

from *Tuning* (1984)

from Douglas Messerli, *From the Other Side of the Century*

David Antin [1932]

REAL ESTATE

while i believe that what im doing depends essentially upon
the event here going here coming here and making
what my idea of what a poem is or making my idea of
what a valuable talk is if thats what poetry is there is a
life problem a kind of running down of ones life i may
not be facing it very gravely now although when i came
to california i started running on the beaches they have
beaches and you can run on them and i twisted an ankle
while running on the beach and it took a damned long
time for my ankle to heal and having played football and
baseball at various times in my childhood i always healed very
quickly and this was the damnably longest healing that ever
happened to me and i had an image of myself as a 40 year
old pitcher which is not an easy thing to be forty year old
pitchers have to watch where they put their feet and watch
how they move and be careful that the mound is the right height
because if they step off too fast they can lose it all that year
and it was then i realized that life is running out somehow
i didnt feel grave about it but somehow i had to be careful
where i put my foot and id never had to be careful where i put
my foot before see up to then i could just put my foot down
and if it slammed against the pavement it didnt matter much
if there was some pain it would be over the next minute or day
and if i got knocked down by something i could get up again

but i was beginning to realize that as with a car there
 is a limit on how long it can do it
 and so i had the feeling that
 in these pieces where i go out and talk its true that i regard
 the pieces as the center yet i still feel that because its
 running out and i dont have time to go all over to do the
 pieces all over the world im not omnipresent in all places
 talking to all the people i feel might benefit from hearing me
 talk or that i might want to talk to because i enjoy the
 idea of talking to people i suppose i thought ill put these
 things in books
 books are not ideal i dont believe that books
 are ideal forms that is books are imperfect recordings
 of transactions that occur in real time im here now and im
 trying to make a piece the way artists have probably
 always tried to make real work once and at some point
 ill take an imperfect record of what ive done and it will
 be an imperfect record because it will only be a tape recording
 and it will only get some of the effect of being here because
 what i say to some degree is determined by what you
 think and my sense of it otherwise id have to do an
 entirely separate berkeleyian ego trip where i would
 talk about anything independently of who i think you are
 this is not my
 approach to poetry i suspect that the approach to poetry
 of poets in their natural habitat which is in
 performance and in performance improvisation has
 always been a response to some specific set of urgencies
 that is homer told the story that way that time we
 have only two of those tellings reworked several times
 probably but we only have two of them and who knows
 why he decided to tell us about odysseuses son telemachus?
 for some reason something tripped him out on telemachus
 while he was taking up odysseuses return that day at
 that place maybe he was at a place where it was important
 that he should talk about the island where telemachus went to
 get advice from an old man maybe some relative of the old
 man was in the audience someone who was in the family
 line maybe somebodys son was there and his father
 was gone and homer knew it there is no reason to

suppose that these performances were staged so that there could be comparative literature 134 in which you take up the odyssey and the iliad as the two great surviving works of all time

its hard to believe that the poet performer was looking forward to an infinite posterity preparing you to worry about a greek aristocracy that had long since vanished it seems unlikely it seems more likely that he had something to say and that the stories were familiar but the way he told them was dependent on some set of accidents like there being these people here and

still there is the book homer need have had no respect for books i doubt if homer would have cared about ever being translated by robert fitzgerald say and i think robert fitzgerald knows that too i would by no means want to suggest that robert fitzgerald is under any illusions that he was doing something for homer i dont think that homer would have cared but we now feel a certain anxiety about being locked in being in a small room as it were without telling someone outside the room what the room was like maybe because its valuable to know what its like in this small room maybe something happened valuably in this small room

i dont believe in globalism im not a globalist which is why i dont speak with a rhodes scholar accent or part of the reason in my university there are many people who have strange accents that when im stuck with committee meetings i normally try to analyse phonemically and they have very strange phonetic structures because they were exchange students somewhere in england once and i recognize iowa under cambridge and i keep saying that sounds like iowa but then it sounds like cambridge and then it sounds like a fantasy of cambridge and i cant quite get it and then theres a little bit of la jolla mixed in it becomes an interesting task to dissociate the parts of this accent that are a consequence of a belief in some kind of globally appropriate style

now the book itself can be considered a package a kind of care package so to speak right i mean i do my talking here and i take my imperfect recording and i

transcribe it in the hope of finding what in it was the real thing
 the real action and i try to get it into the book in such a
 way that its still intelligible when it goes into this rectangular
 object with covers that you open like this and which
 is partitioned arbitrarily by those things they call pages

there are
 no pages when i talk you dont turn anything at all that
 is i turn you turn but we dont turn pages someone
 doesnt bring down a screen in front of me every few minutes
 and then let me continue again

now the book has this
 problem but then everything has its problem talking also
 has its inherent difficulties there is no such thing as a
 perfect medium thats why they call it a medium because
 its in the middle so to speak its between it mediates
 a transaction and deflects it

