

George Stanley / AT ANDY'S

for Andy and Martina

Terrace '97. I arrive here on the bus, Andy & Martina pick me up (while I'm writing I'll try to ignore undercurrents of the brain, personal worthiness, outcome or 'point' of this writing, e.g., or should I include them? A pointless paragraph. I can't write.

OK, I guess I really do have to freewrite & quit fucking around. So — dive in — splash — *in medias res* (in the middle of things) — don't like this pen, point too short — I arrive on the bus — strip mall on Keith — we stop at Safeway for groceries — obesity — almost everyone too big, I think, is the weight of all the food that gets here, by truck (less waste, and, Andy reminds me, heat loss) added to the bodies of those living here, Terraceites?

Streets jammed with cars, we take the long way up to the bench, a kid pulling away from the West Side food store drinking a Coke seems enclosed in his car — encased —

What's wrong is somehow I think there's something to write *about* — instead of writing.

I'm sitting down here in Andy's basement at Vicky's old desk on a hot Sunday in August thinking I should write about something, or rather, that I should (emphasize *should*) write (emphasize *write*) to justify my existence — my life — to myself (& then having justified self, I can be with others, have a drink with Andy, e.g., without feeling self-unjustified (un-self-justified?). I'm appalled — horrified — that at age 63 I still think this way — write this way. I can't write, Barry & I say. What would 'writing' be? I think of the quick, sharp (objectivist) takes on

heart & world in GB's "Blonds on Bikes" — I can't do that — wouldn't even try, to act so nonchalant, i.e., pretend to. I started out to write about Terrace & here I am writing about myself, with as bad a fit between this so-called writing activity (free writing — what's *free* about it?) — & content — & poetry! — as ever. I should *pray*, I guess — just keep writing this silly shit & pray for a poem.

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White hair on the back of my hand — radio going upstairs — I go upstairs, Andy tells me about constant noise from next door subdivision — rottweilers, dachshund — bulldozer — angry crows. I go outside, sit on porch, hear crows —

I hear crows in Vancouver — I have nothing to write about, & am not in right state to dive deep — on edge here — hate this pen — there is no content — or is age content? (Kavanagh: "they know it to a day") — fuck that — feeling myself breathe — insect makes wide sweep around flowerpot — Teddy barks —

Poetry means (a) I'm going to die — & (b) this notebook will be read by someone who will see how lacking I am — unless I destroy it — & I can't do that — that would be worse than keeping it — that would mean thinking of it. Better this shit than nothing, better be sitting on Andy's front porch with Teddy, imagining this shit being (miraculously) turned into a poem — as Spicer said, not the Vietnam War but Autumn in Vermont — a poem about obesity, cheerful obesity, all the big people trundling their carts & bags of groceries out to their cars parked at the mall — one lifestyle — nothing but the economy — the drinking water sour — environmental movement focused on the immediate, daily threats to health —

At the college — MACLABUSE, one word, becomes MACL ABUSE, a new threat? Abuse, abuse, obese — truckloads of log corpses from farther & farther away, up the Nass — operate the mill at lower cost, develop the mining sector, truckloads of food — this is a site of conversion, realization of surplus value, how else to conceive of it.

No way to conceive of it, no understanding. And I'll never know if it's really understanding that's disappearing or am I just moaning the loss of a sharper mind.

Well, I've started writing again.

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Drinking water — foul — a sour or flat taste & then a chemical after-taste — two-stage foulness.

Sky overcast — air muggy — due to automobiles? Is anything 'natural' anymore?

This is not poetry. But what would a poem about Terrace be like? Objective — at a distance from the mind, posing as anybody's perception, idea — or no one's. The View from Nowhere. But is there another alternative? Ah, inspiration!

I wish I had a desk — I'm sitting on this duvet in Annyha's bedroom, balancing the writing book on my naked knees — I feel like I'm in the jungle. But nothing to pounce on me, except myself — always pouncing.

Fine rain, and now, to the west, a rift of blue like a river in the white cloud — blue rifts opening up over the cedars — fine rain — me here — a visitor — seeing Terrace from the outside. I was extracted — like a tooth — early retirement — & the skin of Terrace closed easily behind me, the placidity, the obesity. A feeling of contentment — & exclusion — at the edges of this the trees are eaten — the best logs hauled, the second best burned or buried — hauled back here — then the conversion begins — the logs turn into money (the computer watches the saw) — some of it stays here — & then the trucks come, the food — & also the car carriers (any name for that?), rattling & clanking, steel ramps, chains — an objective poem, no one's vision —

Cars moving slowly up Lakelse — cumbersome — in & out of parking spaces — slow — because so heavy & so dangerous — & there is food, in bags, in carts, lifted into trunks & back seats of cars, backs of pickups, in mall lot. Cars & trucks move slowly, heavily, toward the exit, then move like heavy tanks into the traffic lanes, & then, inside all this, inside the cars (the objective poem sees) there are people, placid, cheerful —

What a vision! — is there behind this some animus — is it deep dislike of these people, misanthropy, or just objective — is this a phenomenon anyone could observe or the twisted vision of a fucked-up old man — is there anything natural — or is it *all* natural — blameless — the programmed activities of sapiens with their tree trunks on trucks, wood chips in hopper cars, cars & carts & such no less than insects with sticks & leaves — each has its function, its social role.

The salt lost its savour, but is it only in my life? What is it I don't grant them, the Terraceites of '97 — the right to be fat & happy & to have overcome (not individually, but *en masse*), simply by not learning it, dread?

