

STEPHEN RATCLIFFE / ROBERT GRENIER November 17, 2001

STEPHEN RATCLIFFE: Well, here we are again, on November 17th, 2001...it's a significant day in my life, actually, it's the wedding anniversary of my first wife & it's the day I met my second wife & we always thought of it as an anniversary...so, it's a day that has some charge, that has some significance for me, & here we are, speaking about the significance & the value of the particular, & whether it has any significance, so...I'm glad to be back talking, the last tape was September 19th, & it was so much in the wake of the World Trade Center events that I think we were entirely preoccupied with that, & in some way we still are, I find myself to be thinking about it, actually paying attention to it & paying attention to the news or what's on the radio when I drive around & making notes on things, so some of the poems have references to what the Secretary of Defence has said or what Bin Laden is saying or what some newscaster is thinking about things, it seems to find its way in here & it seems to segue into things that are happening in Virginia Woolf's To The Lighthouse, which always makes an appearance, & other events...so I thought I might start by reading the last four, maybe five of these, just the most recent ones, so it's starting on 11.13, & it might be an instance of particularity & we might have something to say about this or in the wake of it anyway, so

ROBERT GRENIER: You still think that this whole range of things, everything going on there, is equally real?

SR: Yeah, I would say...I think the material on the radio, the material outside the window that one looks at

RG: There's some question about that, that we had raised, &

SR: There was?

RG: Well, at least in my mind

SR: Uh huh

RG: I wondered whether the

SR: Whether the...yeah, we were talking about that

RG: the video screen & the image of the

SR: Right

RG: Trade Center had

SR: No, I think that's a problem, that's a question

RG: had validity, as a particular

SR: Well, it may be 'real' in the perceiver's experience, but not as real as...for the person right there next to it...there was a curious picture in the surfer magazine I saw yesterday, I spotted it on the cover, they said something like "September 11th surf in New York", so I looked in the index & there it was & I looked, & there was one photo taken from New Jersey at a place called Sandy Hook which must be right south of Manhattan

RG: Nice wide view

SR: Yeah, it was a big wide-angle view, & it was a picture from the water looking at the back of a wave breaking & a couple of surfers out in the water, one guy had just broken through this wave & you could see the shore, this big beach, behind that, & in the far distance there was Manhattan, with smoke coming up, a big, wedge-shaped plume of smoke, & it said "8:50 in the morning, September 11th", & so this building had been hit & maybe it was on fire or maybe it had already fallen, & it was a very strange picture because there were the people, & there was a little text about a couple of guys who had wanted to go surfing, there was a good swell that day, but they knew this was going on & so...the reality of the Trade Center buildings

RG: Surfing in New Jersey?

SR: I guess there is, once in a while, I've never seen it, I've heard about that...I think when a hurricane comes up

RG: Floating, floating on the water would be more like it

SR: Well, when a hurricane comes up the East Coast, it said the waves were head-high & it looked like there was a real wave (laughs)

RG: Well, to each his own

SR: Yeah...but the question of what is the 'reality' of events happening on radio or in the media, that's...I guess I wouldn't be so quick to say it's 'as real' as what's 'real' outside there

RG: So 'reality' 's increased by proximity? I don't know, those guys in New Jersey were some distance from Manhattan

SR: Yeah, I think it is

RG: but they were 'closer' than we were

SR: Yeah, absolutely, maybe it's a degree of 'real', maybe what's 'real' is really what's happening in the body

RG: Or what gets pushed back...is there a particular part of the body which has prominence in that regard, like the head?

SR: Maybe, maybe the brain, the nerve centers?

RG: Closer to the head is better than the toe

SR: There's some reference in this last poem to Roger Kent, the man with melanoma, & it's entirely distanced from him, certainly from the reality of the experience he's undergoing now

RG: It's nice to entertain these things from whatever proximity one is granted, or can gain, or

SR: That's true, there's some value

RG: or is forced to acknowledge

SR: There's some value to that

RG: It's nice to have a range of things, at different distances

SR: It is a matter of range, actually

RG: with things 'closer'

SR: Yeah

RG: & things 'farther away', but

SR: Well, it's like a movie, in a film the camera's sometimes looking up close, & sometimes it's a wide-angle view of a landscape or a panorama, & it's all part of the film, so

RG: The pineal gland is supposed to be the center of it all, & the source of

SR: Is that right?

RG: truth & being, but

SR: I know nothing about that!

RG: it hasn't been found

SR: Where is that, in the neck?

RG: It hasn't been found!

SR: It hasn't been found! (laughs)

RG: Why don't you read some

SR: Okay

RG: It would be great to hear some

SR: I'll just read these then, you can interrupt me if you want, else I'll just read them

RG: I'll be quiet

SR: or I'll interrupt myself

RG: I'll be very quiet

SR: (reads)

11.13

light green leaves of new grass shoots coming up
below cypress tree, yellow-orange light on ridge
fading as grey-white cloud moves back in

White

House spokesman noting nothing unusual was said
before plane crashed near JFK, pilots ditching
fuel into Jamaica Bay

woman with copper hair

next to piano noting Ruth Crawford Seeger died
of cancer at 51, who once wrote "when I sit by
the side of the blazing fire on a cold December
night"

Mrs. Ramsay's death at last becoming
part of "ordinary experience," Lily Briscoe
watching her cast "her shadow on the step"

film of white water on windswept grey plane
after wave breaks, drops splashing up on left

11.14

grey-white sky reflected in plane of wet bricks
in corner, bird slanting across glass back door
toward feeder on right

grey-haired man across
round table explaining physics of post and beam
construction, woman to his left not putting her
baby into Skinner box

Mary Shelley's journal
noting birth of "female child not quite seven
months not expected to live," in a few weeks
"finding my baby dead"

Lily Briscoe hardly
able to leave her easel, "so full her mind was
of what she was thinking"

shaft of sunlight
slanting through grey-white sky above right-
sloping shoulder of ridge on left, a gull
flapping across from point on the right

11.15

bird in vertical window slanting up to the right
across dark green tobacco plant leaves, circular
orange flower in corner of the green glass back
door

man in a faded green sweatshirt talking
about Emerson's essay on "Representative Men,"
spreading his arms as he walks toward lichen-
covered gate

Secretary of Defense claiming
appeasing Al Qaeda is like feeding an alligator
hoping it will eat you last, bin Laden family's
interest in Disney and Snapple

Lily Briscoe
"holding her brush to the edge of the lawn,"
thinking of Mr. Ramsay still in boat

white
water moving in across grey white plane at eye
level, mist rising across wet slope of the cliff

11.16

curve of dark green tree in the lower left
corner of vertical grey-white plane of sky,
outline of bird taking off from the curved
copper bar above the feeder

Rumsfeld noting
Afghanistan is a country of caves and tunnels,
General warning "the bombing will become more
and more and more focused"

woman in pink wig
collapsing onto floor at stage left, Schubert's
"Du bist der Ruh" moving forward toward sublime
close

boy in boat looking at Mr. Ramsay, hand
hovering over the page "in readiness to turn it"

diagonal line of high thin white cloud slanting
up across pale blue sky in left corner, pelican
gliding above light green edge of breaking wave

11.17

sunlit lower edge of grey-white cloud in front
of dark green plane of the ridge, bird landing
on tobacco plant branch in left foreground

man

with melanoma still not strong enough to resume
chemotherapy, physician not convinced benefits
would be worth it

Keats on deathbed in Rome
claiming that his "greatest pleasure had been
watching the growth of flowers," epitaph reading
"one whose name is writ on water"

wind blowing

across Mr. Ramsay's hair, making him appear
"extraordinarily exposed to everything"

pattern of white birds flapping across
sandstone-colored slope of cliff in left corner,
the line of white water moving across toward it

SR: So, fun!