you start out to reach for something
 thats under water and your hand goes to the wrong place
 and after a while you realize that the object under the
 water is differently situated than you would have imagined
 it to be if it were outside the water and under the air let us
 say because water has a different relation to light rays
 than air which you dont really think about and are good
 at reaching through because thats what youre almost always
 seeing and reaching through so that under air you almost
 always find it because thats the way you learned about seeing
 and reaching whereas under water its really not where you
 think it is because thats where it would be under air and
 its really not there but then you reach again and find it
 after a number of tries and you realize that the water is
 a medium as the air is a medium and the lens of your eye is
 a medium well language is also a medium that were talking
 through

and maybe there isnt anything but the language when
 we think finally but theres some sense in which we
 feel ourselves moving toward the language toward the
 language to go through the language and the language has
 its habits its specific density its index of refraction and i
 can use the habits of the language if i know what im doing with
 them and sometimes i get used to them and i get very

expert and i forget theres going to be a crack in the grain
 somewhere over there and im going to get stuck with something
 something i dont want because it is the habit of
 the language to divide the world that way in that zone
 and its not my inclination to divide the world in quite
 that way and then ive got trouble

poets have always had
 trouble with language anyone who uses it seriously has
 trouble with it it goes the way it wants to go because
 of the way people took it before and im a foreigner in it
 youre a foreigner in it do you realize its the one thing
 we all are is that were all foreigners in the language you
 know its very funny to talk about acquisitions of secondary languages
 because nobody comes in speaking the language

you come into
 the world not speaking it and its their language
 and theyve spoken it and you havent spoken anything
 youve been involved in looking in feeling and
 touching in transactions with them and all the
 while they keep talking this foreign language

and gradually
 you take it from them and you get to think of it
 what you get to think of it you may be suspicious of
 the way they use language maybe you think that theyre saying
 strange things that you dont agree with but in order to
 get them to do nice things to behave reasonably you
 pretend to accept their language and after a while youve
 accepted enough of it to be called a "native speaker" which
 is itself a lie of the language in a real sense there is something
 of a lie in this there is no such thing as a "native speaker"

"native" would
 suggest that there is such a thing as someone who was born
 speaking it there is no such person who was born speaking
 it we are all born foreigners and its very important to
 remember that were all foreigners and all languages are secondary
 to our being

because before that there were meaningful
 transactions and we all got involved in them i dont know
 what it is to be before the language but what i know now
 is that the term 'native speaker' has come to seem alien

to me again because "native" doesn't seem to go with "speaker"
 it seems to be an odd juxtaposition of two terms that
 are somewhat at odds with each other an exaggeration of a
 sort an over optimistic one that promotes a false
 union that somehow because we are all here now and seem to
 be at home here and seem to have been at home here as
 long as we can remember speaking a common language that
 we all understand it would seem as though we were born
 here speaking one language and we all share a native currency
 could you imagine
 having a "native currency" coming into the country with
 its money being born with a supply of its money is it
 really that different to be born with dollar bills in your
 pockets and that's not trivial you don't have pockets and you
 don't have dollar bills in them look take a dollar bill
 see it doesn't mean very much at this point but its
 wonderfully formalized the dollar bill has all the great marks
 of our unity gathered together on it

it has the numeral one
 printed in all four corners and on both sides it has the
 founding father of our country in the center of it our first
 president number one and on the other side the reverse
 side his place is taken by the word ONE which in case
 you are in any doubt about it is also printed over each of the
 numeral ones in the four corners of that same side and it is
 wonderful in its promise of a beginning a new order of
 centuries from out of the many one beginning with one
 and it is all very wonderful as it states unequivocally
 that this is legal tender for all debts public and private and
 you may believe this i used to believe it too

i used to
 believe it too i was an artist in residence at notre
 dame i kept thinking ill be an artist in residence and ill be
 talking to the football team which was kind of nostalgic
 for me but i got there and they had me in this funny motel
 notre dame has a great motel they're terrific on motels
 because all the tractor salesmen from duluth come down on saturday
 to watch the football games so they make a lot of money
 on the motel and i was in the motel and i thought well
 what i ought to do is rent a car because on the weekend
 if you don't want to go to the ballgame which i didn't

really you might want to go see some other part of the country
 and i came provided with a fair supply of dollar bills and
 i went to the car rental agency o.j. simpsons company?
 it was one of those companies the one in whose commercials
 this guy goes running to a car and makes a mad leap to get
 into it because he has no time for formalities for some reason
 or other o.j. simpson the man with the heisman trophy
 out there in the hall goes running to this car but presumably
 he doesnt go there waving dollar bills because if he went there
 waving dollar bills they would have said go away o.j. doesnt
 wave dollar bills he waves credit cards i found out very
 fast that i could wave all the dollar bills i wanted to they
 wouldnt rent me the car

