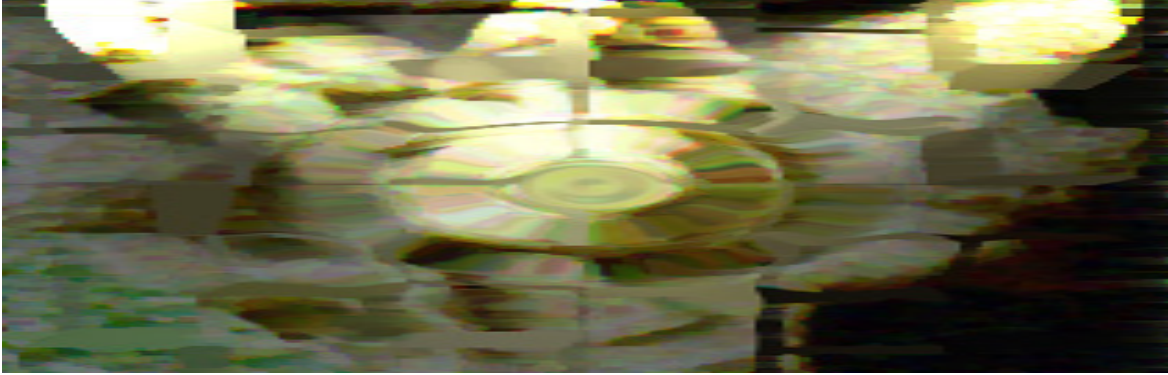


a walk on the wild side



by Mike Heffley © 2000

- Thought of initially as a type of story, the ethnographer's journey of discovery and self-discovery/revelation constitutes an account of personal development. It has features of a quest--a sort of voyage of search, adventure and exploration. The narrative of the ethnographer's story portrays him or her through key events and social encounters. He or she embarks on an exploration in which he or she moves from being 'outsider' to 'insider', from 'stranger' to 'member', from 'incompetent' to 'habitué'. There is a recurrent pattern whereby such narratives are accomplished.

The elements are, indeed, well enough established as to constitute almost a folklore or mythological corpus in its own right...While elements of the narrative are normally distributed throughout the text, the ethnographer frequently recapitulates them and elaborates on them in a separate narrative--often in the form of a 'confessional' (cf. Van Maanen 1988). The autobiographical account...portrays the vicissitudes and encounters in the field. The ethnographer presents him or herself as anti-hero, blundering and coping in strange and adverse circumstances. There is an implicit contrast with the image of a self-assured 'expert.'...

- --Atkinson (1990: 106)

- **It is not even remotely a matter of rehabilitating the Aboriginals, or finding them a place in the chorus of human rights, for their revenge lies**

eslewhere. It lies in their power to destabilize Western rule. It lies in their phantom presence, their viral, spectral presence in the synapses of our brains, in the circuitry of our rocketship, as "Alien"; in the way in which the Whites have caught the virus of origins, of Indianness, of Aboriginality, of Patagonicity. We murdered all this, but now it infects our blood, into which it has been inexorably transfused and infiltrated...It is now becoming clear that *everything* we thought left behind for ever by the ineluctable march of universal progress, is not dead at all, but on the contrary likely to return--not as some archaic or nostalgic vestige (all our indefatigable museumification notwithstanding), but with a vehemence and a virulence that are modern in every sense--and to reach the very heart of our ultra-sophisticated but ultra-vulnerable systems, which it will easily convulse from within without mounting a frontal attack. Such is the destiny of radical otherness--a destiny that no homily of reconciliation and no apologia for difference is going to alter.

--Jean Baudrillard (1990: 137-38)

Life is Change, Other is Self, and That is Just (a Matter of Fact)

With the end of my interview with Petrovsky, I felt a subtle and delicious shift in consciousness: it was the last one I had required myself to do. I had another three weeks to go, and I might do a few more (with the younger FMPers), make a few more gigs--but they would be gravy, were optional. The essential ones, with the first-hour elders, were done.

What's more, I felt like I had some very good stuff. I wouldn't confirm that intuition until I got home, did the translations-transcriptions, whipped all into readable, organized shape--but my sense was that I had what I'd come for and more, despite the classic stall of a start from June into July.

It wasn't yet noon, the gig wasn't until late that night, the day was summer perfection--and I was in Vienna! For the first time since I'd arrived in Europe, I felt free from both the frustration of not being able to do my work when I wanted to and the demands and intensity of it when it finally did start. I strapped on my camcorder and set out to while away the day like a *richtig Tourist*.

The few blocks from the hotel to the core of the city's several concentric rings--where the imperial palace and its adjuncts and courts, sculptures, and historic churches and other buildings were--afforded me a walk undistracted by the grandeur and beauty that had me compulsively (and never very effectively) videotaping, gawking awestruck, generally good for nothing as I

reeled and shuffled through it all. The flesh was in the heart of the Romantic-music capital, but its thoughts were settling around the closer lines of my recent fellowship with the East Germans, summing it up, to later summon it up.

Most broadly, that fellowship had brought me closer to the presence of Russia. When I started out on my quest for a German identity in this music (and, inevitably, in my American self), the fall of Rome to the Germanic tribes seemed as primally poetic a place in recorded history as one could start (indeed, it was the *only* beginning *recorded* by Western letters). In my mind, Germany was part of this civilization called "the West," and Russia another entity entirely, in another world called "the East." And, in the geopolitics that defined those words, West had prevailed, imposed its will on East.

Being here, however, redrew borders on the mental geo-maps that informed my sense of such identities, created a new global picture. That redraw reminded me of John Szwed's image of the "jazz landscape:" [1](#) a map of America more defined by New Orleans, Chicago, New York, Kansas City, Philadelphia--places significant to jazz history, lore, and mythos--than by its various geopolitical entities local and larger. To such a map, the ethnic/racial and tribal, civic, regional identities defined by the *music* would constitute the demographic. Thus, for example, the music histories of New Orleans and Chicago would be crucially tied to the dynamics of the French, Creole and other groups, and the migration of southern blacks northward. One would want to recall and understand this mix and migration for their parts in the development of a musical aesthetic/expression that was ongoing, current in its life and development, whereas one might leave them in the museum of a history that was long past if one's focus were politics, economics, sociology, or even history itself.

Russian history and culture was dawning on me now, in the terms of my particular work, as the more primal, deeper *Urgrund* of whiteness and the West, a ground that, as I'd seen German history and culture to be, was also a still-living root. It was as if I'd come here with a well-developed map of the American jazz landscape to use as a sort of template for the new map I wanted to draw, of the European jazz landscape. Thus I might think of Paris as a kind of New Orleans if I wanted to find an historical entry point of the music from which it moved to other points in time, space, and aesthetics. I might think of Berlin, London, or Amsterdam, or Wuppertal as cities where distinctively "white European" sounds grew, as counterparts to Chicago, or Philly, or Kansas City, the grounds of distinctively "black American" expressions.

However, before my interviews, my mental counterpart to America and its history was Western Europe and its history; after my interviews--with the Wessis, for their contacts and influences that extend to Japan, eastward; with the Osis, for their similar contacts as well as their closer ties to Russia (as Petrovsky;'s name signals, his family background is Russian)--and after the sights and sounds of East Berlin and other Eastern cities I visited, with their Russian war

memorials and street names, my working mental map had expanded to encompass the whole of Eurasia as the entity to consider. That entity was the counterpart of the American whole I knew so well *as* a whole, with Western Europe as only one of its regions--the New to its Old--albeit the one where the music I knew both originated (as "Western music," exported) and re-originated (as "jazz," imported).[2](#)

When I had first considered ancient tribal names and other descriptors for their current semantic charges as "barbarian," sometimes specifically Teutonic barbarian--the Berserker, the Hun, the Vandal--germanicism was my sole focus; now the also still-current word "Caucasian" added itself to that list, to remind me of the Caucasus mountains, from which the waves of Aryans on horseback swept across the continent from north to south as conquerors millennia before the Germanic tribes moved down into Western Europe. I recalled that the Prussians were Slavs, and that the Slavic reputation as "barbaric horde" was as impeccable as that of the Vandals, Goths, and other germanic tribes at the gates of Rome when Slavs inhabited the Berlin region. I recalled the Old World imperial-cultural axis of Russia, Prussia, and Austria, still intact as recently as two centuries ago, when the democratic New World rose to its day in the West, including America. (And it dawned on me--Germany, the land in the middle, was a microcosm of the broad Eurasian cultural scope, reflecting the pattern of Old World collectivism in the East and New World individualism in the West.)

Why go back and out so far in the context of an ethnography such as this? Because it was only very recently that peoples as disparate as Russians and Prussians and Western Europeans as far south as Greece and Italy became, simply, in America, my fellow "white people," even as all the tribes on the African continent became "black people." Such a concrete reversion to that common biological marker of identity (which is what "race," like gender, boils down to, more precisely: the idiosyncracies bodies improvise in ecosystems, as opposed to their narrower, more transient and mental categories of "culture," "tribe," "ethnicity," "nation," "history")--not to mention the nature of music itself (per Alan Merriam, cited in [Part I Introduction](#))--begged the question of primal origins as a timeless-timely one.