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Who can see the inner Terrace? Do our individual hearts meet there as our social selves meet here in this slow moving jumble of steel carapaces & Safeway carts & fat pleasant faces with the log trucks an undertone in the background? We aren't crowded together there, that I know. Or do we not meet? Is there a place, even in summer, where each man (& woman) moves continually *away*, through a personal winter, saying, "this is true"?

There's no way to know except by knowing them, which here I don't, except my old friends — & their knowledge of each other, seen in faces & heard in tones of voice more than in words — knowledge of what is not said, out of kindness — life a condition of unsaying, of waiting for the unsaid to fade, of waiting for forgetfulness while

preserving shards of memory, of avoiding laying it all on each other, out of forbearance.

In Hawthorne's story, "The Minister's Black Veil," the minister blames his community for their forbearance as if that were a sin of secrecy & not a balm of love — to suffer the unsaid in privacy — in one's knowledge that ultimately that's what there is — aloneness — the urge to lay it all on the other being a desperate cry, a try, at leaping that bulwark of loneliness, to enforce mutual knowledge, mutual terror.

Do we consume merely out of duty, is it a façade, that we pretend to savour the objects we devour, pretend to praise the process, and these fat smiles are not of satisfaction in consuming but of living in virtue, of never revealing, of ever concealing, the true life we know the other also lives — in darkness, in winter?

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(At Mr. Mike's)

I can't separate my feelings from their faces. If I could peel them back like a film, from the fat & placid — huge man ordering grapefruit juice — 'on a diet' — what would they seem?

They would seem nothing — their faces are in my mind — that's not solipsism, just Terrace-ism. I sit in Mr. Mike's — the veggie burger & Coke — a sketch in the brain —

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(On the Halliwell bus)

The bus driver said of one of his passengers: "When she started riding the bus she wouldn't say a word. You'd ask her a question & she'd give you just a little short answer. But now . . ." (Pause.) "She's a Christian, her parents brought her up to be a Christian — but I told her, hey, I don't hold it against you, & she gave a little laugh."

By which they know how they feel — she knows he didn't mean to

dis her faith — but they say so little — “she wouldn’t say a word” means a feeling that could be explained in other words, shy, or frightened even, but the driver doesn’t —

Maybe the bus driver knows why she wouldn’t say a word — abuse — but won’t say, maybe because he’s protecting her — from a word, spoken out loud, to a stranger — to me — “I haven’t seen you on this bus before” —

Feelings are there in the air, in the mind — ‘this side of the grass’ we walk among feelings — & carry feelings in our brains — & so the faces act as doors — set in lines — not to let words in. Words dart about inside, puckish — Andy’s father asked what that word meant — mischievous, *méchant* — up to no good — words, like spirits, neither good nor evil, just natural — but some would call them good *and* evil — Christians — so the faces —

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Who am I, a ghost? Walking up from Greig to Lakelse — one of those streets east of Kalum — empty lots & broken house foundations — weeds — think, am I here — am I a ghost? I’m not here, not in the sense that thoughts & feelings & the odd word (at the joint — words at the joints) would carry me — to the next meeting — I could be going to a meeting (come in late, like Ken Belford) — for city politics or to get drunk or for sex — yes, many of those meanings — meetings — but no network —

& love & courage, Simon Thompson said, at the bar, at Hanky’s — we had met there every year & now were meeting again — Rocque, José, Andy — those narratives, Simon said, are somehow replaced or annihilated — by consumer —

Happy to read an account of Margaret Laurence’s suicide — her own account— she couldn’t find the teakettle to heat the water to melt the Diazepam — tranquilizer, Andy says, like Prozac — so she used the coffeemaker, but didn’t put any coffee — just hot water & Prozac

— & the glinting memory — faces of joy — one last?

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Dream poem: tyler alters / night amber / with sensation.

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The same world for me as for Andy — we agree. Not the Thing-in-Itself — that horror-movie creature — but a thing between us and the Thing — something we have made up (using all our unspoken language) — call it world. So how is it I stand in it, on the broken asphalt & concrete sidewalks of Terrace, & feel it not — feel it *as* not — as departure, Rilke might say? At Andy's I feel part of it, hearing Andy's lawnmower, seeing the grey pile rug & blond dresser in Annyha's room, two pairs of my shoes — writing at 3:15 p.m. — it feels like I'm here, & that I won't leave.

The world that seems so frightening (admit it) when smoking dope (it's the fright I'm admitting, not the dope) or when thinking — too rationally — you could sit on the porch — *and* imagine it — stars coming on in the 10 o'clock evening, maybe Orion, time of year? — but chill, too early for stars to come out fully — late by the clock, but too early for the meteor shower — Andy's voice from the dark, down by the barn — “take 15 or 20 minutes longer, but I'm not waiting, I'm going to bed.” “Me too.”

Located in it — not located — in it — not in it — it — not it — I? — no, not I — the? The the (Barry's line, from Wallace Stevens). The with stars.

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Old Lakelse Lake Road — driving to John & Larisa's for dinner. I'm holding the dessert in my lap — a cake — & Martina in front of me holds a bowl of custard sauce. Andy drives. Dark sky — scattered rain — second growth cedars packed in — roadside bushes — branches waving in the wind. I watch the raindrops crawl up the windshield &

I feel the void, like a natural phenomenon, stabbing out of the clouds, or flashing without light — but alternating — on & off — with its absence — something more substantial? — faith?