“but it says here” and i read it to
 them i took my dollar bill out of my pocket and i read i took
 this dollar and read “this note is legal tender for all debts
 public and private” i said “how much do you want? ill
 rent your car ill pay you in advance ill give you a deposit”
 they said “havent you got a credit card from some major
 company” i said “not only do i have a credit card from a
 major company i have a credit card from the most major
 company in the united states the united states because
 basically thats what this country is its a credit card company
 its a credit card company and these are its credit cards

they said
 “no we dont accept those” i said “you must be
 unamerican” i said “this is the biggest credit card company in
 the united states because it is the united states it prints all this
 money they said we dont take it

so all week long i couldnt
 get away from notre dame except when driven by friendly
 students but i had no way of moving out on my own because
 they didnt accept dollar bills which as i understood it were
 legal tender but they were not legal tender as far as car rental
 companies went they would not accept payment they
 would not accept deposits they didnt accept these green things
 and i said to
 myself all these years i used to think this was money and i
 had an image of money you know i didnt think a lot

about money i confess as a kid i didnt really think
 much about money at all but money was a kind of solid to me
 when i was a kid because well because of the way its
 presented you know some of its even very pretty we
 used to have nickels that had the head of a very beautiful indian
 on one side and a buffalo on the other these two vanishing
 species and they both looked wonderful and i used to
 look with admiration at my nickel i really liked my nickels
 i was a little kid jefferson on this one doesnt really
 look very good but i dont have any buffalo nickels left
 if you do theyre probably worth more than nickels which
 goes to show you that if money is worth a lot of money it
 goes out of circulation which i believe is called greshams
 law that cheap money drives expensive money out of
 existence the law meaning that whats cheesy stays in
 existence and whats not cheesy you pull away from transactions
 because you dont want to give it up

and i liked nickels

i really did not only because of what they could buy
 i thought the nickels were really very nice i had a jar
 of buffalo nickels the different years of buffalo nickels
 they went on for a while and i think they pulled them out of
 circulation some time after the second world war buffalo
 nickels vanished and buffalo nickels and indian head nickels
 became extinct and only were kept in peoples private collections
 but these nickels

were very tangible to me if you took a nickel down to a
 grocery store you could buy two coconut-covered marshmallow
 candies if thats what you liked and at that point i did if
 you took one nickel to the candy store you could trade it for
 a spaldeen rubber ball with which you could play stickball
 which was very nice because we played a lot of stickball
 and the spaldeen was considered a very good ball spaldeen
 was the name of the ball or we used to call them spaldeens
 though now that i think of it they were probably spaldings
 but in our neighborhood and in our dialect we called
 them spaldeens and these spaldeens were very much
 admired because they were much livelier than other balls and
 we used to test them out by dropping them from about shoulder
 height to make sure that they would bounce chest high or at

least over your waist because if it only bounced knee high it was a dead one and then nobody would be able to hit a home run and you'd wind up with a kind of pitchers duel even though you had no pitchers when you played stickball because stickball as we played it in the streets of new york was played with a stick and a ball and the stick was an old broom stick what you used to do was saw off the end of a broom though i never saw anybody saw one off everybody always seemed to have one really they always had these sticks and nobody ever sawed them off at all somehow they grew sawed off and we used to go into the street with our stick and our spaldeen and play stickball which was a game like baseball except that you threw the ball up in the air and you hit it on the first bounce which is why you used to be concerned for the ball not to be dead and usually you stood with your stick at home plate which was one of those sewer lids actually entrances to the gas and electrical lines that ran under the citys streets and placed at about 30 yard intervals so you had the batter standing over one sewer lid that was home plate and you played with first second and third basemen no shortstop because the streets were so narrow and usually one or two outfielders and in order to give the outfielders room because the streets in brooklyn were so narrow you usually played up near the end of the street with second base the sewer lid nearest the end of the street so that the outfield could play in the "T" of the intersection and you used to count sewer lids to describe the quality of your hitters and if you were a two sewer hitter you were really very good because you could hit the ball on the fly across cortelyou road which was the name of the broad avenue that intersected with east fourth street where we played and if you were a two sewer hitter you could hit it over the head of the one or two outfielders who patrolled cortelyou road and if you were lucky it would sail over their heads and if they were lucky they didnt get hit by the bus that traveled up and down the avenue you had to be very alert as an outfielder because you had to field the ball between the buses because cortelyou road was a fairly heavily traveled street even in the days before the smog hit because it was a big street that took you down to the major local shopping area on flatbush avenue

the others were very narrow little streets and cars came about every half hour so you didnt have to worry about them and thats what i used to think was the average rate for cars to come through places about once a half hour you would see a car and you got through a lot of innings and when a car would come everybodyd walk to the side of the street and the car would sort of drift through at about ten miles an hour and youd go back to playing stickball

now in those days i thought of money as real because the prices of things were constant in my experience they were fairly constant anyway little houten chocolate bars were two cents coconut-covered marshmallows were about that price yoyos were a nickel spaldeen were a nickel tops were a nickel this may begin to sound like a nostalgia trip but you see everything in my world it was a childs world was fairly stable the price structure was stabilized and these things that you wanted and used were all objects and these things that were money were objects too a nickel a yoyo a spaldeen five pennies two marshmallow candies one top two houten bars and you could trade them for each other in regular exchanges five pennies for a nickel or a top or a spaldeen the same way you could trade the spaldeen for a yoyo or a top or two marshmallow candies or a coke or a big puree shooter and it was clear this was money

