

WORDS SURFACING . late August 2006
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I've just finished grading Finals, and after one hour of sleep the night before, I feel like I might be coming down with a cold. Fuck. Needless panic and stress sets in. Tomorrow I plan to drive to Arizona to teach for a week at a school on an Indian reservation. I dread possibly becoming the cliched white invader who decimates the population by sharing his infection (when I get to the school on Monday I discover that in fact the town's already been infected - a weird sense of relief). It's time to unwind, distract myself and read some email. Jim Tenney died last night, the first one says.

I leave school. It's 6ish and the light today is exceptionally bright, glaring, moreso than I'm used to. As a result the car's windshield is now an opaque white-yellow and I struggle to see the street ahead of me. I stop in at a gas station to get a vitamin C drink. As I walk out I see the glowing stare of a little girl with Down syndrome. She is sitting in the back seat of her family's SUV, somewhat expressionless. The rest of the car's insides are dark & shaded, but the low, glaring sunlight is shining sideways and illuminates her face, and the high contrast betrays her halo. She is beautiful. I think briefly of Dorit and her Buddha-sister's dancing.

I mistook East for West [and vice versa] [again] today.

on the reservation

I wonder if noise-music would work here...

recipe for roaring silence: take any small road, drive a bit, park somewhere, find a good vantage point, then sit and listen.

it's so quiet

I wonder if those who perform noise-music (myself included) secretly desire a return to silence, and use their noise to battle and drown out a noise that is not theirs, an omnipresent one that is hoisted upon them by the mechanics of city society, whether through un-lubed machinery or sad, perverted psychology.

[I prefer my noise to theirs...]

however

I arrive at the high school

the students are Hopi, and all the teachers and administration I see are as white as me
the students here are just like the Hispanic students in Los Angeles - everyone's wearing black outfits adorned with 80s punk and metal insignias, and most students, when not in conversation with a friend, have their ears plugged with headphones blasting
as my friend Nat wrote in a study on portable audio devices: *anywhere but here (all the time)*

I go to the cultural center at the motel
they have a few huge pictures blown up on the wall
one is of the Wuwuchim Society, a group of clownish Hopi men dressed in mangled garb, half
nude, paint splattered randomly on their bodies, and they appear to be hopping or running or
both. seeing their huge fiendish smirks I think to myself that they resemble Günther Brus and Otto
Muehl, only this is from more than a half century earlier and far, far away. fascinating. I take
note and plan to research more when I get home.

I'm in the car again
things are far apart out here and everything is 30 minutes away even at 70 mph
I turn on the radio and turn it to the AM dial - do the Hopi have their own talk radio station?
I find a Christian ministry station with 60-cycle-hum in the background; the host is talking for
awhile about the damning properties of MTV culture, and then later, when he's taking calls,
about the damning properties of idolatrous religion - I assume he means the Indian's "idolatrous"
religion. he is very sure of his particular reality.

I feel embarrassed ten times over. and sad. I pass a couple churches on the way to the school. the
churches and the schools out here appear to be the same as anywhere else, just like the fast food
restaurants (though the fast food hasn't yet made its way onto this reservation like it has the
Navajos¹).

I wonder if I should be here - am I unwittingly adding to the continued normalization of these
people? I look around, though, and realize most of the work has already been done. is it my job
then to undo it? is that possible? I hope to talk to the students about John Cage, but am reminded of
his advice: "Stop trying to change the world [you'll only make matters worse]"

I realize that to be human is to adapt. being human is a process of living, and to be inflexible is to
hasten the process of perishing. These people have adapted; perhaps first to the climate and land;
and then to the culture that desires to subsume them.

From the Tao Te Ching (as translated by Victor Mair; 41):

Human beings are
soft and supple when alive,
stiff and straight when dead.

The myriad creatures, the grasses and trees are
soft and fragile when alive,
dry and withered when dead.

Therefore, it is said:

The rigid person is a disciple of death;
The soft, supple, and delicate are lovers of life.

An army that is inflexible will not conquer;
A tree that is inflexible will snap.

The unyielding and mighty shall be brought low;
The soft, supple, and delicate will be set above.

I realize that the version of Christianity spouted on the radio today is for people who are really depressed. a psychotherapeutic noise to blot out the confusion and sadness of a chaotic world that doesn't fit the zealot's mold. it is against adaptation - adaptation is sin - unless you're adapting to this zone of anti-adaptation. I think of my job and my friends' jobs and how depressed I've been and how depressed they have been, and I wonder if the community fixtures that Judeo-Christian society has installed are designed with a built-in feedback loop of depression and futility in order to sustain the beast indefinitely (as in: Judeo-Christendom begets depression, which begets the need for Judeo-Christendom, which begets more depression, which begets...) - built into our cultural fabric from the apartments we dwell in, to the ways we get our nutrition - to the job culture and models we accept. I wonder if the Hopi were depressed before the missionaries ever arrived, and if so how that depression differed from the one followed. I wonder what the Hopi word for depression is.

as I drive I feel embarrassed and sad (in my Judeo-Christian-way?) and offer a silent prayer to the land rolling past, wishing for the defeat of invaders everywhere, however belatedly, feeling somehow content knowing that even I would most likely perish in such a battle.

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