-to-back track of “Blue” playing the piano, and a video tape in the geometrical landscapes, and we made this deal: Dean Winkler, an amazing video engineer who had just finished designing the most *beautiful* television system I had ever seen, was a great fan of ours. He persuaded a television production studio to give us some time. He took a three-month leave of absence to work on *Perfect Lives*, and we went in there every night at 6 PM and we didn’t leave until the next morning. John Sanborn, the video director, came in each night with two huge volumes of his notes about how *Perfect Lives* should look televised.

John Sanborn knew the libretto better than I did. I mean, he knew every nuance. The idea, in the beginning, was to set up seven “isotapes,” that is, seven tapes that would run synchronously. The isotapes would contain all the prerecorded images for each episode. The images upon which each episode is based don’t tell the story or have eventfulness, but are significant for that episode—an illustration of some deeper image, inherited or passed down, that has meaning. The isotapes would all have cut points, and our original idea was that you could go from this tape into that tape, and things would match . . . they would be cut to match. This was real 1970s *idealism*. The idea was that different directors could take the piece and make different things out of it: One guy could go very abstract, and one guy could just feature “Blue” on piano . . . that was a *great idea*.

THE ADVANTAGE OF PLAYING

it so many times in public was that, in spite of our limited production, the templates actually worked. They expand and contract very slowly. So, we had the seventy-two beats, and “Blue” could decide how many beats on a certain chord he was going to use.

The singing part that I couldn’t get anybody else to do, the part of the narrator, I did myself. That part, shot in my loft in New York, was very easy to squeeze. And what you hear in the video (which I am very proud of) is the three basic ingredients: the rhythm tracks, the piano playing, and the vocal parts, which are all run on independent schedules. And we all more or less get to the same place at the same time. . . .

THE IDEA OF THE METRICAL

templates and the visual templates makes the pieces be paired first and last, inside, to the middle, where time turns around. The form of the piece is very roughly patterned on the notion of a Midwest evangelical church meeting . . . from what I can remember from my childhood.

I used to go to “Holy Roller” meetings, and what I can remember I tried to put into the opera, particularly the idea of putting more and more language into each episode. In other words, the sixth episode has almost twice as many syllables as the first. . . . The second episode is an exception (and the seventh). I decided I would recapitulate the *whole opera* in the second episode.

THE CENTRAL EVENT OF THE WHOLE

set of operas—the “moment”—occurs in the third episode of *Perfect Lives*, The Bank. Gwyn and Ed elope, taking The Captain of The Football Team (“D”) and his friend Dwayne along for support.

Back at the bank, during the elopement, it is discovered that the money is gone. Something *unusual* occurs (a dog fight), the bank manager goes into the safe to change his clothes (everybody knows he keeps a change of clothes there), and when he comes out and announces that the money is gone, each of the tellers, Jennifer, Kate, Eleanor, Linda, and Susie, has what amounts to a religious experience. They see things. Kate sees what we are seeing, the plot of *Perfect Lives*. Eleanor sees something that is the basis for *Now Eleanor's Idea*. The other three see, separately, the three men of *Atalanta (Acts of God)*. And, of course, there is a question of whether or not this is actually a real event.

IN THE SPRING

of 1977 I had the chance to do a record for Lovely Music. It was a kind of catalyst event. I had at first thought I was going to make a movie. I knew I wanted to write these portraits of my friends. But it was hard and, finally, I realized I wasn't going to be able to get the imagery into a film. Then it sorted itself around certain characters. The basic idea became this middle-aged guy who goes to a small town with his musician friend. They get attached to certain people in the town, and everybody misunderstands *why* they are attached.

I was going out to California two months every year as director of the Center for Contemporary Music, and “Blue” Gene was still there, too. That spring I came out to California with these piles of paper that were the beginnings of various portraits I’d been working on. Since I only had about ten days to record something, I chose the simplest portraits. I went into a room, and I sang the words as I had heard them again and again in my mind. This became *The Park* and *The Backyard*.

Then we tried to create *Buddy, The World’s Greatest Piano Player*. “Blue” *is*, of course, the greatest piano player in the world. One night he played sort of like Liberace; the next night a different style. We did this for about a week. He was getting absolutely beautiful things. But I said, “This isn’t going to hold up for the next seven years, you know, ‘Blue,’ you’ve got to *be* this guy.” Finally, we got the character down. That was the beginning of *Buddy*. Then *Buddy* and the middle-aged guy went on the road. We did *exactly* what it says in the opera: We went to these little small towns and he’d play piano and I’d tell these stories.

I HAD THE FIRST ONE

and the last one done. The second one, *The Supermarket*, came next because I wanted to get the old people in there at the beginning. I had the idea for the third one, *The Bank*, and I wrote it very quickly, because we were performing it somewhere. And then I wrote *The Bar*. The first four came in order, and then everything went crazy. By the time I got to *three*, it was getting too complicated for my small mind. I had all these things leftover, and *that’s* when it started becoming what it is now.

The words and music for *The Living Room* had been forming in my mind for some time. I was driving home from Mills College one day to my rooms at the Lake Merritt Hotel, and I tried to push from my mind the idea that I would improve on those sentences. I sat down that day and wrote it out from beginning to end.