now in my family there were people who probably didnt think that way about money they must have assumed that money was a unit in a capacity to build something that would end up by making more of itself they call that capital but never mind about that there is a threshold effect in piling up money you pile up enough of it to become contagious you eventually get together a lot of nickels and eventually they start reproducing themselves at a certain point

i had no such experience of money and no such theory of money as an agent of infectious disease and i only knew money as a set of simple and desirable objects you could exchange for other objects of equivalent desirability and size like the ration tokens we used to get during the war little red ration

tokens that were smaller than money and you needed them to
 get various things like meat or butter that you bought during
 the war because meat was rationed and butter was rationed
 things like that but there were people there in my family
 who were more disillusioned with money than i was at
 that time because to me money was like a brick a yoyo
 a kite and i thought i understood money
 in those days it cost
 me 11 cents to go to the movies on saturday which is
 ten cents or one dime or two nickels and a penny tax
 for kids to go to the movies on saturday and it seemed
 fair enough then it went to 22 cents when it went to
 22 cents i just thought it cost more money that something
 had happened to the movie it didnt occur to me that something
 had happened to the dime i was not in a position to recognize
 that the dime had changed its character because the entire
 nature of a coinage is to deny that money changes its character
 it is very important to recognize that the beauty of money
 that the great engraving and designing skills normally
 employed in putting out money are part of a long tradition
 of making money look stable of making money look like
 a durable thing
 a nickel looks like a nickel forever it may
 eventually not contribute to buying anything at all but it still
 looks like a nickel the dollar looks like a dollar though
 if the dollars appearance were related to its function it would
 have nearly disappeared by now having started at one size
 it would now be but a shred of itself but the image of it is
 unchanged
 now this image of the constancy of money is very
 much like the image of the constancy of language it seems
 to me that there is a relationship between the solidity of
 money and the solidity of the language which is very
 similar the language is also a coinage its a coinage and its
 in circulation people accept it and people modify it but
 all the time people have the illusion that the coinage
 remains the same and that theyre talking the same language
 they have the illusion because the illusion is fostered
 by a kind of nationalism a nation you might say is an
 institution organized to stabilize credit language credit

buying credit maybe its the same credit nationhood
 is a formal celebration of the objecthood of language and
 credit and what it attempts to do is to give the appearance
 of regularization to human transactions throughout the
 culture

now all over the country people are buying and selling
 the same or seemingly identical things and services and
 notions at wildly varying prices while almost everyone is
 under the illusion that these transactions are more or less
 uniform throughout the culture because the national system
 of coinage and language has provided a way of picturing these
 wildly varying transactions that makes them look more or
 less uniform by framing them within the apparently
 regular dimensions of our coins or our words in a way that is
 most satisfactory to the people who manipulate them most
 efficiently

now there were people in my family who could
 have told me though they never told me very much but
 they could have told me that this stability was not likely

first of all i came from a family where everybody spoke
 several different languages which makes the situation look
 very unstable anyway they spoke russian and german and
 yiddish and french and so there we were

in my household for
 me to listen to a conversation usually meant that i had to
 learn one other language because kids have very great
 suspicion that somebodys saying something that theyre not
 supposed to hear the fastest way to get kids to learn another
 language is to gossip in another language and its amazing
 how fast theyll pick it up because they dont want to be
 shut out from the gossip so i went through all this
 keeping up with my peoples languages and it was a lot of
 fun i enjoyed it all but that could have told me theres
 no telling where you might have to go or what language you
 might have to speak that is as long as you dont have
 to go anywhere and you always stand still you never have
 to talk any other language because youre always in the
 same place and everything stays pretty much the same the
 nickel always stays the nickel wealth is always wealth
 legal tender is the same all the meanings attributed to
 the coinage are the same up and down the system but

there were
 members of my family who distrusted this they didnt trust
 money at all and there were two passions they developed
 passions for land and passions for objects you see there is
 something in the coinage of the language called *real*
 estate you may laugh at the relation between "real" and
 "estate" but real means thingy estate you know it is
 that estate which is real and doesnt go away it doesnt
 go away because it is like the earth the earth stays the
 money well whatever happens to the money happens to
 the money but

there was in this family a remote relative and
 he had come the hard way here he had come from russia
 after an abortive revolution in russia in 1905 in which
 hed made the mistake of turning a printing press he had
 turned this printing press which had printed in ukrainian
 various calls to arms and human dignity or whatever in the
 name of whatever he had called it because its not clear to me
 what these manifestoes said it seems to me that when the
 revolutionaries went down to speak to the peasants of the
 ukraine they did not make speeches to them about the rights
 the rights of man they said to them sometimes the tsar is angry
 at the landlords for taking away the fruits from the lands of his
 people weve had enough of these scoundrelly landlords
 and what we need is land for the peasants the peasants who
 understood land very well and had no special ideas about
 freedom responded rather well to this and gathered together
 to help the tsar rid himself of oppressive landlords and then
 found themselves being attacked by the tsars soldiers for
 having helped the tsar rid himself of these worthless landlords
 something like
 that was probably in the manifestoes that were being spread
 down in the south because as lenin said on some other
 occasion "liberty is bread" *khleb svoboda?* i dont
 know it doesnt sound right to me they seem a little
 different but perhaps there is a relation and he was
 calling attention to a relation as if it were an equation and it
 was an effective analysis for the time