RG: Well, that was quite wonderful to hear (SR laughs) & gets us rolling!

SR: Thank you, it was fun to read it...I must say I do like these poems, I like those

RG: So, you don't feel that you're drowning us in junk?

SR: O God, I do, yeah! No, "drowning us in junk"? I hope not!

RG: One thing after another, stripped of symbolic reference or...meaning only itself?

SR: Exactly, that's exactly what it is, "one thing after another, stripped"...yes & no, "stripped of symbolic reference..."

RG: Wait a minute, wait a minute, I think

SR: Berryman

RG: I'm really bothered by that characterization & I wouldn't accept it myself

SR: Uh huh

RG: and I only introduce it as a means of introducing

SR: Okay, good

RG: a quotation in the preface of John Berryman's The Freedom of the Poet

SR: I'd like to borrow this

RG: by Robert Giroux who

SR: Thank you, yeah, I need to talk about him in the spring so I'm happy to have you talk about it now

RG: Yeah, well it has no particular bearing, but nonetheless I insert it, just as another...element
(laughs)

SR: Good, good

RG: Junk if you will! (SR laughs) So, this is Robert Giroux's very personal account of the last exchange he had with John Berryman in the preparation of this book, but "He should have the last word", meaning, this is Giroux of Berryman, "in the book he planned for so long, with this statement about his work as a critic that he drafted two years, exactly, before his death"

SR: Wow, um hmm

RG: So, I'll skip all the good part, & Berryman quotes Joseph Conrad & he says, quoting Conrad, "A work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character... All the great creations of literature have been symbolic, and in that way have gained in complexity, in power, in depth and in beauty' (letter of 4 May 1918)."

SR: Oh, man

RG: And, by implication, Berryman of course concurs in this sense, so

SR: Was that Berryman, oh that was Conrad

RG: Conrad, yeah

SR: Uh huh, of course, Berryman's quoting, with approval, Conrad

RG: But I shudder...this book has some great stuff in it, there's an essay about Ezra Pound which is a marvelous tribute at the time of Pound's trial

SR: Oh, good

RG: & very funny & specific, prickly

SR: Berryman was a smart guy, he wrote a lot of Shakespeare criticism, I believe

RG: capable of testifying to Pound's value...but I shudder to think

SR: But that idea

RG: I shudder to think what John Berryman would think of me (laughs)...because of the fun there is, & the nastiness in the absolute deconstruction of

SR: I think he would like you!

RG: almost everything under the sun

SR: Look at him, he's sitting in this stone window

RG: Yeah, well, he's just posing for Life magazine

SR: with a big, grey-white beard (laughs), he would like you

RG: No, he wouldn't, & he would find that it had no resonance...like a poem like

LAPP

SIDE

WISE

LIES

SR: Um hmm

RG: with its 'sequel' (SR laughs)

LAPP

LIES

ON'S

SIDE

SR: Uh huh, "with its 'sequel'" (laughs) well

RG: That's what's going on around here, you know

SR: Right

RG: That's some of what's going on, but

SR: Well, you're pushing, you're pushing, that's very interesting...read the Conrad again, just so

RG: No, no, I refuse

SR: Okay

RG: It says, simply, that the symbolical

SR: The symbolic

RG: is the basic element of literature

SR: Right

RG: & 'great literature', the greater the more

SR: Symbolic, right

RG: obliquely & unresolvedly, endlessly symbolical

SR: Well

RG: For example, the 'flag' is limited because its symbolic meaning...or is it?...people have said they couldn't tell what it meant when someone flew the flag, nowadays

SR: Right

RG: But the 'flag' is not 'that piece of cloth'

SR: You know, this idea of Conrad's, that Berryman picks up & of course championed, implicitly, in his criticism

RG: Um hmm

SR: & probably attempted in his own work along with legions of other writers in the 20th Century, I think, & before, this notion of the symbol

RG: Seven kinds of, twelve kinds of ambiguity?

SR: Seven Types of Ambiguity

RG: Seven...

SR: Empson...& all of our professors

RG: Figurative meaning!

SR: & most of our colleagues if they have a brain, but...figurative meaning...but, you know, it reminds me, there was a...actually

RG: I don't have a brain! That must be it

SR: an interesting essay by Rosmarie Waldrop, which this reminds me of, where she talks...I think it's tangential to this, but she's actually talking about this, kind of useful...she talks about vertical &...& actually it's an essay on Lyn's work, I think it's called "Tilting At Windmills" or something like that...anyway, but it's talking about verticality & horizontality in writing

RG: This is this French shit

SR: Oh, maybe, but she doesn't, yeah, she probably quotes...when she writes essays, she puts all kinds of quotations in them, you know, so they're kind of fun to read

RG: I can't remember whether 'horizontal' is 'time' or 'verticality' is 'space'

SR: Oh shit, I don't know

RG: It's some sort of classifying...

SR: But anyway, the symbolic

RG: Yeah!

SR: is a sense of language that's vertical, where you have the words

RG: The 'meaning'

SR: but it's really what's 'above them' that's important...it's the ideas 'behind them', either depth or height

RG: Um hmm

SR: but the symbolic presence of some idea in King Lear about old age struggling to discover itself, or whatever, I don't know

RG: So that Lear 'means' that, has 'meaning'

SR: That's what 'means'...& in this essay, she's talking about some new sense of writing

RG: Yeah []

SR: not 'new' necessarily but, in any case, where it's the horizontal relationship between things

that is important

RG: The lance, Quixote

SR: “Lapp...lies...on’s...side”?

RG: Coyote’s lance would go out (SR laughs) possibly some place between the horizontal & the vertical

SR: Maybe so, on a slant?

RG: raised such that it would be unlikely to come in contact with any...any dragon, & thus his titling at windmills, which is like pointing

SR: Um hmm

RG: maybe in a forty-five? no

SR: I don’t know

RG: forty-five degree, no, a fifty...? anyway, neither horizontally nor vertically...would be out to lunch in that interpretation of the value of the symbol

SR: Well, be that as it may (RG laughs)...maybe I’ll dig that up & I’ll look at it again & see if you want to look at it

RG: I’d like to read it

SR: It’s good, I think it’s pretty good, it’s about Lyn’s work, it’s a sort of a preamble suggesting how one might read...probably she’s talking about My Life...I think that essay was published in Temblor years ago...so, but his, you know, what would he [Berryman] make of this [SR’s poems from CLOUD / RIDGE] or of your work, not that this & your work are identical, but there is some way in which...where does the symbol...what was Pound’s phrase now, “The natural object is always the adequate symbol”? What was his

RG: Boy, I can’t remember it anymore

SR: But it was something like that, wasn't it?

RG: I paraphrased it for so long that it's just a...

SR: See, he was actually reading

RG: Some kind of hogwash

SR: Yeah, but he was probably...he may not have known the Conrad thing, but he was in that, coming of age in an age in which the symbol & symbolism was totally in the air, as a literary event

RG: Well, it's certainly in the air in Emerson

SR: Is it? Okay, read the Emerson

RG: Absolutely, all the time, & so, out of the

SR: Transcendence, right? Transcendental

RG: Well, 'correspondence' of the

SR: Um hmm

RG: spiritual with the physical, as part of an extension of a 'divine plan' almost...“Nature exists entire in leasts” is a favorite thought of Swedenborg

SR: “in leasts”?