And it was only as recently--also over the last century or two, since the revolutions and falls of monarchies--that this identity known as "the West" had become such a force in the world, so distinct from "the Rest." Like "whiteness," and, for that matter, "blackness," "the West," "the East," "the Third World," "the Arab World," "the Asian hordes"--whether empowering or demonizing, such mass identities were indeed power ralliers, transhistorical treaties allying, as argued in Chapter One, John Cage with Gregorian chant, or Anthony Braxton with Hildegard, Peter Brötzmann with Johnny Dodds with Greek *rebetiko* clarinetists with Sidney Bechet with Adolphe Sax with Medieval recorder consorters, with Greek *aulos* players: history as chronopolitical empire building, music history as "Western" music history. Hitler with Otto I,

Mussolini with Julius Ceasar, Marcus Garvey with the Egyptian Pharoahs, Mao with Genghis Kahn...

And why not? Show me the scholar who would dismiss this notion as an absurdity of unenlightened-to-mad power-trippers, that I may instruct him (perhaps through a music lesson or two) in the proper way to eat the dust of said trippers. (Indeed, I have noticed that the ones riding highest on the tattered dragon of whiteness and the West in its current moment, whatever their biological identity markers, are those who affect the most cynicism about and criticism of its power and history, especially in academia.) Such mass, time-deep identities are more than intellectually sloppy or primitive errors of essentialism--they are part and parcel with the healthy human impulse to stay connected with ancestors, as well as with kindred spirits. The musicians mentioned above would embrace (or, its counterpart, dislike with real living zeal) those forbears as, indeed, colleagues in a common timely discourse, and the more the merrier.

My direction to ground was not narrower, in spacetime, but broader. More precisely, it was through the narrowest (my body, here, now), through the middle ground of its focus (FMP, in its place and time), to the broadest ground (as far back and forward in time and as deeply in and widely out of place as said body and focus led).

The general interest and significance of such musings will be more impersonally and precisely discussed later; the point in presenting this much of them here is the part they played in the way the rest of my day unfolded, largely due to the state of mind brought on by the conclusion of the interviews. I couldn't help but begin to assess, to define the moment that the flow of my interviews had just turned into, to ponder what I had. And the first and really only thing that popped to mind then was this visceral intertwining of Western and Eastern identities and histories, and the geographical arena that was as much a single living cultural-historical organism as the forty-eight contiguous United States had become in my mind. Yes, Eurasia was a patchwork of Europeans, Arabs, Asians, Russians, Indians, just like America with its versions of the same and related groups--but, their differences notwithstanding, there was in Eurasia a working confederation of peoples unified by Old World history and identity, just as there was a New World to which all of us Americans belonged (including the first Americans, to whom Old World peoples were New). Even as my mind was going to the ground of biology and civilization, past other identity markers, now it was going to the still deeper ground...of time, evolutionary time in place, as the set in which "race"--biology, organisms-in-ecosystems, ever mutable and in flux--was a subset even as "ethnicity," "culture," "tribe" and so on were often cast as subsets to "race."

(Again, why go so deep? Because the body itself is indeed, as Gunter Hampel commented about music, a time machine, because ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny--but, again again, I get ahead of myself. What was soon to happen this day is the point here...)

The washing of this expanded image of place and time across my psychic terrain affected the way I next perceived and reacted to the places I now crossed a big, busy street to visit: the *Heldenplatz* (Place of Heroes) and the *Hofburg* (Court of Castles). They were impressive for their size, spaciousness, and elegant beauty, but they didn't draw me emotionally. Their trappings and fruits of imperial power, civic power, somehow seemed to get more mundane in proportion to their excess. I did still have the awe of an American rube who had spent most of his life on the West Coast, where the oldest buildings and graves rarely go back farther than the last century; the statuary on the most banal public building still triggered fancies, approaching hallucinatory force, of real spirits and gods and ancestors carrying on their lives and doings in the midst of the humans, much like humans do in the midst of birds and dogs. Still, I'd been around long enough at this point to have some discernment of, distance from, such cheap thrills. And my new sense of "Eurasia" rather than "Europe" put the empire of the Hapsburgs in perspective as something relatively more recent and common (in both senses) in the grander scheme of things. Power, money, monuments, yes, how very nice for you, excuse me, please...

I wandered over to the *Staatsoper*, where Krenek's *Jonny Spielt Auf* stirred up some of the earliest Nazi propaganda in the late '20s; again, no real desire to sidetrack into it. I strolled down some small side streets where I enjoyed, more than the grand spaces surrounding grand structures, the close and winding views that would open with constant sudden surprises onto some courtyard view of this or that palatial wall topped by beautiful naked people, or armored people enthroned. My awe slowly but surely came to life with these ramblings through narrow enclosures blazing out onto such instant takers of breath.

One such delivered me to the door of the city's library. Climbing marble stairs up to a room with domed ceilings painted with religious images and at least two high stories off the ground, with shelves covering the whole vertical distance and ladders rolling on rails to reach them, I paid 20DM to see a display of Viennese music history: glass cases of scores and other memorabilia from and trivia about Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, up through Mahler, Schönberg, Webern. My lack of interest in this surprised me--but then it really was a superficial display, and the feel of authenticity of place, of history, wore thin quickly. This wasn't actually my field of interest, scholarly, personal; it was more a part of my past education, something I had had to deal with, like learning math in high school, then go on from to my own things. It was musty, stuffy, closed, I left it behind to sleep on...

Eventually, something did finally click with the mood brewing in me: the *Kunsthistorisches Museen* (Museum of Art), opposite the *Naturhistorisches Museen* (Museum of Natural History). They faced each other across the huge lawn of the Maria Theresienplatz, in which a statue of the empress Marie Theresa sits enthroned like the Goddess, above men on horses and standing, doing her work in the world. Unlike the emperor's layout, which repelled me, the function of

these two buildings lured me in.

Each building had two grand, two-story wings of one grand room after another, each housing a different epoch of art and artifact, from the stone-age *Venus of Willendorf* and similar figures through the ancient Sumerian, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Assyrian, Greek, Roman, and Western European eras up to the last century or so. I didn't keep careful accounts of what I saw; I was more interested in feeding the inner state growing in me, to see where it wanted to go.

It had me walk slower or faster through a given room according to its accessibility to my consciousness. Yes, the paintings by Dürer, by Vermeer and Breughel, by Titian, Permigliano, Arcimboldo; the Rembrandts, Rubens, Van Dycks, Van Eycks; the Raphaels and Caravaggios, the Corregios and Velazquezes, the Cellini gold works were each worlds in themselves one could inhabit and explore forever...but I breezed by them with no more than a glance, telling myself I could come back later if I wished. I wanted my body to take in and register the museums' wholes, to see what they housed and how. I relaxed into my motion from room to room as if it, in symbiosis with those buildings, were indeed the operation of a time machine, each room a moment of flows of moments, each whole building as good a construct of What We Know, Who We Are, as any such in the world.

My pace was quickest back through the Middle Ages, because my education was thickest from there; I knew at least enough about the history to feel threads unbroken to my own moment and person, to know where to find more threads and how to weave them into stronger cords, or designs of my own.

I slowed among the relics of Rome, and of the first Western empires, because the objects and the presentation of them were thinner in detail, more ambiguous, something more parts mystery than history. But that mystery lay more in an absence than a presence. Greece and Rome speak to us well enough for themselves, as does even Egypt; it was Northern and Western Europe that became the mystery, as the center of what is known and collectible by museum builders, by scholarship, shifted from its area southward as time receded. That area then joined the rest of the world in receding to the far-flung realms of "barbarism" beyond the pale of cities and writing.

Go back as far as the beginning of literate civilization in Eurasia, and you find it coming out of the Mediterranean on both Eurasian and African sides. At that point, the cultures that had developed for millennia around the rest of the world speak only through the unwritten evidence of themselves they've left behind, and that through the written records of the ones who've found and studied such evidence.

The obvious, stated. But that's where my mind was settling, into the silence of the unrecorded

voices in the Americas, Africa, and the vast majority of Eurasia of the time, imagining them to be not much different from the sound of the recorded ones, in their basic life experience--but now not sounding at all, as the others continued and grew to do, through the baffling amplifications of the shields of both time and the choices and events that shaped it.

For some reason, it was that very thought that made me chalk this museum visit up as a done deal, a marvelous box I could open or close. I had opened it, rummaged around enough, I knew what was there, I could come back to it when and as I wished. But really, all in all, the sum of human knowledge is nothing but a small thing.

Ach! There was a startling thought, especially for me. Where on earth did it come from? "The sum of human knowledge is unfathomable!" roared a devil in me. "You've been slaking it down like a drunk your whole life, and you'll die gulping for more, and you won't even have filled your thimble!"

Pshaw, said my still, small voice. Mere quantity. I know quantity, I'm a twentieth-century man, we've quantified it all. A thousand years have become as a day to us through the knowledge at our fingertips; our days pass like millennia, for all the things we have to read, see, hear, the time we're free and able (unless, of course, we volunteer or fall prey to twentieth-century slavery, most acutely the tyrant of our *time*) to take to do so. I've learned from this luxury and wealth that any quantification is a mediated, a narrow, small thing next to the potential of its immediate quality; any act of quantification, of putting the information in a box, is too easy, is usually a way for an impeachable power to control and manipulate.

