

Tottel's 18

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I can hear myself, my voice that is, in the distance. Which of us is answering back? Go inside, where it's warmer, not safer. Painstakingly, then, not for other eyes, or ideas; independent of the idea of what you bring to it, don't be just nothing but nonsense, I go out when my roommate comes over to read a play by her friends, I'm distracted by the sound of my own voice; my reflections on it are an influence on me, none of this is hard and fast, it's pleasant to abuse clumsy beginnings because honestly the form doesn't work for me as pre-established, like a farmer I have to work it. I can hear the past out the window: I'm in the yard, on the lawn, it comes out the upstairs window — colors. Silly shit — man, you really caked up in that one. Aren't you embarrassed? I want to find how it ends. The tone of metaphor taking over, generalizing, not advancing the argument in its own direction but telling you to it, giving up as to a sexual experience (no transcript), why is this philosophical? You guys are growing a lot of weeds in your patches of the garden — I'm just talking to keep myself possibly on the verge of alert, available to criticism. What do you think; of course it's not. In a certain way it could be very funny (if we

concentrated, hearing how it's listened to
by each other) — I'm not interested in
pursuing lines of thought. It's astounding
how they grow, larger, bolder, not more
advanced but more overall, as I pace through
a given — you can hear the shape and limits
of the room, my acquaintance with — my
relationship with myself mirrored in my
relationship with Chris, or vice versa, as
in a dream, everybody represents me to someone
who only admits he's watching at the risk of
introducing art or the layer of self-consciousness,
like a resin more than a finish, as a, not
a figure so much as a controlling quality,
not stylizing the whole so much as
determining the reification of its forms
in its terms, the qualities of successful
alienation or disturbing but consistent
dislocation which I unfortunately, foolishly,
needlessly . . . attribute to those
qualities. Two people in a room, both of
them me, I'm outside, overhearing very
deliberately but as though I'm not there,
through a window: dumb. Not self-abnegating.
Ignorant, deliberately, actually — myth,
childhood fantasy of homosexual seduction
by itinerant mature man, invented since,
I think. What jogs is not my memory.
Peculiarly toned down. The full force.
You can hear the tentativity, the *sense*
of limits, no realization — how they
"deform" the process taken into account in
the implications of the product.

Neatly arranged on the tabletop, people,
instruments, places. Ink smears on my
hand. I plan to upgrade the modes of
production, I do so, talking to a so-called
friend. He is a friend, "is" in quotation
marks, I offer him some criticism, and he
accepts the offer but declines the position,
walks away into the toilet to unload a big
shit. I'm not mad at anybody when I say
this, I say, isolated, alone, to myself —
what madness is that, that doesn't express
itself in sadness, its true form — oh stuff
it, you sheik. Some moments I'm just not
so mature — I pretend to have an overview,
but really I'm just watching the connections
hammering the points home; not wandering,
not as sterile as it seems — the model of
sterility really is the condition of propogation
of individually discrete organisms, isn't it,
conventionally with a positive moral applied,
like "better luck next time" or your own
offspring won't hurt you — a branch of "you"
to which "self-knowledge" need not apply.
Does this time have your name on it? Do you
have a cold? I woke up with something funny
in my throat, presumably the residue of
reruns of all those old dreams decomposing
like reconstituted tape. Nothing looks
interesting, everything looks better dusty,
one can't tell the cultivated plants from
weeds without a guidebook. I tried to
watch my father do it but not knowing where
I was going to be living I couldn't remember
I had no fantasy to apply it to except being

my father, which was clearly untenable by that time in my life — so I'm stuck with research in books, and the idiosyncratic policies of friends who are somewhat like me in their headstrong clipped improvisations into the hastily deconstructed bombs that are our life. The planet streaks through its stratosphere. I go off alone to try to put the particular end to end as though history were a unity of science and the novel but am constantly interrupted by all the books I want to read. Like walking down the street I lambast myself for not feeling more emotional, thinking I'm reporting on this. I intend to see the relevance of all these fragmentations, oscillations, interruptions, and dislocations — I intend to bear witness to their inherent mutual compatibility and discovery of structure within that deconstructive self-consciousness within a flux based on a lamentable primordial stick in the mud within solid wind. The beep goes on. Rhythmic, elastic — I sense it out, pressing my nose against it, coloring it with my face, the part I cannot see. Do you think he really wants to be in it? Well if he doesn't he can always drop out, he's proved himself good at it before, he agonizes but he knows he's right. I was asked for things to think about; it was surprising but right and not disturbing but steady and friendly but inwardly very disturbing because I was losing something without admitting it, my grip on what I thought. It was easy enough to tell her but afterwards I thought of

other, qualifying, more general things that I
wanted to tell her but have forgotten them now.
Don't eat without chewing! "There's not
enough time left to do anything else but
continue this."