RG: Yeah, in grammar, in metonymy, in this kind of world-rhyme, each...well, through Plato, there's the Ideas, then there's the product of them in the larger sphere which is echoed in the next layer

SR: Um hmm

RG: so that throughout nature, there's a sense of...well, what does it say?...this is Swedenborg, in translation, quoted by Emerson [RG reads from “Swedenborg, or The Mystic” in Representative Men]

“In our doctrine of Representations and Correspondences, we shall treat of both these symbolical and typical resemblances and of the astonishing things which occur, I will not say, in the living body only, but throughout nature, and which correspond so entirely to supreme and spiritual things, that one would swear that the physical world was purely symbolical of the spiritual world; insomuch that if we choose to express any natural truth in physical and definite vocal terms, and to convert these terms only into the corresponding spiritual terms, we shall by this means elicit a spiritual truth, or theological dogma, in place of the physical truth or precept: although no mortal would have predicted that anything of the kind could possibly arise by bare literal transposition [RG laughs]

SR: So the physical world is purely symbolical of the spiritual world, is that the?

RG: Yeah, & vice-versa

SR: And vice-versa?

RG: Yeah...

SR: But not that the spiritual world is symbolic of the physical world, but stands behind it somehow

RG: There's an interplay

SR: Um hmm

RG: that keeps the world alive, in a way...this is Emerson, commenting on Swedenborg

“One would say, that, as soon as men had the first hint that every sensible object,—animal, rock, river, air,—nay, space or time, subsists not for itself, nor finally to a material end, but as a picture-language, to tell another story of beings and duties...”

SR: “beings and duties”, wow...so it’s moral, moral-ethical?

RG: “...a science of such grand presage would adsorb all faculties: that each man would ask of all objects what they mean:”

SR: Mmm...how interesting! (RG laughs)

RG: “Why does the horizon hold me fast with my joy...”

SR: Read that one again...“each man would ask of all objects...”

RG: “what they mean”...meaning how they would translate into a spiritual realm

SR: Yeah

RG: of higher, symbolic significance

SR: ‘Meaning’, yeah

RG: and that’s why you read the world as a text

SR: The world as a text

RG: because the physical objects are ‘linked’, in some basic way, with their ‘meaning’ which they call upon you to decipher

SR: I like that! Don’t you? What do you think? Let’s come back to this. Do you dismiss this?

RG: I find it...complete hogwash

SR: You do? (laughs)

RG: and at the same time, absolutely pertinent &

SR: Yes, it’s beauti-, it’s hopeful

RG: very enlivening as a proposition one might yet fulfill

SR: Right

RG: but I deny that the...‘meaning’ which is to be found in the objects is ‘elsewhere’, apart from

SR: Right, okay

RG: them, ‘over there’, in a translated spiritual realm, which is of ‘higher’ significance

SR: No, I have a hard time, yeah, I think I agree with you on that, but

RG: Nonetheless, the object in itself

SR: but this statement that the ‘meaning’...now what was that, “each man would ask of all objects what they mean”...but then, what was the next sentence there?

RG: “Why does the horizon hold me fast with my joy and grief in this centre?”...Emily Dickinson’s “Circumference”...“Why hear I the same sense from countless differing voices, and read one never quite expressed fact in endless picture-language?”

SR: But if there is, then, a relation of the objects in the physical world to, Emerson’s claiming, to some world of ‘meaning’ that’s beyond it or other than it, a spirit world or a symbolic world of higher meaning, he’s giving hierarchy...that’s that vertical thing again...but at the same time

RG: That’s what it means, ‘Heaven’! ‘Up there’

SR: Well, ‘heaven’, yeah, it’s some transcendental reality that we get []

RG: Oooh, wow! And we can find out about that by minutely examining the particulars of our everyday experience?

SR: But this, but his, but

RG: Gods!

SR: the premises that he’s making would

RG: What ‘romantic powers of Imagination’ would have to

SR: But they would justify, or

RG: Are we devoid of these powers?

SR: No, not a bit, it gives us license to pursue this writing of the particular

RG: But, but

SR: not necessarily to find its symbolic ‘meaning’ in some transcendental world, but simply to put the particulars together...I mean, the question, I think, we’re talking about is, is what is the value of the particulars in relation to one another, or simply in themselves...before any sense of transcendent...not ‘before’ but other than that, or ‘outside of’ that?

RG: How come it’s not important to strive after these ‘eternal truths’, insofar as one might imagine

SR: Well, one can do that

RG: How come, have we just ‘given up’?

SR: (sighs) Are you going to church?

RG: No, well, Emerson didn’t go to church either

SR: He didn’t?

RG: He quit! (laughs)

SR: I didn’t know that

RG: He quit the church...& then he embarked on this...

SR: But he was a reli—

RG: evening-entertainments, in Boston

SR: Uh huh

RG: in 1845 [?], as a secular...he was a

SR: You mean he had a kind of salon...was this at his house, or at a meeting hall?

RG: No, he was like a rock star, this would be like in a performance space

SR: Wow

RG: & these were ‘winter evening entertainments’

SR: He would hold forth, he would speak, he would lecture? Were they lectures?

RG: People would come...& there's a tribute in Representative Men from Longfellow about how long hairs & short hairs, old folks & young (SR laughs), & rebels, rebellious students all came

SR: And he would talk, or they would discuss...?

RG: It was snowing

SR: Yeah

RG: & there certainly wasn't any other show in town

SR: Well, I would assume from his thinking...I mean, not knowing...that he was a member of some church, the he went to church

RG: He borrows all that authority, which everyone must associate with other times they went outside their house

SR: Right

RG: & assembled in a hall, so, but he set it up as a business in those days

SR: Well, that's good, that's good for him

* * *

SR: So, you were saying that Emerson had these winter, snowed-in events in Boston

RG: Yeah, he has seven people...Plato & Swedenborg & a really good one on Napoleon

SR: Oh, these are the 'representative men', in the essays?

RG: Yeah, & 'representative', we could start there...you look for men who are 'more than themselves' & participate, democratically, in the body of men in such a way that they can...lead us forward, as our representatives, whom we in effect put in office, by our devotion to them...the 'great men' become the equivalent of the 'meaning' of the local in its higher

SR: Right

RG: form, they're more 'completely ourselves'...it's an interesting idea, in America, that a

person can raise themselves by their bootstraps, & they can become as ‘good’ as the ‘great’ men whom they emulate

SR: Right, okay, that’s the democratic ideal

RG: God, it’s hard to imagine how the particular can avoid even...how it can exist for more than a hair’s-breadth, of time, because it would immediately be sought out & researched by this figure who’s going to accomplish the erection of the ‘great man’ into his own greatness

SR: Right

RG: Sometimes, the man himself (laughs), by dint of tireless self—

SR: So the object would be sought out by the ordinary man, who’s going to become extraordinary

RG: Or it would be sought out by the Scholar...the last of these is Goethe, the Writer,

SR: Yeah

RG: who is Emerson’s ideal man, & whom he himself would hope to be...that person who accomplishes the ‘translation’ from the particular...well, anyway, I wanted to read the beginning, of this seventh public lecture...I wonder how they would have sounded?

SR: Ah, um hmm

RG: (reads)

“I find a provision in the constitution of the world for the writer or secretary, who is to report the doings of the miraculous spirit of life that everywhere throbs and works.”

SR: That’s beautiful!

RG: Good God!

SR: Well...“report the doings”...

RG: (continues reading)

“His office is a reception of the facts into the mind, and then a selection of the eminent and characteristic experiences.

Nature will be reported. All things are engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river its channel in the soil; the animal its bones in the stratum; the fern and leaf its modest epitaph in the coal. The falling drop makes its sculpture in the sand or the stone. Not a foot steps into the snow, or along the ground, but prints in characters more or less lasting a map of its march. Every act of the man inscribes itself in the memories of his fellows, and in his own manners and face. The air is full of sounds, the sky of tokens, the ground of all memoranda and signatures, and every object covered over with hints, which speak to the intelligent.