WE WERE IN

asymmetrical times — 13, 5, 9, 7 — for the first four pieces. Obviously, then, we had run out of asymmetrical times, there just weren't any more. For the next three pieces we either had to go backwards and repeat those times, or go in some other direction. What happened at that point was that we changed the rhythmical pattern over to symmetrical time.

The thing about the asymmetrical times for long songs — that is, songs that last about a half-hour — is that asymmetrical time is very very beautiful. The coincidences are so weak, the actual structural cadences are so ephemeral, that you can just go on forever. I mean, if you get things going in say, thirteen, *there is no time*. . . . Or if you do things in sevens, you can just keep turning over that three and four *forever*. . . . whereas if you do things in 4s, or 2s, or 6s, it becomes very heavy. You can make a very strong statement in symmetrical time, that lasts a particular length of time, which is sanctioned by the culture. You can extrapolate from that, for your concert performance, a bigger format, but you can't go beyond the basic cadence that is built into the piece. You can't go from a simple symmetrical time into a long story.

It seems to me that when I hear people doing the most *interesting* thing for them to do, in the most *exotic realms* of popular music — I'm talking about people like Michael Jackson — the most important thing he is doing is he's trying to break down that time. He's trying to shatter the grip of that symmetrical time, without going into 5s and 7s that cannot be put together easily. You can't stay out there on the stage for two and a half hours if everything is going 4/4, it makes you crazy. You have to think of a way that it's interesting for you spiritually. Otherwise you might as well be driving a car.

GEOMETRICAL

layering is very basic to multi-track music recording. First, you divide the template by the tempo, and then you go into the harmonic subdivisions of that tempo, and that becomes a fixed template. It's like paint-by-numbers. You just fill that template with any kind of instrumentation you want. . . . Then, the next stage is to fill that template with words. Each of the songs is made up of a bunch of little songs of different lengths. Then there's an overall metrical template for each of the seven songs. The word patterns are set up according to the inflections that can fill that template. The template governs the rate of speech and the inflection quality. That becomes the music for the narrator.

I want the saying of the words, the singing of the words, to sound like another instrument. It's not like a voice-over in films. I worked with balances because I don't want the music to sound like accompaniment to my narration. . . . When you're lucky, the shape and theme go together.

WE DIVIDED

the screen into seven equal bands vertically and six equal bands horizontally. The templates in that geometry were a way for us, as musicians, to communicate with the visual people. I had the idea that for each episode there would be a characteristic camera movement, a dynamic, and the camera dynamic would be illustrated graphically in a pattern on the screen. (When we shot the scenes, we made pieces of plastic with the templates drawn on them, and we pasted them to the monitor so that we could align the landscape in the camera to the template.)

The first episode uses the bottom line of the six horizontals, the horizon, and the camera movement is a continuous pan left, a “seeking.” In the second episode, there is the horizon *and* the triangle or pyramid of lines converging at the top. The dynamic is the “aggressive” zoom in.

In the third episode, the way that the pyramid divides the screen into seven parts becomes a grid (6 x 7) and the camera dynamic is a continuous “tilt” up—the feeling of wonder, or detachment. In *The Bar*, all the horizontal images go away, so you’re just dealing with the vertical divisions, plus the picture. And the camera instruction is that all the *new* material comes in from the outside, from the outside edges; it’s pulling back, “rhetoric.”

This process keeps happening until you divide the screen into equal volumes, which is the fifth episode. *The Living Room* is a “study” in symmetry; equal volumes vertically or obliquely, but not horizontally. It’s the two-shot. Then, the rotation of the equal

volumes in the sixth episode becomes the spherical thing, the rose-shaped window of The Church. And the camera position and its movement is to exaggerate that sphere.

In the last episode, if you can imagine the sphere being a third of the surface, symmetrically — since the last episode is in sixes, that is, medieval perfect time — if you think of the circle as having the same symbolic value, then if she, Isolde, makes it to heaven, you've defined a sort of doorway. In The Backyard, there is the doorway defining a third, a third, a third.

THE NARRATIVE MASTER SHOT

in the whole of the piece, the three and a half hours of *Perfect Lives*, is that each episode consists of details from one look at the world, one musical breath as it were.

You are in the middle of the United States, on the eastern side of the Mississippi in southern Illinois, and you're looking south. The camera is looking south. The tellers in the bank are all facing south. The bank is facing south. The tellers are watching this magical thing happen, so everybody is facing south, except the antagonists, the middle-aged guy and the piano player with his dogs.

Then the camera turns toward Indiana where it's possible to elope. And the lovers get in that car, which has holes in the bottom. The camera looks down through the holes. Then we drive to Indiana, and when we get to Indiana the camera turns up, and there's the preacher. Now we're looking at things from the point of view of Ed

and Gwyn. The preacher marries them and the camera pulls back from there to reveal them in their medieval vows. And then, those equal volumes rotate.