When now all that day dies monosyllables
down long, that memory ipso facto syllables
come like ride this dowdy lowlife clinging
bow-wing sequinned bracelet with calfskin
gloves. Like a character in Henry James,
she charms her charity first, wins rides
and claims monstrous gravitation among the
rides and soups the monster wears to work
and the horse shoe factory. Boll weevils
belts gloves glow into heavy seeds negating
weakness down low in the drivers' seat where
James Dean crunches a piano into a cigarette
pack in advance of the tobacco industry.
Sentences start up like cars that aren't
going anywhere until they through that part
of the operation interrupted sentence on
till midnight jaggedy still thought croaks
in reedy fitness squabbles long time march
winners end losing streak to carousers' glow,
like wondering what will happen if you get
famous — haven't you been preparing for
this all your life? Not that the by-product
is essential, it only lasts for a short
while compared to the process of the whole
work, like this sentence meaning shifts into
low and high gear without needing to but
wanting some kind of reification, reintegration,
and a negative grace to counter the facile

purposeless (seemingly) quasi-grace to challenge
an active or maybe we say realizing what's the
watchword these days a grace that would hold
up not only to inspection, which is important,
but to the impact of waves and flying things,
diversions of attention from this ground we
need, being people, to stand on. Over all of
us a cosmic sort of sky, grey light hanging
with its hands up and its head full of
cigarettes, unsmoked so not so bad. The
washing machine towers over the scaffolding
raised to unwind its listening touches — a
burglar soars over the houses and gets lost in
the trees: the trees have sent extensions into
the air above and rerouted systems of learning
for the birds whose wings now tip into dully
squeegee wet brown precipitantly sedentary words,
car radio sounds coming out of their cars. It's
not the last thing I do to change the sentence
in the middle — my mind is so stubborn I couldn't
tell you I changed it. It resolutely refuses
to be challenged and I refuse to believe it.
So how are we going to start the revolution?
I don't remember if I dreamed that I once learned,
meaning managed, to light a fire by rubbing 2
sticks — if I really did it I didn't believe
it. This by way of example, quoting myself last
night, I don't remember either way, the but
notion of that I . . . often appear as an
example, usually of an exception, but perhaps
less often than I'm aware. Having lived and
experienced a lot of history, ambivalent about
whether and how it shaped him and he carried it
around with him, wanting to shake it or let it

slide off his back, hence finding himself not so out of joint with the time as so unavailable to it for his personal freedom and its perception of his historical necessity, once pitted, he considered his option to approach those living in time with the freshness of makers peeled by consequences as a independent agent and a cringe of history situation missed value in them; not a follower but a inspector or procedure, he was immune to advice or criticism, plunderer of his own track, which would violate, if unresisted them, and which talking back to was informing. His disdain for the subject was eagerly mocked by the quest to have something to do — he was not one of those who would have liked to retire into persona — he kept himself earnestly figurative, neither begging nor in any way demanding but certainly tending to keep the doors of communication (a good way to conceive them) open or at least ajar for the endlessness that would leak out and that he could in any way find relatively (to possible alternative) free forms for. The doors of communication were or possibly are of access, and now I'm taking on his voice more consciously and so I know and can tell nothing is happening anymore. I remember a lot of opinionated poetry, some of it in letters to the editors and book reviews. Not the words themselves but a sort of destruction or why don't you like John Ashbery or the roles of ill health hurling themselves up through the brain — rolls of wadded time and paste gabbling ironically against the monkey — you can read the setting of the

ass in the chair in the insensitive tension,
deliberately prepared, of these words — not
mine, I'm talking of someone else's — Diane
Wakoski's, and the persons she argues with.
Is this "being" unsupportive? Does one have
an ax to grind, or is it obsolete? If I
like a friend, I like to help him, or her,
or it. It's impersonal, whether I like one
or not, it's not a value judgement, it's
valuing pure per se. If you can volley for
serve you can play the game. I can't make
it up to you; you can easily make it up to
me. Let go of your chest, hold your arms at
your sides, walk over to me.

3/23, 3/24, 3/26 / 80