In nature, this self-registration is incessant, and the narrative is the print of the seal. It neither exceeds nor comes short of the fact. But nature strives upward and in man the report is something more than print of the seal. It is a new and finer form of the original. The record is alive, as that which it recorded is alive. In man,”

SR: “The record is alive, as that which it recorded

RG: Yeah, the human, the human writer is alive...“The record is”...so it’s not mere transcription

SR: Oh, “The record is alive, as that which”

RG: “it recorded is alive” (laughs)

SR: What is that “that”...to what does “that” refer there? Not to a person...

RG: Well, I think that would be a good place to stop, because that would be the question to ask, that would be our way of bridging

SR: Um hmm

RG: from...let me go on to say that Emerson then puts forward the idea that the human will take the fact to a higher sphere...actually let me just read it, let's remember that question

SR: Okay

RG: (reads)

“The record is alive”...I mean, the human writing...”as that which it recorded is alive. In man,”

SR: Oh, okay, that makes sense

RG: (continues)

“In man, the memory is a kind of looking-glass, which, having received the images of surrounding objects, is touched with life, and disposes them in a new order. The facts which transpired do not lie in it inert, but some subside, and others shine, so that soon we have a new picture composed of the eminent experiences.”

That's what you do.

SR: Oh, read that again

RG: (continues)

“The man cooperates. He loves to communicate, and that which is for him to say, lies as a load on his heart, until it is delivered.”

So, that's the first creation.

“But, besides the universal joy of conversation, some men are born with exalted powers for this second creation. Men are born to write. The gardener saves every slip and seed and peachstone: his vocation is to be a planter of plants. Not less does the writer attend his affair. Whatever he beholds or experiences, comes to him as a model, and sits for its picture. He counts it all nonsense that they say, that some things are undescrivable. (SR laughs) He believes that all that can be thought can be written, first or last; and he would report the Holy Ghost, or attempt it.”

SR: Hmmm, absolutely

RG: So, anyway

SR: That’s good, I like that!... He’s, of course, talking about himself, I would think, but...talking about the vocation of writing

RG: It’s like his lecture, “The Poet”, which is calling

SR: Is that the one where it’s the giant eyeball?

RG: No, that’s “Nature”...calling for the coming of this figure who will accomplish this transposition of the particular to its realization, its truer, higher realization in another form, & so

SR: In writing?

RG: It’s, to me, an impossibly grandiose prospect, but it has the virtue of directing my attention toward the thing, which is supposedly the site of all this initial activity

SR: Mm hmm

RG: So, it was important to know one should look...around & imagine oneself to be in the position to accomplish this translation, & if I was never able to make the translation, I was still nonetheless rubbed up against...my nose was ‘stuck in the jam jar’ (both laugh)

SR: Like a bear!?

RG: of the particular, & the fact that I never got my nose out of the jam jar (laughs), but was always constantly, over many years, licking with my tongue toward the increasingly...less

SR: Less jam in the jar?

RG: Less jam (both laugh)...probably lengthened my tongue briefly, during my time being alive, but it's possible to take the first imperative

SR: No less alive than that which it records...that was []

RG: Yeah, you see, it's complex, he makes provision for

SR: That's very good, whew! (reading Emerson)

RG: the 'contribution' of the human

SR: Yeah []

RG: 'shaking the mirror' a little bit in the...no longer [] metaphor of 'imitation'

SR: What's that? What's that about imitation?

RG: Well, it's a mirror...hold up the mirror to nature

SR: Yeah, yeah

RG: which is Aristotle, you see he's shattering the image by introducing the life of the...of the what?, of the image in the mirror?...it doesn't make any sense at all...but he insists that the human is responsible for something, if no more than 'shaking the mirror' ...so

SR: Does he have that phrase in there? To shake the mirror?

RG: If you 'shake the mirror' enough, glass will break! (laughs)

SR: The acorns will fall...does he have that phrase in there?

RG: Yeah

SR: "Shaking the mirror"?

RG: Well, you know, that was the governing idea in neoclassical art, that the work was a mirror of nature

SR: Yeah, of course, I know that

RG: so this Emerson is still under the spell of that

* * *

SR: So, let me come back to...this was a terrific passage that you read, right from the beginning, the whole thing

“I find a provision in the constitution of the world for the writer or secretary, who is to report the doings of the miraculous spirit of life that everywhere throbs and works.”

(snaps fingers) that’s really great!...but down in the third paragraph here

RG: He’s my hero! Man

SR: Yeah, it’s fabulous!

RG: He’s my ‘representative man’!

SR: (laughs) He could be!

RG: Ralph Waldo Emerson

SR: Yeah, absolutely, you’re putting him back on the map, at least on my map, he wasn’t there...thank you! (laughs) for pointing toward him...this passage, these three little sentences, are really worth thinking about

“The record is alive, as that which it recorded is alive.”

So, one question is, what is “the record” & in what sense is it “alive”? Ok, then the next sentence

“In man, the memory is a kind of looking-glass, which, having received the images of surrounding objects, is touched with life, and disposes them in a new order.”

“The memory...is a...looking-glass”...now, that’s very interesting []

RG: Want to talk about...can’t talk about two...want to talk about the first sentence?

SR: One more sentence, & then that will be on the table

“The facts which transpired do not lie in it inert, but some subside and others shine, so that soon we have a new picture composed of the imminent experiences.”

RG: “eminent”

SR: “eminent”, yeah, it’s not the same as “imminent”

RG: But it’s the same...sort of hogwash!

SR: Same idea...“hogwash”, yeah

RG: “eminent”?...but on the other hand, there is a selectivity, & certain items are ‘selected out’

SR: Well, they are, that’s true, that’s what we’ve been talking about by the bye, by & by, in passing

RG: What do you think “it” is in...what was that last sentence?

SR: The last one, or the first one?

RG: The last one...what did “it” mean in the last sentence, if we had to read the last sentence again...?

SR: “The facts which transpired do not lie in it”...I think “it” is the work, the written work, in that case

RG: [Or the physical, human brain]

SR: Well, that's how I'm reading "it", maybe that's not it

RG: Well, now in the first sentence...

SR: "The record is alive..."

RG: So, what do you think "the record" is?

SR: I think that's also the written work

RG: I'll be darned! Really?

SR: "as that which it"...yes

RG: You mean, the writing, the writing itself?

SR: The writing, I think

RG: That's what he means?

SR: Well, that's the way I'm taking it... now I would

RG: That's a literal way of taking "record", & it certainly

SR: I think he uses his words carefully...he uses the word "record", he uses "disposes"

RG: I thought he meant the []

SR: which has to do with posi...he uses the verb "disposes"..."is touched with life, and disposes them..."

RG: You mean, the words...what is "touched with life"?

SR: Okay, "In man, the memory is a kind of looking-glass"

RG: The "record"...the "record" itself "is touched with life"?

SR: No..."In man, the memory is a kind of looking-glass, which, having received the images of surrounding objects"...so that's the perceptive faculty of perceiving "images of surrounding objects", like the rock or the acorn falling on the roof, "is touched with life and disposes

them"...the word "disposes" he's using in a completely etymological sense of that word, it has to do with positioning...that's why I think he's talking about writing, disposing something is

RG: Well, this is why he's a good writer

SR: He's a great writer!

RG: and these essays are

SR: and he's totally intelligent, he knows the language,

RG: Right, back to the dictionary!

SR: he's using an absolutely precise sense of word meaning, & in a syntax which is very careful,

I love it because

RG: He's having a good time writing!