In the last episode, the camera enters from a “foreign” point of view and introduces itself as a “character,” watching what’s happening in the opera from the inside. The camera dynamic is a compound truck shot; that is, the camera *and* what it’s looking at are both moving. It’s the idea of two heavenly bodies when one appears to be rotating around the other, but actually they are *both rotating*, around each other and around a moving center.

Isolde is standing in the doorway (“the doorway of her mother’s house”). The doorway is one of the moving heavenly bodies. The camera — the other heavenly body — is making an arc through the backyard, looking at the doorway. We are always watching Isolde. The camera enters from the east edge of the backyard (returning from Indiana) and moves across the backyard to the west edge, looking east. Since we are always watching Isolde, who is facing south (as *we* were in the first episode), this is a kind of closing of the circle.

THERE HAVE BEEN

some very shrewd and ironical uses of, quote and unquote, opera form in television that have produced wonderful pieces. At the time we were engineering *Perfect Lives*, I would go into the studio in the evening, and by the time we’d got the studio

set up it was time for the reruns of “All in the Family” on television. I’d never seen “All in the Family.” I mean, I knew who Archie Bunker was, but that was all. So, every night I’d watch it just before we’d begin work on *Perfect Lives*. You know, I’d be eating my sandwich and drinking a Coke and watching “All in the Family.” And I thought, this guy is doing very crude operas. It’s just like *Perfect Lives*: There are the two kids, there’s the middle-aged guy, and there’s the world’s greatest piano player — his wife.

And the fantastic thing is, they set her up every night for an aria. It’s just like you were trying to explain opera to three-year-olds. They set her up, and then she does her piece. You know, Archie sits down, he does his piece, and then there’s this and this, and the first thing you know you are looking at your watch, it’s about seventeen minutes into the show and it’s time for Edith to do her aria. Just like Maria Callas. She does this amazing thing, and bam! the show is over. It’s like Mozart. Of course, Norman Lear got it from George Burns and Gracie Allen, but “All in the Family” is actually operatic.

THE EXPERIENCE OF HEARING

an opera is that you accumulate a lot of details that are not very significant in themselves. No one of the details in an opera (or in a novel) is a mind-boggling detail. But things just keep coming until you have a huge pile of them. That’s when they start meaning something.

For me, the libretto doesn't have in it that extreme refinement of language that one would find in a shorter form. I'm trying hard, in *Perfect Lives*, to reproduce the music of the way people talk. It's not poetry, it's song. It's song in the same way that, I suppose, *The Iliad* was a song. It's just a song — if you read any one line, it's not that interesting in itself, but if you read a hundred they start to make sense. It gets into your mind. It's not really a refinement of language, it's just a huge number of details that make up a story. And the details in my case happen to come from their association with musical patterns.

THERE IS ONLY ONE

television audience, and it's two people. Watching television by yourself is a little bit dirty. And *three* people, well, the point is that the people who put the programs on TV, they think about how many *pairs* of people are watching. . . .

I don't think we're going to do American opera on stage at the Met. I might be wrong but I don't think so. I think that our opera should happen in our living rooms. I don't think that the moral burden that television puts on you is any different from what is put on you by the San Francisco Symphony.

When *Perfect Lives* premiered on British TV, London's Channel Four, they broadcast it on what in Britain is called "late night television," at 10 or 10:30 in the evening. The premiere of *Perfect Lives* was the last thing they did every night for a week. They

got a *very good* response. I got fan letters from Wales! And then they replayed it the next year, and then Austrian television played it, and they got a good response too.

John Sanborn was told when he visited Europe that it was the most imitated piece of new television. Of course, it's largely because of John Sanborn's outrageous genius, and "Blue" Gene and the whole deal. . . . But, it has not been shown on television in the United States, and that's a problem.

THE HARD PART

is to make it so that when the two people watch the television screen, they've got to have the feeling that it's not a peculiar thing for them to be doing. They've got to have the feeling that there are many many *pairs* of people watching the same thing. Everyone is two at a time. There is no social interaction, you can't mingle with other people at intermission. There is no endorsement from lots of bodies around you. So, you've got to feel like it's okay for you to be watching, and that everybody else is watching too.

MTV has that problem. It's not the easiest thing in the world to make good rock video. It's weird enough to be with ten thousand people, and you've got a bad ticket, and you can't see Michael Jackson way down there, but *at least* you are with the 10,000 other people, at least you feel like it's a *real* thing. So when you've finished an MTV piece, it's got to feel like it's a publicly endorsed thing. Even if it's just three minutes long.

I KNOW PEOPLE WHO COULD NEVER

get up in front of people and talk because their thoughts are very short—they're very *interesting* but they're very *short*. These people are not even interested in stringing a bunch of thoughts together. They have brilliant thoughts but they only last for a few words.

Then there are other people like John Cage who has a huge library of things that are different lengths, and he pulls those out and does them, without respect to anything except how much energy he's got that day. Then there is the famous Bucky Fuller type. They just get talking and they talk for about twenty hours. They never run out of things to say. . . .