however it wasnt effective
 for my relation who was promptly put in prison when
 the revolution was crushed with guns and swords and many of the

peasants killed and such of their leaders and assistants as the tsars forces could find were put in jail from which this relative with the help of some money from his friends and relations was able to escape and disappear through the latvian corridor and he had to take his ukrainian russian german yiddish out through latvia get into whatever boat he could buy a passage on and go somewhere out of the tsars reach which usually meant going somewhere where there was another relative who had gone before

so these refugees were likely to wind up in the united states or in cuba or mexico and this one wound up in argentina and where before this he knew about rubles there he was in argentina dealing with argentine pesos and speaking no spanish he quickly learned enough spanish to work in a cigar factory and there he took his previous skills which were odd skills he was something of an athlete he was a wrestler greco roman style which is a form of wrestling i dont know too much about except that its sufficiently different from most other kinds of wrestling that i feel i should point out that he was a wrestler greco roman style and he was now rolling cigars in argentina while his brother who had gotten out of russia through the latvian corridor at nearly the same time for some reason through some connection they had apparently collaborated in proving that bread was freedom this brother had somehow wound up in the united states where he had settled in new york on second avenue this brother was something of an artist he had a knack for a kind of witty caricature-like painting and whimsical wood carvings and this brother continued his politicizing for the peasants he had come to the united states where there were no peasants but there were workers the distinction between peasants and workers is fairly considerable for marxist theory which distinguishes between them rather precisely but in revolutionary practice whoever is ready to revolt becomes a revolutionary force and philips artist brother was familiar with the adjustment of theory to practice so that on second avenue he contributed his revolutionary cartoons appropriately enough to a newspaper called *die freiheit*

freedom which was concerned with liberating the workers of the garment district or the furriers trade from the bonds and thralls of the sweatshops the same way he had previously contributed them to the cause of land reform and philips brother who was a very witty caricaturist received a certain amount of recognition and acclaim as a newspaper artist and he even made a certain amount of money at it

so he wrote

to philip in argentina who was meanwhile working in a cigar factory where he was acquiring a whole new set of skills and understandings because in latin american cigar factories they did not have that totally contemptuous relationship to the people who worked there or rather the people who worked in these factories did not have a totally contemptuous relationship to themselves and to counteract the boredom of rolling and packing cigars they ordinarily selected one of the workers who happened to have a particularly attractive reading voice to read aloud to them while they worked so they would have read to them cervantes and lope de vega and calderon and quevedo and most of what were considered the masterpieces of the spanish language along with whatever serious modern works fell into their hands and seemed appropriate for reading aloud so that after they had been there awhile they had heard most of the classical literature of spain and argentina in this cigar factory where philip was becoming very literate in spanish

but not wealthy

when he received a ticket to the united states where there was the possibility of becoming wealthy but in english which he didnt know

fortunately for him on second avenue

when he arrived there there were many other people who though they didnt speak spanish or even russian spoke the lingua franca of most jewish emigres from middle europe yiddish now yiddish is basically a rhineland germanic language that predates standard german being a dialect that was formed in the rhineland in the middle ages by speakers who appear to have emigrated from romance language speaking countries parts of what we now think of as france and spain and this dialect as it spread with its community of

speakers was populated by hebrew words and then slavic and eventually technical terms from german and whatever else that allowed it to serve as this common coinage and philip spoke this language as he also spoke russian and polish and ukrainian and now spanish as well but with the particular idiosyncrasy and inflection of his background and experience that is typical of a lingua franca which is a common coinage that is exchanged far and wide over a vast terrain by a loosely joined community of talkers who are accustomed to making exchanges in several coinages besides the one they may happen to be talking in

which sometimes leads to differences of opinion about the equivalences of some of the coins they happen to be exchanging differences id often observed among my relatives when they were talking differences like the one between two relatives one had been living in argentina while the other had been living in the united states for many years which didnt really impede their conversation because they were speaking in yiddish and not in spanish or english and they were sitting in the living room calmly talking till one of them the american remembered something he had forgotten to do and asked the other to wait a moment because he had to go downstairs to attend to something in his store only it happened that he said "store" as if it was a word of yiddish *ikh muss arunter ins store* (i have to go down to the store) the other was puzzled *vos eysst a "stor"* (what's a store?) (where you do business) *vo muh treybt gesheft ohh ir meynt a bodega* (ohh you mean a *bodega*) so that it was clear that in the yiddish of the argentine you went down to your *bodega* while in the yiddish of new york you went down to your *store*

and it was situations like this that should have prepared them all these relations of mine for shifting currencies you would assume it that they would have been prepared to handle these currencies somewhat skeptically because they so often had to change them

but these people who were so good at exchanging languages and currencies didnt learn the whole lesson they were so good at learning languages they