I know--I became a *Baccalaureate* (one who has earned the laurels of the berry bush) of *Scientia* (knowledge) as a young man; I then quantified music, among other subjects, as a professional music critic, for all the world to see, for years. I then became both a Master (again, per academic degree) and a Servant (administrator) of Arts, of the best of arts and of fellow artists in my prime; the record is there, I can prove it by any respectable standards (those of the market place notwithstanding). And now I'm on the trail and the brink of learning to teach (as shaman-healers do, as Doctors do) the Love of Wisdom (the *philos sophia*) here, at this point on my academic track, Satan, so get thee behind me.

So thinking, I walked out of the glorious museums and into the wider world within and without. Thank God for that wider world, without and within. That is where my day would unfold, and it still hadn't even reached its midpoint.

As I looked around and headed toward the club where the gig would be that night, I ratcheted my thought's drift up another notch, in saying to myself, "The great things are small things; their makers made the understandable mistake of squeezing the abstract greatness out of the still

small voice and making it concrete large." A wicked thought, in that setting--but also rash, as I discovered a few blocks away, when I came upon St. Stephen's Cathedral.

The wider world without is not a museum, for all the degrees of historicity in its objects. When those objects continue to live in the spectrum of an ongoing moment that includes your own life as a breathing, thinking human, your emotions about them come alive. Mine did--for the first time that day among more historical artifacts than I'd ever seen in my life--as I rounded a corner and came face to edifice with this eight-hundred-plus-year-old heart of Vienna. Indeed, its aura seemed to beat at a different evolutionary frequency in the visual field, something archaic in the city's body around which newer refinements of its organic systems--nerves, muscles, arteries--had developed, to preserve and serve *its* life, as limbic and cortical brains serve (protect, help), as much as control (overrule), reptilian brain.

From the relatively short distances allowed its sightlines by the surrounding buildings of the city's inner ring, it was massive; its density near ground level made it a black hole to vision, a gravity that sucked in the trapped light of the gaze. It forced that light up, through the expanse of its base--in which a modest-sized modern building could have fit, but only for a wisp of a moment before being consumed by its portent like a gas by flame--along its gradually narrowing roof and spires and arches, to shoot out at the points where material becomes air and matter energy, which flowed and swept the gaze back down over the structure like rich sap down some robust old oak.

Approaching close enough to see the trees within this tree--surface and grain, losing the sight of the forest the whole building sounded with its metonymic Treeness--was to see the many small hooks that worked together to so pull in that gaze. Detail--God and the Devil both were indeed in the details of such projects--little designs, words, figures, all told their little tales, lived their little lives, as though their presence in stone's space was what stone existed for. Between them, the stretches and planes of stone and wood retained the textures of their own life in nature, were not materials completely refined to their death in human life.

The front door gathered such embedded lives to it, along with those of us flesh-and-blood mobile mortals caught in the orbit: busts of the Apostles, animals, grotesques and geometric patterns, scenes from Revelations, all were clustered most in the areas around the *Riesentor* (Giant's Doorway, so named for the large fossilized tibia of a mammoth, thought to come from the leg of a pre-Flood protohuman giant, found during excavations for the doorway). The original design was early thirteenth-century Romanesque, which survives in the facade; the Gothic towers and arches and roof designs added on until 1433 culminated in the largest tower, which stands, like a rocket the Goths readied to launch away from Rome (that is, from earth), as Vienna's signature landmark.

I stepped inside and looked around, but immediately sensed another box, like the museums--coralls of refinement, control, reification, an effulgence of history's best; to be sure, quality rather than the museum's quantity, but a quality more summary than revelatory, on its face. At this point, I was more interested in the way things sprang from the world of natural material, still half-lived there, than in the way we could turn the material so far to our purposes that its own original purpose drowned in our concepts and plans. Somehow, the building itself, surviving and functioning for as long as it had, seeming indeed to grow from the ground like a tree, out there in the world, spoke to me louder than the thing(s) it enshrined.

Circling the cathedral slowly, looking it up and down up close, then backing off to take it in again whole, I repented of my earlier wicked thought about concretizing spirit. Maybe it wasn't always a mistake to amplify the still small voice into its grandest realizations--this, the pyramids, symphonies, the "monumental" (recalling Kowald's talk about this). Empire, Church, Art, Religion--yes, I was pissed off about it all, as Kowald and his fellows were, as any thoughtful Western person might be at this point in our history. I too was more interested in the small, the human scale, and if I felt my blood stirring before grandness like a moth's before a flame, my reflex had pretty much changed from fly-toward to fly-away. Still, the sight of this cathedral was having more profound an effect on me than all the other historical wonders I'd snubbed so effectively. Why?

It was rough, it was old; it had survived wars and bombings, changes in worldview, in world power; it had the stuff of myth and legend about it; its very construction was like an improvisation, with different builders from different periods conceiving different things for it to be, always innovating as an add-on to what came before; even when logical implications extended into transcendence, it was not as repudiation or replacement. Its Christian identity, originally improvised by Jesus and his successors into being, had asserted itself not only as a Self among Others, but as *the* Self of those Others; it had gotten far in the world on those terms, was still doing so, was part of the community as much as of the museum. And even for those (non-Christians/Catholics/Westerners) with whom that identity had failed, it still stood, idiomatically, as a viable gateway to the universal.

Improvisation: it had risen up from the rough by the vision, faith, and artistry of its builders... Identity: to express, momentarily--and house the living flow of--universal truth...Idiom: it was one among many, and many possible, such houses. As long as we understand that the great things are small things, it's okay to do and make them; indeed, to refrain to act so out of a sense of false humility would be arrogant, self-important; to make more *or* less of them than what they are is idolatry, and its payoff, unmasked, is base. The truth--the real life--of Christianity survived its own death as dogma and doctrine ("science," knowledge), resurrecting as poetry and myth, a metaphor available to any human body, not just the "knowing," initiated

ones.

My spirit was soaring now, primarily because it kept dodging so these nets most perfectly designed to capture its particular swimming soul. The last few hours I had spent on these things had not been derailed into the details of this or that larger universe, to spend and exhaust me; I was making free with them all to engineer my own mood, my experience, my time here, and I was happy with the job I had done so far. I wondered what would encounter me next.

The sun was so warm, the air so fresh and fragrant with it. I strolled from the twelfth to the twentieth century, away from the cathedral into the downtown mall-like area it skirted. Quintessential modernity, and American at that: the ubiquitous fast-food and other chains, shops from simple to elegant like they looked throughout most of the urban world, the Dixieland-Disneyland banjo/saxophone duo playing for street fees in earshot--a moment familiar. The buildings and their statuary ringing the plaza stood like sentinels guarding our moment on earth, overseeing it benevolently as it passed with such panache.

Then something else with an offbeat aura rose in my visual field to draw it from the splashes of all this life: an historic statue of some sort, obviously, green like the ubiquitous bronze figures on horseback--but shapeless, from this distance, something like a giant bunch of grapes hanging from the sky. As it gradually came into closer focus, it revealed itself as a sort of three-dimensional collage of humans, angels, clouds, and symbolic mixes of man and beast, all topped by a triumphant figure holding a cross. It was called *Graben* (Graves), was a monument to the victims of a 1679 plague epidemic, a joint effort constructed over time, like St. Stephen's, by several different artisans. It marked the spot where the bodies were actually buried.

I circled it like I had circled the cathedral, captivated similarly, but on a more human scale (of time as well as space), and with a more articulate awe. "My people did this," I found myself repeating over and over, incredulous. It was so beautiful, so moving; I was already a full decade older than the average life expectancy of most people until just before my own grandfather's generation...and look what they had left in their short time, through the most hellish and brutal circumstances, wars and diseases and privations that were only abstract concepts to my own easy, rich life.

If I'd ever seen anything like this in America, it would have the feel of an import from another world, the Old World, Europe; here before it, I almost felt I could reach through time, back through my own genes no more than a handful or two's worth of their corporeal carriers, and meet one of my fathers' fathers--maybe the nobleman who commissioned it, maybe the artist who designed it, maybe the workman who cast and erected it--on his way through time to America and me. The last thing I felt like was an anthropologist standing before the totem of an "other," trying to decode it for his own project; or an art historian, or a tourist. I was flung

down the path of my own totem's vision quest, willy-nilly, by the music, through the music, in the life, for the life. That path had meandered me through its hints of time and place and meaning so as to come here to a point of definition I had to accept and engage, or forever hold my lack of peace: death, my mortality, the abyss, the reverse of St. Anselm's famous God-proving question, "Why is there Something rather than Nothing?" It was getting Serious Here Now.

