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 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 i'll be an artist in residence and i'll 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. simpson's 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 doesn't go there waving dollar bills because if he went there waving dollar bills they would have said go away o.j. doesn't wave dollar bills he waves credit cards i found out very fast that i could wave all the dollar bills i wanted to they wouldn't 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? i'll rent your car i'll pay you in advance i'll give you a deposit"

they said "haven't 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 that's what this country is its a credit card company its a credit card company and these are its credit cards"

they said "no we don't 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 i don't take it

so all week long i couldn't get away from notre dame except when driven by friendly students but i had no way of moving out on my own because they didn't 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 didn't 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 didn't think a lot
about money i confess as a kid i didn't 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 doesn't really look very good but i don't have any buffalo nickels left

if you do they're 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 gresham's law that cheap money drives expensive money out of existence the law meaning that what's cheesy stays in existence and what's not cheesy you pull away from transactions because you don't 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 people's 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 that's 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 city's 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 didn't 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 didn't have to worry about them and that's 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 everybody would walk to the side of the street and the car would sort of drift through at about ten miles an hour and you'd 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 spaldeens 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 child's 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 didn't 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 didn't 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 doesn't go away it doesn't 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 he 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 we've 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 doesn't 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 wasn't 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 phils 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 treyht 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 York’s 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 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 didn’t seem to be an intellectual
either because he was a relatively taciturn man who didn’t
DAVID ANTIN

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 that's 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 didn't trust it too much and the artist brother wasn't 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 I'm 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 who 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 beaus 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 didn't 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 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 philip's 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

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 buried in the grave next to bessie and bessie’s grave was evacuated there was no bessie

cries went up from various relatives “they’ve dug up bessie!” “what 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 philip’s 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 didn’t 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
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had philip done with bessie  bessies relatives wanted to find
out where bessie had been sent  they searched and searched
something like
a year later when philips sister was moving to a new apartment
she turned up by accident  in a box of philips papers
which nobody had taken the trouble to look through  he was
not an especially literate man except in spanish  which they
didnt know she turned up a railway express ticket and
they looked at this railway express ticket and it had a number
on it  and they went and tracked it down  and the express
people looked through their records and they found that
there had been some sort of large parcel shipped to someone
on the west coast  someone in california  by railway
express  and that was all they knew

with a great deal of
trouble the railway express people were persuaded to check
it out  and after a while they found out that the parcel
had in fact been received by the express people on the west
cost  but no one had come to call for it and theyd had
no name of anyone to whom to return it if it was not received
after a lot of
trouble and time they found bessies coffin in a warehouse
in fresno  and they restored it to the real estate that philip
had been trying to protect from her all of this time

(tuning, 1984)