Everybody understands all the theoretical and academic reasons to explain why we understand each other, but in fact we don't understand each other very well at all. I actually don't care whether anybody understands me. I care in the personal sense, I don't like to have my feelings hurt; but in a conceptual sense, I don't care. I literally don't care. I could quit and drive a school bus tomorrow, except that I would like to be around musicians. As long as I can arrange my life so I could always be around a musician, I'm happy.

In coming to this attitude in my middle age, I decided I was going to *do* these things that exist in my mind. And I'm going to do it whether anybody likes it or not. So, the scheme, or the method, that I've tried to describe only worked because it's interesting to *me*. I don't expect it to communicate really. I used the scheme because it had

symbolic meaning for me. All of the narratives, all of the forms of the narratives, and what they allow the musicians to do, all come from the point of digression. In other words the ending is not predicted in what the beginning contains. . . . I'm interested in the peculiarity of looking at history from the Midwest facing east, toward Europe. When you discuss yourself, you always face east.

THE PLOT

of this whole group of operas, in the way of organizing the ideas, was that the first opera, *Atalanta (Acts of God)*, would be anecdotal, in the sense that when you come from Europe, you tell complete stories about where you came from. You say, "Well, back in the old country. . ." and you tell this whole *long story*. That's *Atalanta*.

Then you cross the first mountain range, the Appalachians. And when you come out the other side, you come down into the valley of the Midwest. You actually detach then from that anecdotal history. Realistically, you *lose* it. You can't keep telling the story about coming from Germany if you live in Illinois. You can be German, you can be Swedish, but if you say that you are, everyone laughs because you have lost it by coming across those mountains. There is a long long flat place, which is *Perfect Lives*.

And then, you have to go over the next mountain range, the Rockies. When you go over that one, you get to California. And when you get to California, when you come

in from the Midwest, in spite of the fact that we have jet planes, you can feel the California mentality, which is infected with the sadness of the irrevocable choice to be there. It was hard enough to get there and there is no going back.

You got to Los Angeles a hundred years ago and you were there for the rest of your life. You cannot come to California without feeling that sadness. You can jet-set all around L.A., you can go to the great restaurants, and drive eighty-thousand-dollar cars, and you feel this sadness in your mind. Because you are here to stay. You aren't cut off from Berlin, you aren't cut off from the great civilizations of Europe, but you are cut off from Chicago, you're cut off from New York. The last four operas, *Now Eleanor's Idea*, are all about that feeling, about what to do now. The thing that saves it is when you get to L.A. you meet the guys who came around the other way. The Spanish people.

The songs from *Atalanta* each have a specific harmonic form. They are modular units, you can expand them or contract them to make them fit the anecdote and the formal nature of the anecdote, which is very European (you know, Europe has all the structures and we have all the songs). In *Atalanta*, the songs can accommodate whatever story you want to tell, like you can add rooms to your house but you're still living in the same house. In other words, the form of the music has to accommodate that quality of storytelling.

But, *Perfect Lives* is just the great Midwest, and no story has a beginning or an end. It's all digressions. For the musician, it's hard. It's a different idea from having

a specific form. By the time you get to *Perfect Lives*, you don't know where you are. No story has a beginning, it's all digression, it's digression what "Blue" Gene does, it's digression what everybody does, every time. The trick of performing that piece is that we literally never know what we're going to do until we hear the first note.

I TRY TO KEEP A PLACE

in mind for the music. If you were Richard Strauss, you would be imagining the orchestra and the situation in which your music would be played. I don't think it's entirely superficial. I think it has to do with people imagining the reverberation. I don't think you can write good music that is unattached to a purpose and a situation. I think you've got to attach it to where you think it might be heard, otherwise it becomes academic, imitative. I think that the originality of music comes from the certainty of where it's going to be and who is going to be there. And it's a very real thing.

I think it's obvious in thinking about American composers who make music for orchestras that they don't have any experience. You can always hear in the music what the composer thinks about who will be playing it and where it will be heard. You can hear the *uncertainty* in the best technical orchestral music. You can hear that lack of certainty in American composers that you would never hear in, say, Stockhausen. American composers have no hope of ever hearing their music played by an orchestra. It's a totally fictitious activity. I think one reason people in my

generation have been so radical about that problem is because it got to be such an embarrassment.

For example, if you were in the situation of Charles Ives in the 1940s—he had no reason to imagine anything but an orchestra concert. But me—I had never been to an orchestra concert until I was twenty years old. I didn't know what an orchestra sounded like. I had already become a practicing musician, and I didn't even *know* who Beethoven was. When I went to my first orchestra concert, I cried. I mean, I literally burst into tears, a twenty-year-old grown man. I burst into tears because I had never heard that sound before. I couldn't *believe* it.

But then, a lot of things changed, changed for everybody. And people started making music for themselves. And, as a result of that mood, having thought about it for a number of years, the solutions became very radical. And now you have the Pauline Oliveros solution, and you have the David Behrman solution, and the Alvin Lucier solution, et cetera. Everyone has a special solution that doesn't resemble Boulez.