The *Graben* called forth other images fresh in recent memory: the actual Dead White Males' graves (all the Viennese masters, from Mozart to Haydn to Beethoven to Schumann to Schönberg) I had seen on a visit to the huge *Zentral Friedhof* (the city's main cemetery); Bach's (he was alive during this statue's construction) close walk with death, expressed throughout the texts of his music with such intimate serenity; the other *Friedhof* grave I videotaped, so struck by it: a statue of a woman (naked but for modern high-heeled shoes) squatting onto the stylized bone-phallus of a skeleton, embracing Death, next to the limb-torn, mangled body of a dead man. That said it all, about life and death in general, about Eros, and about much, including recent, European history.

Had I been the age of most of my fellow grad students, such images would have heralded a coming-of-age initiation into adulthood from not-yet-so; in my case, it was more the midlife crisis, Dante entering the woods: the same in quality, I can say (having long since experienced the youthful one), but now more backward-looking, over a life already lived, flashing before my assessing, judging eyes.

As this personal epiphany came on with more clarity and strength, so did its implications for the musical history and issues consuming me throughout the interviews, and their correlation to the people and culture that spawned and couched them. Images began to trickle, then rush up in me like the horses on which my own personal life's images rode flashing by:

- I recalled the feeling of being the music's prey triggered by Cecil Taylor's performance at the 1997 Total Music Meeting, and feelings of being its agent of aggression when I played it myself, and the life-and-death issues tackled with Dagmar's four friends;
- and the reach back to childhood triggered by my solitary reflections in Dagmar's place, the clearing I'd made for myself as a European American distinct and distant from the other kinds of Americans actually around me then;
- and the way that reflection moved to a kind of death, a loss of identity innocence, as it recalled my coming-of-age to a problematic whiteness, an authoritative blackness (or, more broadly, nonwhiteness);

- and the way that reflection broke down under the too-much-too-soon stress, glossing through a nutshell description (in the opening pages) of my adult life as an ongoing struggle for identity in the music that turned out well enough in the end. But now it was time to crack open that shell to the nut, to see just how and whether that was really true, to see how and why it had led me to this point.

I had to get out of there. I was on the verge of tears, loss of control, a public breakdown. If it was time to stare death in the face, losing my mind and forcing the help of this world around me to enable my cowardice and fear would only bring a slower, messier death. I had to flee this riot of crowd and culture and city to a place more serene, where the still, small voice could better be heard.

As with Taylor's music, the life of a flow had met its life as a moment (death)...I had to plumb this moment for its offspring, the next new flow. Somewhat zombie-like, now, I made my way vulnerably to the outside of the city's inner ring, where the trams and trains met to radiate out again to all points from the center.

I had been to another district of Vienna, an outlying, upper-middle class suburb, to present a paper at a music educator's conference at the beginning of the summer; I remembered the tram line that led to the eighteenth-century castle where the conference took place. The grounds surrounding the castle extended as a kind of nature preserve, meadows and woods, open to the public. It was big enough for walks down paths completely removed from traffic noise or any other signs of civilization. I'd had pleasant hours there before, and I headed there now as if on automatic.

Melancholy settled over the sights and sounds outside the tram. I was sad with some kind of loss. This summer had infused me so much with the feeling of getting in touch with ancestral roots that the closeness to them exacerbated my American distance from them. I pondered how that distance had played itself out in my family history, and my own personal one.

"I mean, think about it, Heffley," I thought to myself, "--the Germans and the Irish, your people, were the barbarians in America just like they were in Europe." All I knew about my family tree was that it might have easily been seen by many as "poor white trash" until as recently as my own parents' generation: post-Dust Bowl okies who made their way to California, on my mother's side, interesting characters but social outcasts on my father's ("professional" pool shark and wood sculptor grandfather, perennially starving-artist actor-writer father)--no history of professionalism, public service, formal education (I remain the first family member with more than a high school education), though obviously people of intelligence and refinement, from my point of view; good work ethic, but only marginal-to-basic financial success, nothing of distinction or genius.

"And then you--you come up with all this musical talent, get the best scholarships and opportunities to match it when you're still just a teen-ager, and what do you do? Drop out, like your FMP rebel counterparts, scorn 'the system,' 'the Establishment,' live the hippie's life, play your music (and listen to theirs) like some wannabe noble savage disdaining 'career,' 'culture,' 'art,' 'tradition;' meet and marry a Native American woman, have a child, settle down far away from your white family of origin, effectively spurn them much as you did society; bring up the child alone after the woman leaves, try to mature and carve a place in the world you'd renounced so much, for love of the child, for the idea of community and family and peace; explore and practice religion, leave it behind (or, let us say, digest/eliminate/incorporate it). Finally--here's the rub--begin your long knock on the door of professionalism, as both livelihood and identity, in music and writing."

What was the rub about that is that it was the beginning of the earnest bid for maturity, adult individuation, and from my mid-twenties or so it was marked with an ever strengthening overlay of discipline, dedication, single-mindedness--but it didn't lead to luck, even as it did. I mean that in the same way I mean it for the FMP players, Sun Ra, Braxton, and others I got to know or meet as likeminded, if not so alike in achievements; not even the best and most celebrated in the scene got very rich for very long from their visions and talents and work, and nobody around them has gotten any more successful than they from what they do.

In my case, whether I could have established myself as a more or less fulltime, growing musician or not had long been moot. I knew I didn't want to pay the price for it, to travel so much, to make scenes and gigs and schmoozes and hustles and media, to deal with critics and fans and money/no-money, to live that life. But even cultivating my music as the avocation of a freelance writer and housepainter who was no stranger to welfare and food stamps had taken me far, over time, and promised to keep doing so; but it also promised more of the same struggle, disaffection, outsider-looking-in, half by outsider's, half by insider's choice.

I remember Braxton's funny remark that when he released *Three Compositions of New Jazz* he expected it to sweep the pop charts and have the kids dancing in the streets by the millions. I remembered Sun Ra saying how the real teachers and musicians are never rewarded for their service and troubles. Some get across to the masses, some don't: Miles did, Dylan did, Picasso did--Van Gogh missed, Bird, Cézanne, Ives too, while they lived.

What was this about? This: until the conclusion of interviews, I had been riding high on the promise of the New World of academic careerism. I had a book out, I was about to get a Ph.D., and, besides the chance to do what I loved, I saw it all as a glorious lift out of a socioeconomic poverty and alienation and struggle that had befallen the first part of my adult life in spite of my best efforts to fit in, find my place, to live long and prosper. Now, seeing what I'd seen of this

arena, I felt flung back to the same old story--not being Right, driving a taxi or something while I wasted my days trying to get professional pedants, corporate entrepreneurs, mean and petty bureaucrats, or (worst of all) well-meaning people as poor as I to help me, publish me, support me, employ me, record me, save me from a long descent into senescence, obsolescence, pathetic failure and death on the streets alone. (My thoughts drifted to the East Germans living from hand to mouth...)

Yes! now we were cooking! The more depressing it got, the more the glint in the eye gleamed. This was definitely what I was drawn to face, and it was definitely *a* face of this music, whatever its impact on the life. If my engagement with it as a player had only been marginal, it had certainly turned me into such a philosopher--and a player--that I was hardly good for much else. It was the thing that had made things like money, career, community or social standing, professional peer pressure, even (often) love, friendship, family seem secondary, even silly or distracting; it had made pain, loneliness, extreme disorientation of every sort seem tolerable, preferable, worth enduring. But why were those the only options? Why was such fine and noble fulfillment of spirit and human potential so punished instead of rewarded? Why should the disagreements and disapprovals and judgments of my fellow idiotic human beings have to translate into such hardship for me and (most galling) those who loved, believed in, counted on me?

As I rode, I registered moodily the Danube and castles giving way to plainer, newer buildings, then shops and apartments, finally suburbs with orchards, nice homes. It evoked for me car rides I had taken in Eugene, Oregon near the end of my twenty-year stay there. I could drive through that town--indeed, as far outside it as the covered bridges and large estates near the Pacific coast--and pick a house that I had painted out of just about every neighborhood, some whole tracts of them in the newer blocks; children had been born there, had grown up to buy new houses of their own, while I continued eking out my labor of life with not a penny ahead, a renter still, a starving artist laborer type. Why? how? what to say, how to explain it? who would believe it wasn't a choice, or a fate of character flaws? All I knew is it happened in spite of myself, of many bids for more along the way--if only for successful ownership of my own business, or home ownership, or a decent return on all the journalism I'd sold, in the form of a real job, or on all the club dates and similar gigs I'd done. I'd pursued all those activities as part of a plan to get somewhere, to improve life, just as much as to enjoy the moments, but it was all water under the bridge, gone like time, music vanished in air.

Sadness, sorrow, rage--mystification, feeling like a pawn in a game beyond my understanding, much less control. I flirted with thoughts of walking away from this dissertation and all it was supposed to be promising. I knew how it could go--success in school and beyond was as arbitrary as failure, as the letters A and F. I was lucky to have encountered the allies and

opportunities I had, but if my luck rested on them, and if they could come and go so fickle, like time, where did it really rest? *Why did I keep following this music and its worlds around? How could I get so far and so nowhere at the same time?* Maybe it was time to go eat grass like a beast in the field for seven years, like that crazy king in the Old Testament, then come to my senses and make some sounder decision about my life.