learned them so quickly that they quickly became natives
 became natives with whatever funny accent they may have
 happened to have because some though not all of them
 spoke each new language with a slightly alien accent that was
 a part of the old system of coinage they had so recently left
 so they had whatever funny accents they had but they were
 already feeling like native speakers of english because it is
 one of the main functions of speaking a language at all to
 make you feel like a native and to make whatever way you
 speak it seem natural and stable as it is also to make every
 other way of speaking it strange and everyone who speaks
 it strangely some sort of foreigner

and these new natives of
 english these relatives of mine soon felt very good in english
 and at home in it as they spoke it but they still had some
 distrust of their country's printed currency to the extent that
 they sensed that if they kept on accumulating this currency for
 any length of time its buying power might suddenly diminish
 or be extinguished and to the extent they sensed this they
 looked about for other things they could exchange their money
 for that were in some way more valuable more durable
 more real than money

and this astute greco roman wrestler
 cigar roller with the classical spanish education that he had
 acquired in the cigar factory came to new yorks second
 avenue and found employment in the fur business i think
 and managed to make a fair amount of money in fact
 considerably more money than his artist brother and because
 he had reasonably frugal habits and nothing in particular to
 spend this money on he soon acquired a small pile of this
 money and was soon looking about for things that were realer
 than this money to exchange it for for some way of
 realizing this money making it more real than legal tender
 and he had a
 passion for the open air for greenery for nature and this
 was a passion he shared with many of the people living in
 the grey brick buildings of second avenue and the artist
 and intellectual world he traveled at the fringes of because
 he was not an artist and he didnt seem to be an intellectual
 either because he was a relatively taciturn man who didnt

speak much to the others about art or politics or spanish literature
 even and was thought to be something of a fool

but he was
 a shrewd man and parsimonious the kind of man dollars
 stick to or pesos or rubles and as he saved his money
 he observed that these urban artists and intellectuals in their
 grey city had a dream of nature of things green and fresh
 and flowering and they found their way somehow to this
 nature up the hudson on the old routes 9w and 17
 north past the red apple rest over the ferry at newburgh or
 through nyack to a part of nature called sullivan county
 which was a somewhat depleted form of the nature it had
 once been an oak and beech and chestnut forest mingled
 with spruce and hemlock and it had been logged out for the
 lumber and then for tanbark and had then gone to
 farming with apple orchards and dairy farms and among
 these failing farms they had found their way to these
 small things called bungalows

bungalow i once read a poem
 by paul eluard where he said that he would never use the
 word bungalow in a poem i never thought i would use the
 word bungalow in a poem either but here it is what they used
 to call a bungalow was a flimsy wooden shack where too many
 people camped cheerfully out of a love of nature surrounded
 by a number of other such shacks at the edge of a bit of scrub
 forest

and they founded these bungalow colonies where
 people could commune immediately and directly with nature
 at the edge of this scrub forest in these little places
 with kitchens and bedrooms with screens over the windows
 called bungalows which were fairly simple to build

and since
 he was as skillful with his hands as at acquiring money philip
 exchanged some of his money for land on which he soon built
 a number of these bungalows

and he sold bungalows
 because he had a grander view than bungalows and as these
 bungalows became more expensive more valuable in
 exchange he exchanged these bungalows for land and
 more land lots of land not many people wanted this land

because nobody could live there in this wasted beech woods
 and evergreen forest you see it was real estate all right
 the estate was real there were trees and there were
 frogs and there were birds in the trees and there were
 streams that ran beside the trees but nobody could live there
 in this wasted beech and evergreen woods that had been
 logged out where farming was unprofitable because the
 distances you would have to transport your products to a
 reasonable market were too great and the cost uneconomical
 so that only very large dairy farms or chicken farms could
 afford to transport their milk or their eggs to a market and come
 out ahead given the relative costs of feed and fuel and milk
 and eggs so that most of the small farms were gradually
 abandoned when the old farmers died and their children had
 gone off to the city to live which is why this was nature
 because nobody could live there they could only vacation
 and so philip
 bought acres and acres of this land and on it he and his
 artist brother began to build and what did they build
 there they built a swiss chalet because thats how
 nature should look nature should surround these beautiful
 half timbered rough hewn buildings with great halls
 and they
 built a great halled swiss chalet in which the beam ends were
 carved by the artist brother and in which the artist colony
 of lower new york came to vacation and this great hall which
 was the hotel dining room was inscribed with liberating
 slogans "freedom through joy" "pleasure is knowledge"
 "desire the open" and the like and besides this on
 the walls of the dining room the artist brother painted a series
 of energetic caricatures depicting in a dire way the vices of
 refusing this liberation and their hilarious personal consequences
 and people
 came and the place developed a kind of cultural dominion
 in western sullivan county concert pianists came there
 to play roving and unemployed violinists of consummate
 skills folk singers actors from the classical yiddish theater
 and there too came chess players debaters artists and art
 lovers and professionals and various socialist workers and
 bosses the *intelligentsia*