SR: (laughs) He makes us have a good time reading! He is having a good time, but

RG: "Disposes" means []

SR: disposing "them in a new order" is the order of the words in a sentence, I think

RG: Or on the page

SR: Or a line on the page...

RG: on the computer, perhaps

SR: It could be

RG: Good God, isn't this a very contemporary, interpretive reading of what the "record" might mean, or what "it" might mean? (laughs)

SR: Well, is there any other...reading, is there any other meaning to "record" that we could think?

RG: I'm happy to concur in...yeah, so there is another meaning

SR: Okay, what...maybe an obvious one, what is it?

RG: Well, it could be the mirror...the mirror, if you think the ‘symbolic usage’ or whatever it’s called

SR: But the mirror hasn’t come into the paragraph yet!

RG: It’s not there yet?

SR: No

RG: It wasn’t there in the beginning?

SR: Oh, shit, it might be

RG: Oh, I’m sorry

SR: The “looking-glass” is in the next sentence

RG: Oh, it’s in the...well, you can think ‘back’ from the next sentence, and you can say that the mirror can’t possibly

SR: Yeah...

RG: itself be capable of

* * *

SR: So, you were saying...another way to read the “record” could be that that’s the mirror, and how is the mirror or “looking-glass” capable of disposing something...is that what you were talking about?

RG: Yeah, it would be like being shook...and eventually it would disintegrate, and then you’d be left with only the poet himself...coming up with these wild interpretations...he censures Swedenborg for attaching too literal a meaning to things, he said something like the vulture means colitis, some wild interpretation

SR: Well, he does...if the “record” in that sentence, the word “record” and the “it”...”as that which it recorded is alive”...if the “record” is writing, he accords it quite high ‘value,’ shall we

say, because before that he says

“nature strives upward and in man the report is something more than print of the seal. It is a new and finer form of the original.”

[]

RG: Well, it's a “new” one...I don't know if it's “finer”

SR: Yeah, if the ‘original’ is

RG: []

SR: in my reading of this, the “original” would be the world

RG: Yeah

SR: and I don't know if he would say that writing is “finer” than the world, although maybe that's...I don't know what he's thinking, there, I think he's probably not thinking that, but who knows...

* * *

RG: Well, this is some more Emerson on Swedenborg

“The reason why all and single things in the heavens and on earth are representative, is because they exist from an influx of the Lord through heaven.”

That's Swedenborg.

SR: That's Swedenborg? Okay.

RG: (continues) “This design of exhibiting such correspondences, which, if adequately executed, would be the poem of the world, in which all history and science would play an essential part, was narrowed and defeated by the exclusively theologic direction which his inquiries took. His perception of nature is not human and universal, but is mystical and Hebraic. He fastens each natural object to a theologic notion; a

house signifies carnal understanding; a tree, perception; the moon, faith; a cat means this; an ostrich, that;"

SR: Hmmm, ah

RG: (continues) "an artichoke, this other; and poorly tethers every symbol to a several presumedly everything, nature, all of creation...ecclesiastic sense. The slippery Proteus"

SR: "The slippery Proteus" is?

RG: Everything that's going on,

SR: Okay

RG: all this 'stuff' which we're trying to fathom

SR: Yeah...which has ecclesiastical meanings?

RG: which has drawn us towards it, and we're getting all soaking, slippery, wet

"The slippery Proteus is not so easily caught. In nature, each individual symbol plays innumerable parts, as each particle of matter circulates in turn through every system. The central identity enables any one symbol to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being."

SR: Hmmm

RG: (continues) "The central identity enables any one symbol..."

Well, let's replace "symbol" with... "ditch"

"...any one ditch to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being. In the transmission of the heavenly waters, every hose fits every hydrant. (SR laughs) Nature avenges herself speedily on the hard pedantry that would chain her waves. She is no literalist. Everything must be taken genially, and we must be at

the top of our condition, to understand anything rightly.” (laughs)

SR: Okay, well

RG: That means that...it takes an act of imagination on the part of the writer, to “understand anything rightly”...I might even substitute in there, as you did before, ‘write something down’ (laughs)

SR: Um hmm...but this passage seems to be one in which he’s making this translation from the object to its larger spiritual meaning, he seems to be wanting to do that []

RG: Well, in our practice, which is so far removed from this it hardly bears on it at all, there is still the question of the nearness of the words and the things...the words that we write and that which we address or...

SR: Record

RG: record []

SR: The “nearness of,” you mean the proximity of the two?

RG: Yeah, there’s a ‘jump,’ there’s never...

SR: yeah, yeah

RG: different, nobody would confuse...none of my friends can read my writing, thus they take my assertion on faith when I say that “Lapp” means Lapp

SR: Right

RG: and so when I write

LAPP

SIDE

WISE

LIES

which is very clear to me, in my mind, there is no necessary correspondence, for them, between the fact of the dog and the very different and unintelligible image, which I have created out of my own...entrails

SR: But for you, the fact of the dog...which you see, saw, when you wrote that poem you probably were looking at Lapp sidewise lying...that fact of the dog and what was hap...what took place, what takes place on the page...there's some analogy, for you

RG: I think it's the same thing!, except

SR: (mockingly) "The same thing"...

RG: Part of me does

SR: Yeah

RG: Part of me is absolutely convinced that I am this "Secretary of Nature"

SR: Ahh, 'reporting'!

RG: who is

SR: Are you 'reporting,' do you like that word?

RG: John Heydon, in the *Cantos*, Pound cites

SR: John Heydon?

RG: Yeah, some...

SR: Scribe?

RG: scribe 'way back when' []

SR: Sounds like an American, or an English

RG: they were writing "the signature of all things" and

SR: Well, that's what Emerson seems to be talking about, the 'signature of things,' but he

RG: Yes, but if you leave it there, and don't attempt to try to interpolate this translation into a

'higher'

SR: Right

RG: spiritual order...which he had to do at the time, finally, otherwise his audience wouldn't have listened to him

SR: There would have been no

RG: and in fact he himself felt that he was an agent of God's translation to the people, in his lectures, so that he had to translate himself into a higher sphere to hear the 'message from above' which the things of the world are only the mere signs and symbols of

SR: Right, well

RG: and yet despite all that, for himself, he really evidences, many times, in the lectures particularly, this kind of...worldliness, which would have gotten him thrown out of the church if he hadn't left sooner (laughs)

SR: Right (laughs)

RG: He loves it! Yet he's almost 'too good,' 'too good' in his exuberances about the task of, the Scholar, Writer,

SR: I don't think it's our

RG: Secretary...

SR: point here to discredit those who might hold such beliefs, although those who hold those beliefs in that possibility of immanence in the particular, might get us all into a lot of trouble, if they're radical fundamentalists of this persuasion or that

RG: Ohh...we're back to that!

SR: I'm just thinking...otherwise, if someone believes that the chair is a symbol or sign of the presence of God, if it makes them happy then

RG: If they think that you're the Devil...

SR: Well, then that's...it gets problematical, that's true, if they think they have direct access, by telephone, to God, and God tells them that I'm the Devil, I'm in trouble

RG: So that when they saw 'you'...irrespective of any knowledge of you

SR: Yeah []

RG: They would immediately, in a hair's-breadth of time, convert you into the Devil

SR: Yeah

RG: and shoot you or something

SR: because of the way I look

RG: if you were lucky, otherwise

SR: Well, right, otherwise I'd be tortured

* * *

SR: So, you want to read something from Larry Eigner...*Windows/Walls/Yard/Ways*

RG: Yeah, I was trying to [see] how...not how I 'freed myself' from this kind of enslavement to the necessity of rendering only particulars that were representative and

SR: Right

RG: largely symbolic and 'meaningful' within some other unknown...thing, to concentrating on the thing itself

SR: You know, I just

RG: for its own sake...