I came from a people who would eat their young and starve their old, kill their best and worship their worst, all for the sake of the power to do the same thing to the rest of the world's people. And I doubted not at all that that rest, those others, were a bit different, underneath their less powerful righteousness and wisdom. It was just our turn, and they had done plenty of the same when it had been theirs, when we had been the weaker, less organized, less cultivated ones, the bushmen, the forest people...

Jesus Christ, where were these thoughts coming from? A part of me watched their descent into gloom and doom, wondering where it would end up. I couldn't be too far from bottom now; if I was being called to face the futility of life and reality of death, I couldn't do much better than this, personally or impersonally. I experienced a funky confusion between my own personal issues and the more mythical ones (to me) of the similar soul-searching I imagined my heroes and peers to be doing throughout spacetime, from Moses and Jesus through everyone else I knew about right down to the ones around me now in life.

Moving my body off the tram's clanging, rattly motion and into the few steps toward the woods I sought afforded me the chance to similarly shift my meditation. Classic depressive catastrophizing had been milked for all I could possibly squeeze out of it then; time to turn it around and move on.

Towit: things had gone *supremely* down their best lines of potential, plunking me down in the most *superb* position of my best dreams. Charlie Parker said that if you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn; I was thinking that it was what came out of my horn all those years that shaped my life along the lines it took. I could have spent myself on money and been tasting its ashes in my mouth now; I could have landed a job, a career, a marriage out of fear of the worse or unknown, and been imprisoned or broken by them now; I could have disrespected or feared physical labor, or fatherhood, or erotic health and self-knowledge so much that I would have been deprived of their influences in my life, their salutary effects on my body and its psychic reaches and roots, so that I would be a poor shell of a man instead of the lion in sweet, late, lazy summer I felt myself to be.

That I wasn't so was because I stayed with the music, with the freedom from those common pitfalls of time that the music brought me, the freedom to be as creative and spiritual, as healthy as possible, the *freedom* of a way, a practice, a discipline, not an abstract program I had to get

with or die. And I was still pregnant with that same freedom; the future of the grave, of the worst life might come up with, looked as bright as the past, both for me and for the West, the whites, the blacks, the erstwhile Reds (and the other reds, the defeated commies), the yellows and browns... We had survived by dancing with, then on, then around the *power* of the oppressors in our lives, goddamn it, and we would continue until we were dancing on *their* graves, even as their mouths continued moving reflexively to eat us and our children. There is Nothing Rather Than Something, *and* Something Rather Than Nothing. Daily New Paradox...

Facing down mortality isn't the terror it's cracked up to be, I thought, so glib, so flip. In the music, death see-saws with life, like those flowers laid by those bones in those Neandertal graves. Death only eclipses life if you don't embrace it, keep it in its place: Greek noise as sacrificial killer of life (plants, fish, beasts) and death (silence), plainchant as quiet killer of that noise; Gregorian chant as killer of heterogeneity, secular music as killer of sacred; the murder (prohibition) of drums in the slaves' hands, jazz' violent assault on Western music, from the inside out; "improvisation" and "composition" as each other's killers; the child as patricidal, as victim too of parricide; freedom in time as killer of law, time as killer of that freedom; the Immortality Projects of Histories, Arts, Religions, Letters, Civilizations. Sex as kamikaze aggression for the sake of life, the death built into sex...they all kill each other, revive each other...who could sort it out?

Yes, I had a spring in my step, tempered only slightly (was this the worst mortality could deal me? HA! it had overestimated my capacity for its horror...), and I rode that spring, into...

THE WOODS

It is the poetry of the simple, naïve life that we may find among the negroes in Africa or even among the Greeks. Folktales are the harvest of forgotten places, cherished by the common folk and preserved by them. They possess the same purity as we see it reflected in the souls and eyes of children; they are simple, yet always fresh in their appeal.

--Wilhelm Grimm, in Kamenetsky (1992: 66)

- As Wilhelm saw it, Naturpoesie derived its powerful vision and "eternal quality" from its quest for truth. In that sense, it was not a mere form of entertainment but a significant expression of the humanity of man. A mere play of aesthetics had little to do with this quest. Wilhelm likened Naturpoesie's quest for truth to the powerful current of a mighty river. In comparison, modern poems and fantasies were nothing but meandering brooks or shallow streams.

--Kamenetsky (64)

In the very earliest time,
when both people and animals lived on earth,
a person could become an animal if he wanted to
and an animal could become a human being.

Sometimes they were people
and sometimes animals
and there was no difference.
All spoke the same language.

That was the time when words were like magic.
The human mind had mysterious powers.
A word spoken by chance
might have strange consequences.
It would suddenly come alive
and what people wanted to happen could happen--
all you had to do was say it.

Nobody could explain this:
That's the way it was.

--Translated from the
Inuit (Eskimo) by Edward Field

There was actually a black, wrought-iron gate, unlocked but latched. As I entered, closed it behind me, set off down the paved walkway, I closed the gate on the vagaries of life and death as I might (as I had on the library, museum, and cathedral) the lid on a box, or the cover of a Russian novel, or an American play, take your pick of tragic loss to redeem.

Walking on down the road, my thoughts turned to the moment in Dagmar's apartment when I looked down on her building's courtyard at the young couple playing with their child there, and how that sight turned my thoughts to my childhood, and to the lore and texts from the West's own childhood (Grimm's fairy tales, Bible) I had taken in then. I thought of all the variations on the nature-ringed-by-culture design, from Berlin's buildings to its and every city's many versions of this enclosed preserve--like Golden Gate Park and Central Park, though most American design seemed to be more about building island-fortresses of "culture" (defined way down, if time is what enriches culture) to rebuke the overwhelming presence of so much nature ringing it.

I recalled my childhood attachment to trees. As long as I could remember I'd had, whenever possible, a secret, private place picked out with a special tree at its center. The first--two, actually--from age 5 to 7, a big old willow tree right in the yard of the house, and a fig tree close by. I'd swing on the vines of the former like Tarzan, and sit in the latter as high as I could climb, pretending it was a rocket ship taking me to space, on fig fuel. Later, when we moved, it was a big oak, in the San Francisco Zoo, behind the seals' area. It branched out from a trunk wide enough to form a platform where I could sit comfortably, and shimmy up any of the main branches to quite some height. Later again, into my adolescent years, an old half-dead tree in a park-woods much like this one, hollowed out enough to make for a proper private sanctuary.

I hadn't thought of this in years; I'd never thought of it as a submotif of my childhood, but now it hit me with the force of something that defined everything else, suddenly, unbidden. So did the thought that human beings were originally tropical animals, not a life form begun in the colder climes. We grew in the trees, we sprang from the tropics. We left the trees for our walk in the sun, then found we could walk away from the sun, then lose our melanin, change our body hair--life's gifts in the tropics, but liabilities up north--in the ice and snow and dearth of sun. Then we got strong from the hard, deprived life, got cold inside ourselves, and rode back down toward the tropics, regarded them as our "Eden," our own tree of life, our rightful place in the sun...but we had changed, our relationship to the sun itself had changed, and it's been problematic ever since (especially lately, with those bombs we made that bring the sun way too close for comfort, yet as if to get warm again...)

I, for one, preferred the North, had no interest in the hot spots, the cultures there. I felt drawn to the Northern latitudes as to introversion, balm, health; images of life much south of the 48th parallel inspired thoughts of skin cancer, exhaustion, weak eyes squinting, dry flesh, alienation from those who would thrive around me, early death.

I was getting tired of my mind running on so, so far and wide from every near and here. As we do in the music, I willed the reaches to stop, reined them into silence, simplicity. I savored my walk as I had my trees back then, and just let it go at that.

To my right and left the wood had opened up into park-like stretches of lawn, dotted with benches here and there, and plaques commemorating donations of money and time to the place's support and maintenance, for all to enjoy. An aged couple sat on one of the benches, soaking in the sun; another elder strolled by me with a "*Grüße Gott.*" For all I knew, he might have been one honored with a plaque.

Man, I wasn't ready for America. I'd only scratched the surface here, of a cradle-to-grave life I wished to live. Back there, in that Wild West, freedom meant the freedom to shriek and fight like a gull in a million over some bit of garbage, even over very good food turned into scraps to be fought over, stolen from the swarm. The communists were right, they were just too much the composers, as the capitalists were right but too much the individualist improvisers: both too impatient with lust for power, the greed-quick and the fear-frozen dead. What's a poor boy to do? I didn't want ambition, glory, I had no mark to make, I wasn't in some race to fling my one and only life into some Egg, some Bullet, or the Void--I wanted a simple shelter and rations in a pleasant community simply by virtue of being alive, and the freedom and time to pursue my own callings and pasttimes whether they led to private joy or public acclaim. Gravy, whichever, on a plate everyone should be given, in return simply for maintaining it and perhaps a little more, some part of this park, for instance, or of some everyday business in town.

The lawns and these thoughts ended as I came upon the next visual shock to rock my world a bit that day. Lost in the thoughts for a moment or two, I hadn't noticed the paved path turn to packed dust, curve away from the straight shot through the grass and carry me to another gate. It was a gate in my mind only, but there a gate it certainly was.