now this would never have happened in this way except for marriage because one brother was able to build and the other was able to decorate but nobody was able to manage that is nobody was able to deal effectively with money as capital because while philip could save what he mainly knew was that land was real wood was real and money well he didnt trust it too much and the artist brother wasnt interested in money either he was interested in a life of art and talk and girls and food in the midst of nature which gave the place its tone of a socialist intellectual nudist colony up there in western sullivan county

but it happened that the artist brother in the course of things had an affair with one of the young women who were attracted to this good life up there and this particular young woman was not only an attractive woman but she was also a very clever young woman and very much attracted to the liveliness and beauty of the place so that this affair lasted a good deal longer than most of the affairs of the artist brother who was something of a one-upman in sexual matters and could never stay with anyone long once she had become familiar and no longer an object of possible romantic intrigue so that in a way im not entirely sure about he finally rejected her like all of the others but since she was probably as much attracted to the place as to the man she never stopped coming

and she turned to the other brother who was greatly surprised as you might imagine no woman had ever looked upon him with passion or interest unless he had moved in their direction first he was not a conventionally attractive man though he had a noble head with a craggy dramatic face and the powerful body of the athlete he had been but he was very broad and thick and short like a chunky guard on a professional football team though he was maybe a little short for a guard and what he looked like most was a small bear and in spite of his considerable classical spanish education and his russian and german social political and economic education and his proven ability to make money he was thought to be dumb perhaps this was because he never spoke much about these things and

when he did he spoke very slowly and with great deliberation because he thought while he was speaking and seemed to be making a great effort to say no more and no less than he meant so that he often had to slow down phrases and words while he was in the middle of them which resulted in strange distortions of emphasis and pronunciation that people found laughable or exasperating while they waited for him to get on with the conversation so they thought he was dumb and he knew that they thought so

but this young woman somehow managed to convey to him beyond his suspicions natural as they were that she was interested in him and they got married at which point she lost her interest in him immediately but she remained interested in the place which she helped to build up in a way that was beyond their expectations because she was even more clever than she was attractive and because she was attractive she helped attract a male clientele and among that clientele there was one quite wealthy man a sweater manufacturer with whom she contracted a long liaison

and because she was clever with his help she managed to borrow money which she quickly invested in buildings with rooms and more rooms in which they could put more and more of these cultured people who came to vacation in the midst of this nature now these buildings were not swiss chalets or were only superficially decorated to look like chalets because this young woman had no particular image of how this nature should look but she had a particularly good image of money and how to use it to make much more of it and unlike the brothers she knew how to borrow it and when and she knew how to use it and when to stop so that under her management the place became much more prosperous and more and more of those people came to sit in their casino or dance in it talk in their dining halls and walk in their woods while their children swam in the swimming pool and played on the tennis courts and these people all regarded themselves as what is called the *intelligentsia*

people like rosa schiller who was a doctor whod emigrated from austria with her husband also a doctor and with her sister who lived with

a small dog in an overstuffed apartment overlooking central park south and who was now in her sixties and still in her own eyes and in the eyes of her 70 year old beau an international beauty while rosa lived the intellectual life with her husband in elizabeth new jersey where they had adjoining offices and conducted their separate practices but emerged into a common central room a library filled with leather volumes where they took lunch together and read the agamemnon to each other in greek and i had seen this office which was in their house fronted by a greenhouse and filled with rubber plants and her ancient black and gold instruments that might have been owned by breuer or freud and i could imagine her and her long dead husband working all morning long and then rushing into this central study to read their greek plays and then hurrying back to treat sore throats or examine failing eyes

and the place was filled with people of this type and this situation went on from year to year till the end of the second world war after the second world war a great change took place socially what exactly it was no one was clear about but all of the people who came up there were getting older some of the older ones died and the younger ones got older and there were fewer and fewer new ones to replace the ones that disappeared because the ones who were children there now that they were grown never came there first of all because they didnt speak the european languages that gave the place a lot of its charm and second they had no great interest in spending their time with their elders in a place where they had been children and had had counselors and where they knew every crack in the tennis courts and every leak in the porch roof and very few new ones ever heard about this place in sullivan county where you could hear lectures on sholem aleichem in the morning discuss emma goldman or rosa luxembourg at lunch hear chopin ballades in the evening and dance the alexandrovsky or the russian two step late into the night because the reservoir from which they drew these people was also disappearing as second avenue had dispersed to great neck and new brunswick and new rochelle and though this happened gradually the number of people coming up

gradually diminished and the place became less and less profitable

at one point it had been very profitable which is not to say that it has always been filled because hotels in nature were filled only part of the time but every weekend it had been filled to overflowing and about half of the summer and the rest of the time there had still been enough people left to give the sense and provide the income for a thriving business and now less and less of the summer was filled and filled got to mean something different because none of the outer buildings was ever jammed to capacity anymore and they never had to pitch tents on the lawn to handle the overflow and the business which had been very profitable became less and less profitable

but the buildings didn't go away you see once you've got buildings they're real you've got real buildings the buildings are real you've got tennis courts the tennis courts don't go away grass grows up in them you still have to chlorinate the pool you've got to repair the roof after each winter and repaint the trim and the buildings they don't go away but the people may not be there anymore and this continues for a period of time and it comes on bad days and eventually the struggle to keep the hotel alive just wore them out and the young