YOU HAVE TO INVENT

the circumstances for your music now. You can *make* the circumstances in the information media. As you know, in most of our successful media, things are done in format. The first time I noticed it was in connection with format radio, with the rise of broadcast news media and popular music records on radio, as an environment for *advertising*. To sell products. And the most successful situation for popular music

in the late fifties and early sixties was radio with a format of totalitarianism in the extreme. That format is still adhered to, although we don't see it as totalitarian anymore. But when it first came on, it was really earth-shaking. We were scared, because obviously people thought of themselves as being free-willed.

When someone took over a station and wanted it to be a rock station, he'd hire one of these legendary format people, who would lay down how to do it, down to the second. The word went out to the producers of pop records that there was a very specific expectation of how *long* the sixteen bars, or eight bars should be before the first word in a song.

With that knowledge, with that design on songs, the DJs could line up the records end to end on cassettes and they would know exactly how much time they had between the end of the last word, or the segue word on the last record, to the first word on the next record. And in that amount of time they could put a logo, or the weather. They would have to rehearse and rehearse until they got that rap down, absolutely flawlessly, before they could get a job.

That attitude became totally pervasive, and still is. What I'm trying to do now is to condition myself into that environment, so that these operas will get into that environment, on television. It seems to me that this is one political aspect of my work. Before I started working on these operas, I drew up a spec sheet of considerations. And one aspect of the form was that I took a given variable in my life, tempo, and made it conform to the seventy-two beats per minute as the most modular format.

THE WAY

Atalanta (Acts of God) connects to *Perfect Lives* comes from a wonderful idea that was suggested to me by Lawrence Brickman, who directed the staging of *Atalanta* as a performance, and who directed the video pilot program, *Atalanta Strategy*.

When the errant flying saucer comes to Earth to witness the marriage of Atalanta (the greatest woman on Earth) and to examine the three golden apples who have changed her mind (Max Ernst, Willard Reynolds, and Bud Powell), the saucer is charged with the job of bringing the “apples” to an “examination station”—a sort of truck weighing station here on earth—without damaging them, and without Atalanta knowing that they are gone. In other words, the examination is to happen in zero time. Flying saucer magic.

The flying saucer, somewhat ineptly, misses the *time-location* of the Atalanta marriage by about eight thousand years. The Bank, in *Perfect Lives*, is exactly where the “examination station” was 8,000 years ago.

So, the three heroes of *Atalanta (Acts of God)* are transported down into the bank exactly, coincidentally, when all the excitement is happening. They are seen along with the seedy-looking older guy and his pal, the “Mexican” with the two dogs.

The dogs pretend to fight. The bank manager comes out from behind his desk to stop the fight and arrives at the dogfight just as Isolde arrives with a bucket of water

she's picked up from the flower shop (to throw on the dogs!). She throws the water on him so that he has to go into the safe to change his clothes — and to discover that the money is gone.

When he announces that “The Bank has no money in the bank,” the tellers all see something different — different men connected to the symbolic meaning of that statement. Maybe they are just hallucinating. It is a great moment in opera.

Jennifer, Linda, and Susie, each sees one of the golden apples: The origin of *Atalanta*. Kate, whose boyfriend installed the surveillance cameras in the bank and plays the tapes for her every night, sees *Perfect Lives*. Eleanor, looking at the foreign guy with the dogs, decides that she's going to trace his genealogy because he's unlike anything she's ever seen. She quits to go to the Southwest. Susie quits because she's interested in opera. Everybody's career is totally changed.

The last group of operas, the four operas of *Now Eleanor's Idea*, is about genealogy. How to find out who you are. This group comes out of the “moment” in *Perfect Lives*, too.

On the night of the great event, and as a result of all the excitement, Eleanor and Linda (close friends and tellers at the bank), Linda's husband Don, and their son, Junior Junior (both mentioned in *Perfect Lives* along with connections among the four of them), are in their respective beds dreaming dreams of adventure and travel (inspired by you know what!).

The four dreams are coincidental. That is, they are running at the same time and they arise from, or are governed by, the same external circumstances — which we cannot interpret, except indirectly: for instance, external sounds. The schedule of those outside stimuli is the schedule for all four operas. The pattern is repeated in all four operas. They coincide, to the extent that pairs of the four, *Improvement (Don Leaves Linda)* and *Foreign Experiences* and *Now Eleanor's Idea* and *The Immortality Songs* can be played simultaneously, as in counterpoint — though you probably wouldn't want to hear them that way.

Each of the last four operas has one of these four persons as its protagonist. The conceit of the plot of each person's dream is that the person has to *travel* to get out of his or her circumstances.

THIS WHOLE NARRATIVE

beginning with the Max Ernst episode of *Atalanta* keeps harping on the idea of your responsibility to your intentions. I'm not advocating anything. I'm just trying to explain what's going on.

In what I was trying to describe to you about how I did those pieces a few years ago, I was trying to relate a point in my life where I had to sort of start over again. I had become obsessed with the idea of why people talk to themselves and what boundaries you put on that action and how close you can come to making it public, and how *private* it is. How much of a taboo it is. As a result of working with that idea I produced

the two video pieces in *Music with Roots in the Aether*, and *Automatic Writing*. And it caused in me the natural beginning of this long narrative piece that is made up of *Atalanta*, *Perfect Lives*, and *Now Eleanor's Idea*.