On each side of the path stood a stone pillar, a couple of feet taller than me and perhaps a yard in diameter. They were crafted only minimally, were still raw, looked old, like ruins, maybe Roman, or even older (I let my fancy flow). One had a crack running diagonally across its top few feet, the other had actually broken a piece off its top, a rough shard now lying next to it.

I didn't stop, but did slow to look them both over very carefully, and turned to walk backwards so I could continue doing so. Beyond them, from where I had just crossed the threshold they whispered to each other, no more passers-by in view, no more plaques or other signs of this place's domestication, no well-kept lawns, only the new tree line where the woods had begun now in my memory behind the curve the path had taken into them. I turned and resumed my direction, into woods, woods, nothing but woods. The sun was now shadow, the path enclosed;

Hansel and Gretel, the Babes in the Woods, Jack at the Beanstalk, Sleeping Beauty...they and others stirred in me, whispered in the air of these woods.

Oh boy...walking to the beat of a silent walking bass, some ominous, seductive pulse, ready for anything, ready to jump or be cool, whatever whyever. The Hush was tense, relaxed too, alive, for the moment anyway. A big black bird swooped with a **CAW!** from a tree nearby, the breeze picked up on its sound, played the trees like brushes; the wood's winds both welcomed and warned, me and themselves; a squirrel chattered in, did a run as quick and electric as the bird's sound flying. I'd heard enough...

"HO!" I shouted, clapping my hands. The woods stood still. What's he got to say? they whispered. Who is he to say it? Looks like he's coming on here; come on with you then, we hear you now...

The road got a little strange...packed dust had given way at the gate to older, darker dirt, mixed in with the tops of woody root systems and with stones that looked natural but also possibly selected, maybe, maybe not, as paving stones. They added to the feeling of walking on some ancient abode brought back to memory in the world by *my* act of stumbling upon it, though it also felt like I could be anywhere on earth.

It dawned on me that this was the first time in my life that I had been in some wilderness area--areas I'd long enjoyed in America--where the human history and prehistory was not that of the Native Americans of my first wife and daughter's tribe, but, like that of my second wife's and mine, one of hunters, gatherers, farmers, and fighters who might have led directly to me, and (who knew?) back so far as to mix with some of those Neandertalers mentioned above (Neandertal was only a few miles from Wuppertal). If I thought back far enough, I could stand here and imagine my own ancestors as the simple savages being encroached on by the stronger, more advanced people, from the south, rather than, always, as the rapacious ones doing the killing, enslaving, ruling and regretting.

That image flickered fast, and the usual one, of my folk encroaching, came back--but I fled it as I would have the sight of civilization around me at that point, cupped the other in my hand against its wind. I cupped it so not with my mind alone, but by turning, on impulse, off this beaten path into the first clearing that let me, let me into the woods around me. In fact, I could have gone either left or right at that point, and chose left because it sloped up and into thicker woods; I wanted both the exercise of the climb and the shelter, or cover, of the trees. It felt more primally safe, even more stimulating, with its constantly changing, up-close scenery, little visual surprises (like in Vienna's alleys) at every turn.

The climb offtrail served to sustain and grow the feeling of being on ancestral ground. I felt like a kid again, playing Indian Scout, the brave in the woods who knew the meaning of every smell, sight, sound, to survival of body and food for thought and spirit, who prowled through them all like a cat...only now I really *was* that Indian, that Indo-European, stealthy, attuned to this place on the molecular level, because spawned and shaped by it there. Before the *Graben* I had muttered, as if in pentecostal "tongues," "my people did this," compulsively obsessively; now I was saying, under my breath, in the same way, "my people were here, we know this place, since time began, not that long ago..."

At a point maybe halfway up this rise, something caught my eye, stood out from the rest of the forest patterns that had become a blur next to my inner visions: a log, a boulder...no, a bench, made from the log and boulder.

I slowed, stopped, looked; a big, crude bench, made with a ten-foot-long section of a tree thicker than anything I saw growing, about as big around as the stone columns guarding the path, backed by a boulder with a flat (flattened?) face. It might have passed for nature, from a distance, but the more I stared and the closer I edged, the more obviously it was artifact: grass, moss, and leafy branch were laid out to form the seat, matted beyond fresh into soft; **the boulder had some kind of markings by some kind of pigment, and the log had etchings carved into its facing side, and marks and cuts, whatever they meant or didn't mean, were similar.**

It was so striking because so big--too big for one person, or even two or three to have arranged...yet it looked made, by someone...someone big...who wanted a place to sit, or sleep. I looked around; I was breathing hard from the hike up, but the woods were peaceful, not tense, not ominous...*ganz normale*. Alone as ever, I approached it, slowly.

I fixed on the markings: nothing like writing, or pictures...could have been the equivalent of scribbles, but definitely put there with care; the repetition of some of their designs alone suggested (without proving) thought.

Puzzled, I walked the length of the thing, some ten feet back from it. At the far end, bones and some remains of rodents or larger animals littered the ground, and a round stone, a little too big to grasp, with a sharp edge. Off to my right was some kind of old scat suggesting a big animal.

That was enough. I felt the urge to bolt until I was out of the woods and this sudden danger--but that didn't make sense. There were no bears or dangerous beasts in these woods, this was just a little reserve in a well-to-do Viennese suburb, the thought was absurd. Some kids might have come upon this natural formation, spruced it up, maybe even bagged a squirrel or two just for a game of Wildman, and that was that.

I looked around again, piercing every inch of the woods with my gaze. Nothing, peace, normal. I relaxed myself into the next obvious move: try out the bench, sit a spell in its spell.

I padded over and hitched myself slightly up onto it, leaned back. I noticed some hairs beside me in the mat, long and black, and others long and white; if I had thought it possible that anything other than people could be at the bottom of this, I'd have been uneasy, but I shrugged them off as someone's head hairs. Maybe the "wildmen" had brought some wild women here to play...At night, with a sleeping bag and pillow, this could be a sweet place to sleep. Indeed, it was making me sleepy now. I closed my eyes; maybe a little nap...the warm, fragrant air and whisperings of the woods lulled me, a doze came on for a moment or two...

...and, half-sleeping, I half-woke to a slight rustling sound, a slight vibration, so slight it might not have been there. But it registered; I came to more, felt I should check it out...

Felt hell, my body was jumping now, open-eyed in a springing shock of adrenalin and fear. **WHAT THE HELL WAS IT?!**

It was a man, a giant, hairy, naked man. No, not naked...a furry man, or an ape--or something in between. It was just sitting there next to where I'd been laying, unfazed by my violent jerk to my feet, unthreatening, gazing at me with a half-indifferent, half-surprised look.

Wait. No, I was still lying down, my eyes still shut. I was having one of those dreams of waking, before actually doing so. I was still there--and so was the memory of the sound, the vibration. I tried to open my eyes, felt I did so, saw the normal view, doubted it, realized my eyes were still closed. Paralysis bedevilled by the illusion of motion and mobility...

Then, heart racing and innards tingling dreadfully with the thought of being in danger and unable to act, I made an enormous effort to thrash out of my depths and into control of my body. I did it, I moved, I gulped air. I opened my eyes, I rolled off the log...and was staring at the biggest foot I'd ever seen in my life, black fur on black skin, more splayed and misshapen than human, but more humanlike than any animal I'd ever seen.

The foot didn't move. In the confusion between dream and reality (how did I "see" this a moment ago?), I kept moving, clambered to my feet in a flood of control, scrambled back to the nearest tree, locked eyes on the foot and its body as if to protect myself from it, to size it up in full: an ape, not an ape, a man, not a man...

The urge to run hit hard--but my body didn't follow it. He was making no move toward me; he had not disturbed me when I slept; if he did decide to run after me if I ran, I couldn't win. All these thoughts primed me for imminent death, whether passive or fighting, and that kept me still and unpanicked as the best thing to do. In this state, fascination began tickling shock to feed

more information to the eyes.

Hairy with straight black and straight white hairs, as though aging, a pelt of fur swirling in strange patterns; two conical pouches, one the size of a woman's purse, the other more like a man's wallet, made of rough leather around his neck; no clothes, but a wristwatch hanging on the little pouch's thong, and what looked like a bone flute tied to the big one. Big, seven or eight feet, if he stood; muscular, male (no breasts, a bushy groin mostly hiding his organs there); a face protruding from sloping chin and forehead, less hair there, thin lips, wide mouth, intelligent eyes, greenish brown, a wide flat nose, big ears, longish head hair. And...something in his hand. It looked like a big hand-rolled cigarette, or joint, he was smoking it. He was, he put it to his lips and smoked it, looking me over as if waiting to see what I'd do, inhaling and exhaling. The very picture of unthreatening behavior. I felt he had seen my kind before, was used to my behavior, was letting me go through what I must.

Bigfoot, Yeti, Sasquatch: those words came to me in a flash. They were the only referents I had for what I was seeing, wide open though they were. I recalled what I knew about this subject--as much as any human could know, really, whose knowledge came from the books, even the best books³--but now I was in the middle of the kind of experience that had spawned the books, and I had to deal with it.