SR: To interrupt but I think it's on that point, I found myself, last night, I was looking at, it came into this poem...and I was looking in an anthology, I think it was a passage from "Hyperion," and it had something that began something like "Deep in the silence of the shadowy vale"...was an

opening line, or something like that, and I just (snaps fingers), it was like a light bulb went off in my body because I realized that when I was a younger person, I wrote a poem that had a line that was very much like that, and I worked on it probably for a long...it was like a poem that was in my life for a long time and I must have been reading Keats

RG: You went to King's Canyon

SR: What?

RG: You went to King's Canyon!

SR: No, no, it had nothing to do

RG: And there it was, right over here!..."Deep in the silence of the shadowy vale, it rains all the time and everyone is soaked!"

SR: (laughs) But, you know, when I think...yeah, I had gone to those places, maybe, but...the line was coming out of reading Keats

RG: Yeah

SR: and it was some sense of this symbolic significance 'beyond' the actual thing...so, I mean, I was...I think you're right, talking about Larry Eigner being a way of freeing yourself from the sense of having to write...or wanting to

RG: Write a 'poem'!

SR: Write a 'poem' that would , in which the

RG: Gee, a 'poem'!

SR: immanence of the spirit

RG: The spirit of Jesus in almost every poem

SR: of the spiritual world would come through

RG: Shit!

SR: There was something...here's something!...Johnny Otis, you know that guy on KPFA in the morning, he has a good rock 'n' roll show

RG: David Bromige knows him well...

SR: It's a great show, from 9 to 12, I think...he said, "I'm gonna play this song...and I was asked to substitute the word, every time the word 'Jesus' appeared, they wanted me to put in the word 'Baby,' and he played this song and it was like a spiritual and

RG: Did he do it?

SR: Well, then he played a song in which the word 'Baby' was in there, it sounded like this great spiritual where 'Jesus' was ...suddenly it was a love song for 'Baby' (laughs)

RG: Yeah, he had a joint in Sebastopol until recently

SR: Yeah, no, he still records...this show sometimes comes out of some...it sounds like a brewery, or some sort of a place up there, where he

RG: Ahhhh!

SR: Anyway, go on to the...go to the

RG: So, why bother with the bare, stripped-down thing, which is just the...desiccated beginning of spirituality (laughs), for itself

SR: Okay

RG: if you can't figure out what it means, or why it's there?...Well, I feel that that's still very much an open question..."April 24 '79"...this is from Larry Eigner's *Windows/Walls/Yard/Ways*, page 77 (reads Eigner):

April 24 79

the cat

dumb

looking

RG: And over on the right it says:

looking

dumb

So these are apparently variants.

SR: Um-hmmm.

RG: And he wrote like that.

SR: Um-hmmm.

RG (reads again):

the cat

dumb

You can read it across —

looking

looking

dumb

(laughs)

I wonder

move in
on
a tree

April 28 79

oh it's pretty windy outside

I see

and here's the sun

as the clouds move

April 28 79

M o m e n t s

Spelled out —

SR: "Momets"?

RG: Yeah...stretched out

SR: Oh, "Moments"

RG: across the page, which gives it more time, in space, I guess

SR: Yeah

RG: (reads)

April 28 79

M o m e n t s

daylight

at rest

the cat

grows in

SR: Mmm, nice...yeah! The cat dumb looking, looking dumb.

RG: Susie [Susan Friedland] suggested to me today that possibly if you abandon the symbolic, and the reader abandons the expectation of the 'larger meaning'

SR: Yeah

RG: then the energy that goes into symbolism can, sort of, 'redouble' upon perception of the object given

SR: Oh, I like that idea

RG: so that, you don't abandon your interest in the thing

SR: Uh huh

RG: but nor do you demand that it be anything other than itself, and in fact you try to attend to

SR: That's very good!

RG: what it is, in itself, with all the energy that would have been put into

SR: Right

RG: human interpretation

SR: Well, so you can pay attention to (RG laughs) the thing and...you can pay the attention to the thing

RG: Study it, study it!

SR: that you would have been paying to 'the thing behind the thing,' thinking it was there

RG: Or toward your...

SR: Well, that's spoken like a true...scholar, and probably she, I would say, one could note

RG: Not a 'true Greek,' cause I can't possibly be Greek

SR: No, I'm thinking of Susie now

RG: They say that the Greeks

SR: I'm thinking of Susie!

RG: Oh, Susie!

SR: Well, I think that...I would say that the same thing, seeing from teaching, that students love to think about symbolic value of things in poems

RG: Don't they look for it first?

SR: They do, and they stop paying

RG: Because it's a 'poem'!

SR: They stop paying attention to

RG: That's what a 'poem' is!

SR: the thingness of the poem, which is its words on the page and the shape of them

RG: Mmm

SR: and the disposition of the words in the poem...they don't pay attention to that, they think about the ideas, and not only students but scholars...we spent much of one class last week, or the week before, talking about the first, a paragraph from an essay by someone named Irene Chayes, I think, and she was talking about Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," and she was simply telling the student, or whoever her reader was, probably a student,

RG: Ohh...

SR: about, she was explaining

RG: I love that poem!

SR: the ideas in Shelley's poem, to the student

RG: Ohh!

SR: what the 'meaning' of the "West Wind" was,

RG: []

SR: what the 'meaning,' what Shelley's understanding of life is

RG: Well, yeah

SR: and she was, simply...the poem was not there in her paragraph, her reading of the ideas was there in the paragraph, and it was very interesting because, I mean...that was looking for, basically, the symbol, or the symbolic value, the 'significance' of things in the poem

RG: Well, she'd have to write something, she can't just quote the poem over and over, so

SR: Well, we talked about...it was really a fun class, because I was challenging this...she was the 'whipping boy' of the class

RG: Ohh, a girl...

SR: and some students thought that wasn't fair

RG: Ahh

SR: and one student said, "What else could she do? This is what she was expected to do!"...and it was very interesting, these were graduate students

RG: Well, you substitute words of commentary or description for the thing of which you're speaking

SR: Mmm

RG: so in that sense, inevitably, you're going...otherwise, how can you...?

SR: But she was spending a lot of attention on looking at...beyond the thing

RG: Yeah

SR: and Susan's point was, if you stopped...if you gave up on symbolic value, or just put it aside for the time being and say let's pay attention to the thing...you might really see something there, in it

RG: Yeah

SR: or have an experience of it which would knock your socks off!

RG: But what can you, in fact, what can I... 'say' about a poem which says, only (reads Eigner)

daylight

at rest

the cat

grows in

SR: Um hmm

RG: So what!? I mean, this is just somebody's...how can we speak to the 'value' of the particular in poems which

SR: Um hmm

RG: are not, basically, conjuring toward a meaning beyond themselves...in that other, symbolic way?

SR: I think, it seems to me, Emerson was speaking toward that in his statement about disposing...that which it records in a new way, or in a something way...it's in the passage on Goethe...

“The record is alive, as...”

Larry Eigner's poem, then, we'll say is the “record”...

“The record is alive, as that which it recorded is alive.”

Like the “dumb/looking” cat...

“In man, the memory is a kind of looking-glass, which, having received the images of surrounding objects, is touched with life, and disposes them in a new order.”

So, he's disposed...the images of life in this...and it is absolutely “a new order” because that's a completely original poem

RG: Why is it important?

SR: Well, that's a good question...one answer would be, the doing of it is important, because this is what

RG: Well, everybody should write down everything that happens?

SR: No, but the writer...as Emerson is also saying, the writer is given

RG: The “Secretary”...

SR: “Nature will be reported.”

RG: The “Secretary”...

SR: The “Secretary”...