woman who was now no longer a young woman but still clever didn't really understand this and had taken to drinking she drank champagne all day and all night and the artist brother feeling depressed because this place had been his culture center because he had made almost all of his art works there and there they were on the walls of this place that was dying this artist brother sickened and died and there was a grand funeral for him to which all of the writers and artists who had once gathered on second avenue came and hundreds of people came to this funeral and to a final exhibition of his art that was arranged in a gallery to pay homage to all the years of his work and he was buried so the intellectual center disappeared

and just at this point philips wife became sick and some people said it was

because the artist brother had died and she had been conducting an affair with him all these years and now that he was dead there was nothing in it for her anymore and she became something of an invalid and no longer took any interest in the place and it continued to run down except for philips working on the place constantly keeping up the buildings repairing them because he believed in the physical place the buildings and the land

it seemed everything he had he threw into the physical plant he had always made money and he had made a lot of it from the place so he put great quantities of it back into the place from which he had gotten it and in spite of the fact that it kept running down it was extraordinarily beautiful in this western corner of sullivan county right near the delaware river there was this strange european set of chalet like buildings to which fewer and fewer people came

though any new ones who came there found it exotic and colorful as i found it when i had occasion to work there one summer as a lifeguard and you could always find someone who had played chess with lasker sitting on the porch looking over endings or hear a russian court dance float down through the spruce trees to the library where you were playing poker with the concert pianist and a few of the waiters

now it happened that at about this time my wifes mother became the manager of the place at the time when it was declining but still beautiful and at first it was a job as it had been when she was a waitress there in the time of its fading glory while philips brother and philips wife were still alive and she had been an assistant manager as it continued to fade and on the death of philips wife she became the manager and this job became something more than a job it became a passionate struggle to keep the place alive and restore it to its former dignity and affluence in the teeth of great changes socially that you couldnt stem it was going downhill all the way

and philip encouraged her in this struggle he encouraged her somewhat financially by lending her bits of money to invest in the place and keep

it up but even more by giving her the impression that he would finally bequeath it to her because she also had a love for the place for the idea of the place as an institution as a look while he had a love for the place as a physical tangible thing and he wanted it to be in the hands of someone who would take care of it and maintain it as that thing that he had known and loved so he kept sending out signals to her that she would eventually acquire the place if she would only take adequate care of it

in the meantime there were heirs who would normally have inherited the place in the beginning he had a son who would have gotten it but the son died suddenly and mysteriously far away even while philips wife was still alive and then there was a sister who should ordinarily have gotten the place except that she couldn't keep it up and the place was in debt in terms of money there was no value to the property the place had used it all up and was not only not returning money to the people who had put it in but was now taking more money away from them the property had become a kind of pump that was working in reverse

once when it had been set in motion by the physical energy of its owners or the stored energy of their money it had pumped money out of the hands of the people who were its customers into the hands of the people who were its owners but now it was pumping money steadily out of the hands of its owners into the hands of its creditors and the people who ran it had to sustain it with more and more money so that if you got this property what you got was a debt and a mortgage with a second mortgage in a bank and that meant that this place real as it was swiss chalet in the tall spruce trees was a debt owed to two banks in monticello but none of them looked at it that way and in spite of the debt there was in the family a great concern over who would get the place after philip died

and philip was a long time living and the hotel was a long time losing money each time assisted to continue the next year with loans from philip who always found a bit more money to put back into

it and always just about enough to keep it alive as a
 place then philip died
 when philip died various people
 who knew him and were related to him or his relatives
 were invited to the funeral and philip was about to be buried
 next to his wife bessie these things are always done in
 remote parts of long island they are always buried in some
 green place out in nature where they have real estate
 and these places are way out there on the island and they
 drove all the way out to this place after a moderately
 mournful funeral moderate because he was an old man and
 a cantankerous figure and not everybody loved him
 and they all
 got out there his sister and his wife's brothers and the
 small crowd of close and not so close relatives and a few friends
 and they arrived at the place where philip was to be laid
 in the grave next to bessie and bessies grave was
 evacuated there was no bessie
 cries went up from various
 relatives "theyve dug up bessie!" "whats happened to bessie?"
 in the course of the burial no one paid any attention to
 philip because everyone was concerned with the missing
 bessie bessie was gone gone bessie but the monument
 over the tomb "here rests the loyal husband the loyal
 wife true in death as they were in life" and no bessie
 only philip
 for weeks this scandal was a great mystery so
 great a mystery that most of the relatives and acquaintances
 paid little attention to philips will it went relatively
 unnoticed that he had bequeathed the worthless hotel to his
 sister who was too old to run it and trivial amounts of
 money to various predictable relatives while everyone was
 astonished that nothing was said in it of the whereabouts
 of bessie
 some people had theories they said "well she
 didn't sleep with him while he was alive he didnt want her
 to sleep with him when he was dead" but nobody could
 find out they went to the cemetery people the cemetery
 people checked their records and found that in fact philip
 had delegated someone to come and dig up bessie but what