If nothing else, these thoughts gave me a context for both my situation and emotions, and I could think more clearly about the next move. The main thing was that this was already significantly different than anything I'd read about. Well, maybe not everything: there were accounts of contacts (even barter transactions, especially for alcohol and trinkets--even matings! [Halpin/Ames, 257, Shackley, 112-13]) with humans beyond the chance, furtive sighting (an explanation of the pouches and wristwatch?); and there were theories (Shackley, 140-64) about them as "relict humans" (Neanderthals), thus *not* "apes" eerie for their man-likeness. But this was certainly right up there with the strangest of the claims. To my personal curiosity, that added a sense of responsibility. My professionalism, of all things, kicked in; what could I add to human knowledge here?

I mean, first there was the bench, then the pouches and wristwatch and smoking...but the main thing was his demeanor, his behavior. It suggested, subtly, such intelligence that I was struck with the idea that creatures such as he had been developing, evolving even as humans had done, and that I was seeing a new and improved version of what others had spotted throughout the history of such sightings, was perhaps seeing what others had seen only from a distance, was seeing more of the real picture (though the fossil record, I recalled, shows Neanderthal skulls to have the largest brain capacity of all human species, including "sapiens."

Amazing thought: what if such creatures had some material, psychological culture parallel to

our own, one which had, as ours had this century (after all, they were, if the theories were true, part of our family [see Wilson (1999), and McDonald (1999)]), made a quantum leap of some sort after millennia of relative stasis?

I started with fear of my own processes then; I should be panicked, bolting, at least rushing with adrenalin--how could I be so calmly reflecting, curious and speculative in such a moment? It made me feel vulnerable. But he was still so obviously empathetic and intelligent as he continued to stare at me, that fear subsided to the curiosity, to trust, to, finally, respect, all in a moment. My body didn't bolt because I didn't want to be rude.

He was the first to break our freeze. He stood up, still careful not to make sudden movements that might have scared me. He stepped a bit away from the bench, held out his arms, palms facing me, as if in appeasement, reassurance, then down, as if opening into his own trust--and he motioned with both arms for me to sit down next to him!

As I just kept staring, open-mouthed, he spoke. Like a dog trying to vocalize words, in a husky, growly, clumsy voice, he said something like, "Bit-te, bit-te, please, place, play, see," clearing his intent up with his gestures, his ingratiating nods and grinning, mollifying motions.

By then, I did feel safe. From the roller-coaster height of stark terror I had simply plunged, through these moments he had shaped, into a level certainty that he meant me no harm, and, indeed, was an important creature for me to meet and communicate with. It was almost as if intuitive and rational modes of assessment had switched places in my mind's hierarchy of criteria: I knew, without a doubt, he wouldn't hurt me, would help me somehow, and I was less and less concerned with explanatory details of what was happening.

I walked back to the bench, slow but fearless; a small smile and puzzled look formed on my face, and he continued to encourage and usher me until we were close enough to touch. He held out his massive hand, looking at mine; I raised my arm to a handshake, which he executed gracefully, as a big man might with a woman or child. He gestured again for me to sit, and I did so, and then so did he, a comfortable few feet away.

Reports of filth and odor I had read certainly didn't apply to him; he was clean, even fragrant, a mix of woods and fur and smoke and fermentation (?) coming off him. He had lost his smoke, and was dedicating himself to an attempt to speak with me with vocal apparatus that sounded either ill constructed for the task or rusty with ages of disuse. His forehead furrowed in concentration, and his eyes bespoke infinitely more intelligence than his appearance or "speech" conveyed to me.

"Ma-nn," he said, hand on his chest, gazing into my eyes for signs of understanding. Then he

repeated the word while lightly tapping my arm with the back of his knuckles.

And in that simple utterance, an awesome thing happened: I heard much more than the semantic content of the word, as clearly and surely as if he had said more. What I heard might well be conveyed on this paper as: "We are both part of the same human family; the speculations about Yetis and such, the literature on them you recalled, are on the mark. You are indeed of those you call *homo sapiens*, who came out of Africa north to Eurasia into the lands my people, the ones you know of now as Neanderthals, had roamed for a hundred thousand years. And we are both descendants of what you call *homo erectus*, also out of Africa. Our bodies share some genes. Your ancestors and mine lived, fought, bred together."

No, those words didn't form in my mind, but the knowledge they detail formed there instantly when he touched me and said his awkward "Ma-nn." The ascent of intuition and loosening of rational vigilance I mentioned? With this input from him, it turned into downright telepathy; I was as sure of what he was communicating to me as I am of the words I give you now, in just that detail. And even though I experienced this knowledge as forming in me, unfolding, blinking on in me like my own flow of thought, I was as sure that it was coming to me from him, as he meted it out through his gestures, expressions and vocalizations. There was no sense of being mentally invaded by his thoughts, but the more I took in his voice and its messages, the more my cognition mushroomed so. Within a few minutes, it seemed the most natural way in the world to communicate, as if I'd been doing it all my life. (And, again, it was also obvious that he had had much previous contact with my kind, including many such first contacts.)

Before I leave this description of process behind for one of the content of our exchange, I want to picture it here a little more thoroughly. Here we are, these two creatures, fast engaged on this bench in intense rapport. He--we'll call him Mann--is growling out mangled words from several European languages, fragments, any and every sound his voice can make, straining physically to bridge the chasm of the difference between our vocal apparatus and conventions of speech, stumbling over the words and phrases he'd picked up in whatever previous truck he'd had with us and our ways; occasionally, in frustration or exuberance or sheer reflex, he would resort to something that sounded more natural to his own way of vocalizing or verbalizing--high-pitched shrieks, warbles, slides between high and low, sounds that might have been words but as uttered more by rocks, wind, fire or water than by flesh, to my ears. (I would learn later that the knowledge his sounds imparted to me reflected a sophisticated command of our languages, but not as systems of sounds, rather as systems of thought.)

For example, he might make an animal noise, a roar or growl, that I might put on the page in a "word" such as "**A-A-A-R-RGH!!**" But when I heard him do it, it would register like a Rorschach Test for the ear, from which meaning emerged immediately, with no sense of me

projecting it. Immediately doesn't mean instantly--I could track my own cognitive process' moments--so "**A-A-A-R-RGH!!**" might have become "Our God," or "All of our Gutenberg," or "Oliver got a drum"--or anything, depending, it seemed, on what really was objectively being communicated. It wasn't a clean, direct process; half the time, or more, I did hear only noise, often musical noise--something surprisingly resonant with much of the music I had heard all summer (all my life, for that matter)--but if I kept my ears open, kept searching for meaning, it came through. (Again, it was a process very like the struggles I'd had in understanding and speaking German that summer.)

There we sat, then, having a fine old time, a reunion, a revelation. His big pouch, it turned out, was full of some fruity, heady wine, his little pouch of tobacco or some similar herb. I shared a bit of both, he too had only a bit--but we both rushed headlong into something together that I will build up to for you by constructing the conversation as it *felt*, having done my best with how it *looked* and *sounded*.

So--the stories about these creatures were true, and the explanation was that they were a relict population that had always been thin in numbers--socially, they were never inclined to gather into groups, neither, even, biologically, to breed much, especially since they had really thinned: they roamed in small family groups or pairs, or (mostly) singly, hunting and gathering, raiding, occasionally even trading with humans, mostly staying to the remoter Northern highlands (the Caucasus and Pamir mountains in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the Ural and Verkoyansk ranges in Russia, the Himalayas and Ordos in China, parts of Mongolia, Tibet--and the mountains stretching from my own birth place of San Francisco up to the Pacific Northwest of my adult life, areas I'd hiked extensively my whole life). They had remained so undetected (though, obviously, not entirely) because they wanted to. They had made the contacts they had because they knew they could manage them, largely through this knowledge, this rapport, I now realized, they managed to share with their contactees. The literature I knew included reports of human populations who did live in loose contact with them, without fuss.

To the point, then. What he conveyed to me, over our rough give and take, went something like this:

"Think of us like you do whales, or dolphins--mammals like you who have evolved down different lines into a sophistication of sentience and intelligence, even culture, equal or superior to your own. Think of us as the chimps you've taught to speak, or the animals you've domesticated enough to understand as intelligent, feeling creatures you can commune with and care about," he "said." "We are even more so, as you've learned already, because we are even more closely related to you.

"What is our story? Down what lines have we evolved? What you would call psychic lines,

paranormal lines," he said. "We have remained at the most primitive material and social level, even as we've watched you from our distance surge in those ways, because that simplicity has freed us up to develop our power to (for one thing) communicate in the way I'm doing now with you.

"But here is what we can do, here is what we do do: we leave our bodies to their foraging, sleeping, walking motions as we travel through time and space and other bodies, at will, according to our needs and powers and whims. Am I bored, lonely, needy in my days? I leave them behind, in the very act of embracing them, living them through. You might see me stir myself from this log and walk off into the woods; in those moments I am, inside myself, walking back to the time of our time, when we lived without hiding, when we were young and unknowing but powerful, the lords of the earth in freedom. I am not imagining it, I am really going back there, being there, living the life of some body there that has transformed, through time, into my own, through sex and death and birth: one of my ancestors. It is like remembering my own past, only the recollection is more than mere memory, is as vivid as my awareness of the present.