It was harder to start with the anecdote that rooted the story in some ethical beliefs and ethnic practices, than to start with the stories I grew up with, because those ethnic practices and those ethical beliefs were foreign to me—I had lost them. So, I started in the middle with things that you just open your mouth and they come out.

In composing *Perfect Lives*, which as I said is a collection of sayings, I got into the very very bizarre, for me, condition of feeling that every time I started to compose a piece of music I was making a social crime, or I was insane, as it were. That I was like one of the people who talks to himself on the street. But I had decided previously that I would go through with it. For about six months, I did that. I'm telling you this because if you don't do these embarrassing things by yourself, in your composition, you'll never be a composer. When you go into a room, lock the door, and decide that you are going to compose music, you are doing a criminal activity, an antisocial activity, and if you can't face it you'll never be a composer.

In our careers, and in the way we relate our musical techniques to our lives, you have to figure out what you're going to accept of the material that comes unbidden. In order for me to play the piano right now, this instant, I have two choices: I can either do something that starts precisely with a habit, I can start exactly where I left off yesterday; or I can do something else. There is an instant, right before you play the

chord, where you decide to *will* that chord into existence. It's not the piano that does it, it is *you*. You go... [*plays chord*]... and then you have to accept what came out. Now, having made that first move, the next thing you have to do is to decide whether to keep it, or improve on it. Now, if I'm going to improve on it, I have to apply a whole range of social opinions, including Nancy Reagan's opinion. Everybody is involved in whether I'm going to improve on what I just did, or whether I like what I just did. If I like myself, I actually have to *like* what I just did. And that's what makes you *original*.

IN CONSTRUCTING AN OPERA FOR TELEVISION

I've designed a work that will have no resemblance to a televised performance of opera presented at the Metropolitan Opera House. *Perfect Lives* is a new approach to developing a long narrative structure which circumvents the aesthetic and technical problems associated with producing a work in an opera house. It's more like televised baseball, which is elegant because of the space around the players... a very beautiful relationship between the person and the space. When you watch baseball on television, you realize gradually how many cameras there are, and become aware of a very complicated dialogue between the cameras. It's a rhythmic, nonnarrative form, which is exactly like music because it gives you a number of choices about what you're going to pay attention to.

In *Perfect Lives*, the visual and musical materials are coordinated through the use of the templates, the term I've used to describe the subjective assignment of emotional values and moods to visual forms and corresponding musical structures. Within

the rules defined by the templates, the collaborators, in all aspects of the work, are free to interpret, “improvise,” invent, and superimpose characteristics of their own artistic styles onto the texture of the work. In a sense, the collaborators become “characters” in the opera at a deeper level than the illusionistic characters who appear on stage.

AT THE TIME THAT I

was working on *Perfect Lives* I was reading the Evans-Wentz edition of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and the distinguishing part of that for me was the essays about the use of that book, or that idea. I was struck by the similarity of form between that idea and what I knew about European ideas of the afterlife. I got amused by the fact that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* was a text that was to be spoken into the ear of the recently dead.

The idea is that when you die you immediately start going into very intensified versions of things you experienced in your earthly life, on a larger scale. The function of the book is to guide people through those experiences. The belief is that when the body dies the senses die at different rates, and the last sense that goes away is the sense of hearing. The practice of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is that for a certain number of hours after the person is apparently dead, the consciousness is still there to be addressed. And someone can address your consciousness through your hearing. The traditional use of the book is that as soon as someone dies, you start shouting the text into their ears, and the longer they have been dead the more you have to shout at them.

I was amused by the idea that if you have your mouth up to a microphone and there is an audience at the other end, that it is very much like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. That you are guiding the audience through an experience. I thought of *Perfect Lives* as being essentially like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It has all the characters and what they represent—certain goods and evils. And there is a track, you know, like *The Divine Comedy*.

I WAS ALSO READING

Frances Yates about the reemergence of Neoplatonism. She's a great author. She's an historian who specialized in people like Giordano Bruno. I would recommend any of her books. But specifically, I think you must read her most famous book, *The Art of Memory*, which is a description of techniques that are very much like musical techniques, only these are the techniques that were used by philosophers before printing. There was only one copy of a book and if you didn't want to copy it out by hand, then there was the problem of how the ideas were going to get around.

These books were collected in monasteries and universities, and there was a circuit of scholars who hung around these places to copy down the ideas. And predictably, as in music, among the most famous of those scholars were the people who had the most fluid memories. And just like we have our "Blue" Gene Tyranny, they had their Saint Augustine, who apparently had complete eidetic recall. In other words, everybody else was copying things down, and he just read the books and remembered everything. He became one of the most famous philosophers because he had access to *all* of the ideas he had ever come across.

What Frances Yates teaches is that those memory techniques were specific technical exercises, just like writing music or learning how to operate a machine. They were very complicated techniques of which there were sometimes two or three versions for each. These techniques were adopted by singers and poets and some of these singers could sing from memory for days. They had memorized thousands and thousands of verses. Moreover, some of these singers were so adept that they could invent stories right in the flow of events.