RG: Ah huh

SR: So, the man’s job...(reads)

“His office is a reception of the facts into the mind, and then a selection of the eminent and characteristic experiences.”

Well, I think this is an instance of “the eminent and characteristic experiences” of the mind...

“He loves to communicate, and that which is for him to say, lies as a load on his heart, until it is delivered.”

That’s a beautiful...idea, that there is this pressure and that the writer’s

RG: How would you tell...

SR: [experience] is to do this thing which the...you know, other people do other things, as he went on to say...that the gardener does his thing...where is that passage? (reads)

“The gardener saves every slip and seed and peachstone: his vocation is to be a planter of plants. Not less does the writer attend his affair.”

So there’s some value for the writer...is there a value for the reader?...that was a question that’s come up, and I

RG: How would you tell a ‘good one’ from a ‘bad one’?

SR: Well, that’s a good question, that’s a very good question, that’s a question of aesthetic beauty...and that’s a philosophical question, ultimately, I think, and

RG: Is it an important question?

SR: Yes, well I think it is

RG: Or an irrelevant question

SR: Well, no, it's an important question, and it's a challenging question...one answer would be [de gustibus non disputandum est] one person's like is not disputable...so, some people like John Berryman, and they won't have anything to do with Larry Eigner...but that's a sort of position of relativism, I suppose, but it's also damn true...it's hard to convince someone to like something that they really don't like, although it is possible, I see that a lot in classes where students don't like something to start with

RG: Mm hmm

SR: and then they end up really liking it...that happened with your work (laughs), it wasn't that they didn't like it, they just couldn't read it...but once they began to know how to read it, they kept thinking about it all semester, they found it extremely interesting because it was provoking questions about all writing

RG: Well, things have value in themselves

SR: Yeah

RG: for one thing...and if one sees those that come up into that 'shining'...that's in there somewhere, in the Emerson

SR: Yeah

RG: Some 'shine,' some...vanish...vanishing is interesting, too...but there's a value in accomplishing the...apparent realization of what's going on, in the time in which it happens

SR: Right

RG: which is like an eyeblink, a "Moment", in which something is, is...something transpires, is seen

SR: Yeah

RG: and it has 'value' because it happened...but why does that sense of mere 'being' impart a sense of 'value'?

SR: Well, that's a great question, really, I think that's an important question, and I think that's exactly right...its 'value' is that it happened...the writer records it

RG: Awful stuff happens

SR: Well, that's true...you mean "awful stuff" like

RG: Well, like a crow converting some creature to

SR: To food?

RG: to naught, to naught!

SR: You mean attacking some creature?

RG: No, that's a kind of abstract description of what happened

SR: Uh huh (laughs)

RG: So, a lot of stuff...like in 'nature,' for example...is quite dreadful

SR: Yeah, that's true

RG: from any kind of human...or human perspective

SR: Yeah

RG: Who wants to be...what did Rumsfeld say?...the next bite for the dinosaur?

SR: Yeah, alligator (laughs)

RG: Alligator?

SR: Appeasing al Qaeda...these things are, in this poem, now, these political things are coming in, not as observation of things happening...like Lapp lying sidewise...but more like things that one hears, being in this contemporary world where these things are going on

RG: Mmm

SR: I don't know, I kind of enjoy letting these things come in right now, but I haven't been, it's new...it's something I'm coming back...I used to do that and I see that it's a different...an evolution of the work, somehow, so...go with it, as long as you can...but I think the 'value' of things happening, that there is a kind of 'moral' value to that, or at least an instruct...maybe better

RG: Why do you think that?

SR: Well, no, better to say...than 'moral'...to say 'instructional value'

RG: Why not 'moral'? That's what Emerson would say

SR: Okay, the 'moral' value

RG: 'Moral' is the highest, according to Emerson

SR: Yeah, and we instruct our fellow beings in right morality, so 'instructional' and 'moral' aren't unrelated, but 'moral' is a higher form of this

RG: By 'moral' you mean...

SR: Well, the 'moral' value is that

RG: []

SR: for the reader, as well as for the writer...I'm thinking of the reader now...for the reader, it's a prompt

RG: But the reader wants to be uplifted!

SR: Yeah, but

RG: The reader doesn't want to be shown the thing itself...and just left there, abandoned (laughs)

SR: Well, who knows what the reader wants?...but the reader who reads "M o m e n t s"...the "dumb looking" cat, the cat "looking dumb" (RG laughs)...or "oh it's...windy outside," that...the

reader who reads those things which seem to be inconsequential, and void of significance beyond themselves

RG: Merely happenstance, really!

SR: Happenstance, accidental event (RG expresses shock) that this guy happened to record

RG: Some guy wrote it down

SR: sitting at the little typewriter there (SR gestures toward Eigner's old Royal portable on table)

RG: Maybe it never happened, maybe he made it up!

SR: I want to enter into the record, by the way, that his typewriter is right between us

RG: Maybe he made 'em up!

SR: and it's a beautiful icon of writing, right there, with his page in it, but

RG: How dare he call a cat "dumb"!?

SR: Well, he did, he was a daring individual (laughs) I'm sure...he didn't get out much, but he was daring...but in any case, the point

RG: He was "dumb," he may have been "dumb"!

SR: Yeah, that may be, and he might have liked thinking so...the point about the 'moral' and the 'instructional' is that it shows the reader, it may inspire or prompt the reader to pay attention to...to pay a similar close attention to reading the text of the world, or looking at things, perceiving things....and there's 'value' in that because life is short and experience is...all we seem to have

RG: (reads note) "Sun shine..."

sun's

shine

its

shine

I haven't written that yet, but I was trying to figure out something that was significant...in itself...

SR: Uh huh

RG: for itself...

SR: Yeah []

RG: sun's

shine

its

shine

SR: "sun/shines/its/shine"?

RG: Something like that, a kind of disposition of essence

SR: Yeah, you should write that...I can't believe you haven't written that

RG: Well, I'm not quite ready to write it, yet (laughs)

SR: Well, of course there hasn't been any sun! (laughs) It's wishful thinking

RG: Well, I didn't have time today, but

SR: I think you should remember that one

RG: There is an identity, of course, in old-time philosophic treatises I haven't read between 'being' and 'the good'

SR: 'Being' and 'the good'?

RG: Yeah, 'God is good'...God, which is supreme Being, omni-...is perceived...and then through a lot of 'reasoning,' shall we say, to be equal and identical with 'the good'...and so, in fact, I also have that perception, and its an 'innate' one

SR: The perception...?

RG: That...everything is all right!

SR: Yeah [?]

RG: if one only...understood it to be so

SR: Well, I think that's a...yeah

RG: I've had that perception

SR: Isn't that also a Buddhist idea?...not to bring that in, but...if Joanne [Kyger] were here, she wouldn't have stood

RG: Oh...I'm not sure they would say it was 'good'

SR: At least that it 'is'...? I don't know

RG: Yeah, there's a value in the 'is' itself

SR: Yeah

RG: which is a 'moral' value, which is difficult to articulate, except through the things themselves which show it...

SR: Ah!

RG: reveal it

SR: Perfect

RG: and those things are those things which 'shine'...and one testifies to them through, hopefully, a 'shining' word, writing, writing...which also 'shines' because it's alive (laughs)

SR: Well, it does, it 'shines,' as Emerson says, because it's a disposition of a new...thing

RG: Or, it's a dud, it's dim

SR: "Dud"!?! (laughs) or "dumb"

RG: What would Larry say, about the "dumb" cat?

SR: A dumb poem! (laughs) I like that!