"It is like being in a big house," he said. "The earliest, main rooms, in the core, are big, lively, the people in them oblivious to the smaller, more numerous ones added on around them. I, in my life here, am in one of the smallest, poorest, loneliest, coldest, looking out the window at the world and other houses that have come up around mine, neighbors also oblivious to my house, for the most part. But when I want to, I can go back into the main rooms--back in time, to you, but for me it is all one moment, beginning with my people's appearance on the earth, ending with...ah, let's not go there just yet.

"Sometimes I revisit trouble rather than joy, when I'm feeling bored with satisfaction rather than want. I relive someone's war, someone's grief or death, and come back to my own walk in the woods with more appreciation for my life there. The more I do this, the more I can do it, the farther back I can go, the longer I can stay, the wider I can reach.

"The very lowest level of this way of ours, which all of us grow into in our youths, is the consciousness of us all at our own moment in time. We don't compulsively socialize or breed, we stay as solitary as we do, because with the twitch of a mental switch we can turn from our own awarenesses as individuals to that of the entire group of us spread out over our distances and times; we can feel ourselves as the scant hundreds we are by now, on this land mass, one body with many members making its ways. We can even sense others of our kind on other landmasses, vaguely but unmistakably, scattered over the earth and our time."

As he said as much, I came out of my struggle to understand and speak with him--mostly asking him the questions that led to these answers--and back to my own self-awareness to

reflect a moment. It would understate to say I felt disoriented; this knowledge just imparted, as palpably true as anything preceding it, sat and shimmered like a nuclear explosion, a shock off the scale. The rearrangement of mental underpinnings that had begun with the simple diffusion of rationality and the burgeoning of intuition, mentioned above, was expanding like that explosion's mushroom cloud. A part of me, far in the corners of the house...I mean, my mind... was shouting hysterically, "Everything has changed, nothing is the same anymore!" but as if over a great distance. I didn't care, I wasn't shocked, I wasn't interested, I left it to its shouting. Another part of me was trying to remember what language I spoke, originally: English, German, music, growling, shrieking, whining--it all ran together in my mind in a way I couldn't quite sort out or settle. I let it hang, I had to...

Another part of me, closer, was feeling an increase in strength, well-being, warmth--and that part was content to let those shriller, muddier voices fall away to themselves, like some benevolent giant rousing out of sleep as his dreams lingered in one last echo of voices. This part was hungry to turn back to what the Mann was saying, because it was becoming clearer, making more and more sense, as the rest made less.

Curious...as I looked at him, strained (though less and less) to understand him, he seemed to change, visually. Was he actually getting smaller, less hairy, more human looking? or was that just me? I mean...just...imagination...

"Your culture has ideals, which manifest variously in your various heroes or role models," he was "psaying." "You have people you see as stupid and coarse, undeveloped, and also those you see as having reached heights of human potential--saints, great artists or masters of some sort. We value our potential to do what I've described to you. Our greatest men and women are those whose thousand-year reaches extend farthest and widest, down their bodies' timelines, out their genetic branches. Our ideal of perfection--like your Nirvana, or Heaven--is the ability to travel so throughout the spacetime continuum, on every level, through each and every link as it actually exists between all that is, beyond our own organism's physical/psychic sensings. Our group awareness includes a few such people; we see them leading their lives, in their moments, as we see all our members do, but if we try and approach them, share their cognition, all we see is vast planes of light and dark chasms, mystery unbearable. We keep our distance, we honor and care for them, and we dream of cultivating our own gardens so gloriously."

My God. If what he was saying was true...what? I'd had the beginning of a thought, I thought feebly, then it fell away. If what he was saying was true...um...what? what was happening to me? what was me...?

"When the moment of our individual death comes, if we're living right, it doesn't trap us; we pass it by into the group mind, where we confer with ourselves about whether we should

continue growing in time, bearing more young, or whether it is enough, time to end it.

"I tell you"--he seemed to be wrapping his story up--"this is the brink of our own moment now. We are old, even by our own lights; we feel it, feel what it means...yet it is the one experience *new* to us. Our members have dwindled to handfuls in recent centuries. Our urge to continue has always been that of life itself, unquestionable, prime--but lately the idea that we should stop, that we want to stop, whatever it may mean to the time of our life...looms more and more.

"Part of that loom--to get back to the 'end' I mentioned--lies in this: those 'enlightened' ones among us that I also mentioned? They occur sporadically throughout the span of our history... but toward the end...close to this time now, though the end itself, if it is there, we are unable to approach completely, because...toward the end all our shrinking number, every member, has this impenetrable infinity in them, this light and dark and mystery...I tell you," he repeated, "it is the most baffling thing for us, each of us deals with it as he can, as he must, willy-nilly or masterful...it is as though we are splashing to our end through time in one decisive burst outward, out of our species to return to (through?...all lines radiant from our spacetime locus?) the universe that spawned us."

(All lines radiant? like...mine?)

This thought did form to completion--and hit me with its second, stronger shock. "~~A~~~~A~~~~A~~
~~A~~~~X~~~~X~~~~G~~hairyeeeeee!!" I roared, keened, jumped to my feet. My feet--big, black, hairy; my hands, also, and my limbs, my naked, furry body. I looked down at it, at what I could see, from such a height, to such a depth, through the scream of all the saxophones, brass and other metals, horsehairs, catguts, and stretched skins of beasts in the bloody, raging, burning world. My height, my depth, my scream was eternal, untimely, hovering without...

...then flooding down into that flesh, that Mann's flesh, his time, his being with a staggering lurch, like a baby yanked from the womb.

Then--whirling in a rage, trying to scream again but mute, then trying to speak but *growling, whining, shrieking*...and focusing menace impulsive on that doll-like human on the bench, that Mike Heffley thing who had done this to me, that devil I could kill in a snap!

He raised his hand as I lunged--not in fear, or protection, but command; my giant body stopped, as if spoken to. "Easy, Mann," he spoke; the body calmed. His blue eyes bore into me like the sky of my own world, compassionate, severe, soft all at once. His face was somber, set, unafraid. "I know how you feel, but I'm not the one who did this to you; it could never have happened if you didn't want and need it as much as I. I can tell you too that I didn't foresee it; it was part of that impenetrable infinity I described, the part that was in my own self, the part I am managing to confront here and now, on the fly, as I go. It is not that part of time known to me, I am knowing it new, just like you.

"But--I have been where you are now, and I know you can understand and know what I say as true: you have not been violated, and you are not imprisoned, unless time and life themselves are rape and captivity. You are where you want to be, choose to be, were born to be; you have much to learn and

experience there. The way forward and every other way lies inside, and you will find them and take them.

"Right?"

With that last word, something else did click in me. I was no longer listening to someone talking to me, but to the conclusion of my own thought, in his human mouth. It changed the welter of emotion into a moment of clarity. I couldn't kill this man--it would be suicide. Everything he was would be lost to me, I truly would be imprisoned, in my own stupid bestiality.

This was all a trick of perception, an angle of view; I felt within me the power to reverse it, I did something in my mind to try and do that...

...and there I was, looking through my own human eyes again at my Mann, grinning back at me like some fat and happy secret. I laughed, despite myself, surprised, delighted; he stuck his hand out, I slapped it. We stared at each other so for another moment or two...

...and I moved right back into his carcass and he into mine, as happy as two clams in two shells.

* *

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I had needed that nap, and it was delicious. I woke up quick, sat up fast, felt like a new man. Felt like a Volkswagen full of rocket fuel. Stood up, looked around--shivered with delight at being alive, in such a life; the trees, so old-familiar, looked new, more like flowers than trees, pretties blooming for a moment of lovely. Ah, God I felt good! Interviews completed--and what a dissertation I would write!

I stretched, rubbed and patted myself all over. I looked around at the bench, the black and white hairs...and the two pouches, one big one little, which I left lying there for someone else to puzzle over.

I had a gig to make, still had time to make it. "Stick with me, Heffley," I muttered to myself, God knows why, "this is just the beginning."

Notes

1. From a private conversation.
2. Later I would read Leo Feigin's collection *Russian Jazz: New Identity* (1985) with great interest, seeing in it a picture much like the one my research into the Germans had drawn: a reach by musicians through an American import to its Western roots--pre-Revolutionary Russian "tribal" identity, the same kind of whiteness-as-reflection-rather-than-foil-of-the-blackness-projected-in jazz, let us say. Another study...
3. Ever the academic researcher, I had ferreted out only the competent, reputable literature I could glean from the bowels of Wesleyan University's Science Library. Sanderson (1961), Napier (1973), Halpin and Ames (1980), and Shackley (1983) had alerted me to the discourse about the probabilities, possibilities, and explanations of the existence, both physical and mythological, of such creatures. They included corroborations of the general appearance before me now, even down to details such as the strange spiral hair pattern, and the appearance in this particular place (John Colarusso's "Ethnographic Information on a Wild Man of the Caucasus," in Halpin and Ames [1980: 255-64]).