I'M AWARE

that I think of music in a dramatic sense. I think of it as being a product of a lot of people having a rather complicated relationship with each other, and the moment-to-moment part of it can vary a lot. It's as variable as any sort of social relationship, personal relationship. . . .

This quality is not so much in our music, but I think it's very much in the music of other cultures. From the history of American music, as I know it, this dramatic quality—the idea of the music being *about* the people who make it—is a fairly new idea, but it's also an important idea, and it's becoming more important all the time.

I AM NOT

a jazz musician, but as an American, naturally, I grew up listening to jazz. It's much more comfortable for me to think of singing in a jazz sense, or even in a rock-and-roll

sense, than in a *bel canto* sense. Since I don't have any profound experience with *bel canto*, it would be like imitating some other culture for me to do that. Much of American opera sounds imitative or derivative to me. There's no reason that American opera has to sound like Verdi.

In other words, if you're going to start out by creating a musical situation in which a story is told and in which you can show off all the dramatic aspects of making music—which I think is what opera is all about—you might as well use Bob Dylan as your model rather than Verdi.

The idea of *Perfect Lives*, what I think is original about it, is that it goes back to an earlier form of opera: the idea of storytelling in music. European opera has tended more toward a musical version of theater. I guess I owe more to the idea of, say, the Duke Ellington orchestra. *Perfect Lives* is a kind of jazz narrative. In big-band jazz, there were characters in the band, and people would go to see the bands in order to follow those characters. I've always regarded those bands as proto-operas, and very American in form. *Perfect Lives* comes out of that tradition.

BACK IN THE LATE

sixties, I wrote and produced an opera called *That Morning Thing*. This was years before I began work on *Perfect Lives*, but it's about that same problem of making the conscious decision to come back into the physical world. You have to put yourself together as a human being every morning, and the effect or weight of that particular

activity you can feel in yourself enormously. It's one of the great cultural weights, and it destroys a lot of people. That piece is about the weight of various cultural ideas, and the way some people lose. It came out of a situation where three people I was rather close to all took their lives within a relatively short period of time.

“Frogs,” the first section of the piece, is a statement about the dichotomy in Western thinking, our dualistic way of thinking: There are opposites, distinctions, dichotomies. One very obvious one is male/female. And I was trying to dramatize that. I was questioning, and still am, the dichotomy... the weight of that dichotomy is what *takes your life*. . . . In a dualistic situation, there is no resolution.

One of the dichotomies I have also tried to dramatize is the distinction between understanding the world verbally/schematically, or understanding the world physically/organically.

I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT

novels, but when I compose music, I can't go on very long without some way of relating what I'm working on now to what's gone on before, and what I think is going to happen at some future point. The only way to have a comfortable sense of improvisation is to have things as well mapped-out as possible.

It seems to me that the reader of a novel remembers the structure of the plot. What I'm trying to get at is something like the structure of a *melody*—something you remem-

ber as an aural experience. When you hear it later, you don't recall it as an event, such as, character "A" going downtown . . . there's very little of that in *Perfect Lives*, of people actually doing things. The images instead are rhythmic and melodic.

I started out writing without naming anybody. I was just describing imagery. I realized very soon that if you describe a whole bunch of different images like snapshots, it becomes sort of arbitrary. If you attach those things to a name, even though the name is doing many different things, people connect it in some way.

In traditional opera, which means nineteenth-century European opera, the author thought up an idea about a bunch of characters, then invented actions to define those characters. Singing actors were hired to do those actions. I'm more interested in making a setting in which "Blue" Gene can play the piano so that you can really see him play the piano.

It's like when Duke Ellington sets up his band. It's a collection of characters, and Ellington understands it that way. Ellington's music is not written in the way a symphony, which can be played by anybody, is written. If you pull out a player in Ellington's band, you have to rewrite the part. *Perfect Lives* is based on that model.

IT IS NOT HIERARCHICAL

you do not go down. . . . There is an order to the scenes because of your memory. You go backwards in a genealogical sense: The lovers go east into Indiana. We look back

toward Europe where we came from. But you do not descend in a Freudian or a Jungian sense, nor as in what I understand to be Dante's view. It's more like this: You go into a room with a particular atmosphere, and then you swoon, and suddenly you are in a different room . . . I saw an edited version of *2001* recently on TV, and it made me think of *Perfect Lives*. I thought: It's the way he moves from room to room and he is suddenly older. *Perfect Lives* takes place in seven surroundings . . . I don't think you descend into birth. I don't remember descending.

I THINK THAT WHERE I GREW UP

Ann Arbor, Michigan, is considered to be right on the edge of the Midwest. The scenes in the video were shot in Galesburg, Illinois, which is on the far eastern edge of the corn belt. When I first drove across the country, I'd never really seen that geography, and how it changed.

I started thinking about that image of flatness. I was reading a lot about Egypt and geometry, the measurement of the earth and architecture, and all those ideas about how the earth is divided up. I thought about the Midwest flatness *being* something, like the other flat places on earth. I got interested in it because it was flat, rather than because I was there.