RG: Yeah, he probably didn't like it, he wanted the cat to talk and it wouldn't, and so

SR: Oh, "dumb"... "dumb looking"

RG: he said it was a stupid cat

SR: "dumb," silent

RG: But there is a capac-...possibility there...and of course, then you can connect to the Emerson...oh, what a...hmm! (reads)

"Nature has dearly at heart the formation of the speculative man, or scholar. It is an end never lost sight of, and is prepared in the original casting of things. He is no permissive or accidental appearance, but an organic agent in nature..."

SR: "He"...?

RG: Well, 'she'...as they say nowadays

SR: But who's the "he" or the 'she'?

RG: The "scholar," or poet

SR: Okay...or writer, the poet?

RG: or writer, or representative man or

SR: Yeah, right

RG: Goethe, in this context (reads)

"He is no permissive or accidental appearance, but an organic agent in nature, one of the estates of the realm provided and prepared from of old and from everlasting, in the knitting and contexture of things."

SR: "The knitting and contexture of things..." now, is that a figure of writing, "knitting and contexture"?

RG: Well, I certainly feel very important, myself! (SR laughs) as a result of understanding and grabbing onto and...some proximity to that statement...it was only about a foot from my breast, and as a result I felt that it had greater reality to me

SR: Um hmm

RG: at that moment, even though that was mere physical proximity...so, you can say that this undertaking is not merely like a professional, poetic, human habit, preoccupation...‘career’...but that, in fact, out of the ‘depths of time’ appears each one...given its capacities and perceptual, cognitive abilities

SR: Mm hmm

RG: and the conditions of the day...and that each one, every man, every woman (laughs)...

SR: Let us add!

RG: every duck! (both laugh)

SR: every cat!

RG: has its ‘moment’...and these ‘moments’

SR: Yeah

RG: repeat...unevenly and unpredictably, during the day and they amount to the creation of...what was the word for that? the significant ones?...the “eminent” ones...

SR: Um hmm

RG: “eminent” means only that you’re paying attention...but, that’s important, and so, if one wishes to feel self-important by paying attention, by being kept...then all the more power to ‘her’! (laughs)

SR: But what about, back to your question of...does one feel, do you feel...somehow, somewhat chagrined or at odds by offering all of this amorphous junk, recording of junk, to said reader...this accumulation of details which seem to be...

RG: A mere record

SR: a mere record, without

RG: just what they are

SR: without purporting to be a symbolic...

RG: Who reads []

SR: a conduit to the symbolic val—...world beyond them...

RG: Um hmm

SR: What do you do with...?

RG: Do with that...so far, nobody's read them...therefore I'm not troubled by that (SR laughs)

SR: It's not a problem, thank you!

RG: Now, were I to presume that that meant that these works, of themselves, had not found a public and therefore they...the public had no interest in them, then I might be really depressed, if I

SR: Well, of course

RG: had, as my object, the...public adulation...which sounds kind of...neither here nor there, to me

SR: Yeah...you could go on a 'reading tour' ...

RG: One can imagine

SR: You could be out there at A Clean, Well-Lighted Place for Books

RG: I would have to be symbolic of myself, in a way that would be problematic for me...because it would involve a rigidification into some one person who showed up

SR: Yeah...so, anyway, that's another issue, but...what about the question of the disposition, Emerson's calling it "disposes" or "disposing" of...what is it?

* * *

RG: So, it's just that, right? and it's...only itself...so, when you note something, in one of these sections of these ongoing poems, it's what you write down...that's what it is

SR: Yeah, it's

RG: You expect the reader to read it, for that, or to be wondering...if they read a little more, they might understand what the previous thing meant?

SR: You know I don't...that's a good question...I don't even think of the reader, I don't think of anyone reading these, actually...I do know I like to, if I can read them myself to someone, that seems to be...have a certain pleasure to it, but I can't quite imagine somebody reading these, and I don't think about what the reader would do with them...but what I do think about...somehow, part of the 'value' of doing this, to me, just as an activity, has to do with this disposition of the materials, which I take to be the words...there's the perception of things in the world, and then there's the disposing of things, in the language

RG: Making the poem

SR: onto the page...making the poem...

RG: Yeah

SR: with certain shapes, certain lines, line breaks, the linking of words in a line...all those things are the activity of the writing, which I find, I really enjoy doing it,

RG: Mmm

SR: it's fun and it seems to have...I would hope it had some meaning or value, to another, but I don't know...because no one reads them

RG: Um hmm

SR: and the work is too long to be published, and even if it were published, I can't imagine someone sitting down and reading it like a novel, although maybe, I don't know...I think you must have the same issue...what do you think of the 'the reader' of your work, you keep saying there is no 'reader'?

RG: Well, I think of it as very scary, and strange, and obscure and problematic...and fun (SR laughs) and joyful and mysterious, and creepy to be alive...and I find, in that context, I'm sometimes able to actually look around in amazement and notice some dull...'commonplace,' in itself...and then I chain myself to that, like a man abandoned in space...and I grip the dog, with my bare hand, and I say (SR laughs)

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and the rest of me is going to rush out and look at the Leonid meteor shower, which is supposed to happen later tonight, if it's not rainy and foggy as it probably will be

SR: No, it may be...it may be happening

RG: I'm sick of the rain and the fog...but I find it astounding and completely...conventional to sit here, in our chairs, and discourse like this, at our leisure, of these matters

SR: Astounded or conventional

RG: when, in fact, the motivation is to do something in the actual real time given

SR: Absolutely

RG: with the...terrifying and pending sense of 'doom'...combined with a blissful recognition that Being is Good, and everything that can be seen and testified to...can be seen and testified to

SR: Bob, that's wonderful!

RG: without fear, and without danger

SR: As Emerson said, "The record is alive, as that which it recorded..."

RG: Yeah

SR: is alive"...it is astonishing and commonplace to sit here talking about these things and

RG: Why, we shouldn't have opportunity...

SR: Well, we've taken it! We've seized the moment and made the time, so

RG: Ahhh....

SR: happily, to do that

RG: The 'significance' of the particular is hard to describe...and the way that one is 'pitched' toward it, in one's education and temperament, is so specific that there's no reason even to try to derive one's interest in the particular from that...it's just what happened, and so

SR: Well, I think that the topic of the particular and the spin on it...what is the 'value' of the particular in poetry, in writing...is very interesting and worthwhile to think about, and it's not something that I think one sees people talking about, in fact...certainly that Irene Chayes was not talking about the 'value' of the particular, and she's not alone in not thinking about it

RG: Irene Chayes?

SR: Yeah, she's the one who was writing about the ideas in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind"

RG: Oh, right

SR: She wasn't going to quote the poem for you, or talk about the poem or...anything

* * *

SR: So, anyway, we're running short now on tape, but we mentioned

RG: Time!

SR: Shelley, and I thought Larry Eigner's poem of April 28 '79 begins with his own version of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and Larry Eigner's poem's line reads

"oh it's pretty windy outside"

RG: A [] statement, if I ever heard one!

SR: Well, it's not windy now, but it will be...Shelley's poem, I think...well, here it is, without

RG: Characteristically understated, like Larry's, no doubt

SR: Yeah, completely understated (reads)

"O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being."

RG: Whooo...

SR: (reads)

"Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven,"

RG: Aghh! Baaghh!!

SR: (reads)

"like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,"

RG: Gnahhh!

SR: (reads)

“Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,”

RG: Really!?! Smallpox

SR: (reads)

“Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,

Who chariotest”

RG: Ahhh!

SR: (reads)

“to their dark wintry bed

The wingéd seeds, where they lie cold and low,

Each like a corpse within its grave, until

Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o’er the dreaming earth,”

RG: Whoooo!

SR: (reads)

“and fill

(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)”

RG: Wheee! (burps)

SR: (reads)

“With living hues and odors plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;

Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!”