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A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Ashley's operas-for-television and other large-scale narrative works have brought him international renown as a composer and as a writer. He has influenced a generation of composers and artists working with new forms of music for the media.

His early work designed for the stage was created for the ONCE group, a legendary performance cooperative in the 1960s avant-garde. His fourteen-hour video opera, *Music with Roots in the Aether*, was produced in 1975. *Perfect Lives* was commissioned by The Kitchen (NYC) in 1978. Since its premiere on Great Britain's Channel Four in 1984, it has been broadcast as a series or in part throughout Europe, and in various cities in the United States. *Perfect Lives* is part of a trilogy of operas—including *Atalanta (Acts of God)* and *Now Eleanor's Idea*, both currently performed in touring versions by Robert Ashley's chamber opera ensemble—that in television format will be produced as thirty-nine half-hour episodes.

Robert Ashley was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1930. He studied at the University of Michigan and at the Manhattan School of Music. He was one of the founders of the ONCE Festival (1960–1967) and he toured with the Sonic Arts Union from 1966 to 1976. He was director of the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College from 1969 to 1981. Since 1981 he has lived in New York City.

A NOTE ABOUT THE BOOK

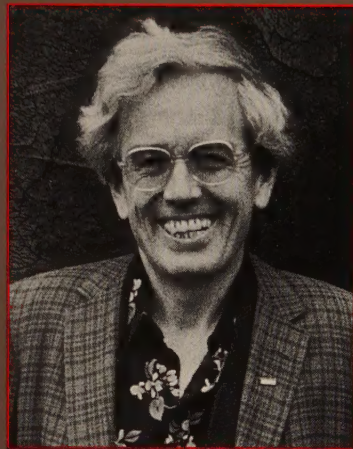
The text of this book was set in Century Expanded designed by Theodore L. De Vinne and Linn Boyd Benton as the first commercial version of the font cut for *Century* magazine at the turn of the century. Its proportions give a sense of cleanliness and wide-open horizons that exemplify the romantic ideals of late nineteenth-century America.

Additional type was set in Futura, named after the Futurist art movement in Italy, and designed by Paul Renner. Futura's structure is based upon classical Italian oldstyle proportions.

Type composed at Burch Typografica in San Francisco.

This book was edited and designed by Burning Books. Editor: Melody Sumner. Book and cover design: Michael Sumner. Typographic design: Kathleen Burch.





MICHAEL O'BRIEN

Robert Ashley's operas-for-television and other large-scale narrative works have brought him international renown as a composer and as a writer. His early work designed for the stage was created for the ONCE group, a legendary performance cooperative in the 1960s avant-garde. He has influenced a generation of composers and artists. Philip Glass attests, "Robert Ashley is undoubtedly a leader of the new music theater of our time."

Perfect Lives, commissioned by The Kitchen (NYC) in 1978, premiered on Great Britain's Channel Four in 1984, has been performed and broadcast throughout Europe, and in various cities in the United States. John Rockwell, in his acclaimed *All American Music* states, "Ashley has always been a catalyst . . . Always the pioneer, he may one day realize his dream of *Perfect Lives* on international satellite television."

Robert Ashley was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1930. He lives in New York City.

BURNING BOOKS ARCHER FIELDS

636 Broadway, Suite 1200, New York, NY 10012

Jacket design: Michael Sumner

MUSIC / LITERATURE

ISBN 0-9627767-7-7

ROBERT ASHLEY
PERFECT LIVES

**"What about the Bible? And the Koran? It doesn't matter: We have
Perfect Lives."** John Cage

Known for his experimental theater and large-scale performance works, for his years at the forefront of the avant-garde, Robert Ashley is a pre-eminent writer. "Echoes of Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein . . ." says *The New York Times*, "a major work."

"When *Perfect Lives* first hit the scene, everyone I knew had *The Park* memorized and quoted from it constantly. Ashley brought a mystery into music theater that smashed our previous conceptions of the genre." Kyle Gann

Created as an opera-for-television, much imitated and long-revered by the cognoscenti, *Perfect Lives* emerges from the avant-garde to become a literary classic. Can there still be "masterpieces" asks *Village Voice* critic Gregory Sandow. Yes, he writes, "*Perfect Lives* deserves the name."

"Robert Ashley is a pathfinder, and *Perfect Lives* is a cerebral, poetic, regional, universal, warming, perfervid, and pathbreaking work. There is nothing else like it." David Behrman

The setting: early summer, small-town Illinois. *Perfect Lives* pursues the thoughts and sensations of several local characters and two out-of-towners as they intersect catalytically around a central event.

"Ashley's genius in *Perfect Lives* is nowhere more evident than in his use of the vernacular—the native spoken language of the midwest . . . the formal American gavotte of the ball park." Charles Shere

This book includes the complete libretto, in seven episodes, followed by Robert Ashley talking about his ideas and the making of the opera.

"*Perfect Lives* is an endless and seamless dreamscape of the musicality of the spoken word. Last winter after performing *Swimming to Cambodia* I would lie on the floor and listen to *Perfect Lives* over and over. It floats in my head like a memorable, ever-changing dream." Spalding Grey

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