

Memoir of an Interdisciplinary Academic Conference;

Or,

I Remember Halloween.

The stars at night
Are big and bright
Deep in the heart of Texas.¹

Texas is the reason
That the President's dead.²

1. **Rethinking Space and Time Across Science, Literature, and the Arts**, the seventeenth annual conference of the Society for Literature and Science, will be held at the Marriott at the Capitol in Austin, Texas, on October 23-26, 2003.

Dear colleague: We are happy to inform you that your paper/panel proposal has been accepted for the SLS 2003 program. (If you are the organizer of a panel proposal, please distribute this information to your panel colleagues if necessary).

We look forward to a lively, international meeting under mild Texas skies.
[Date: Fri, 20 Jun 2003 13:02:27 -0500]

A WANDERING SCHOLAR: one bag, three dress shirts, three white tshirts, one black, one pair khakis, one pair jeans (wear on plane), one polo-type shirt (wear on plane), boots (do NOT wear on plane), sneakers, underwear (2 extra pair), two books (culture industry, in the cage), toothbrush, 2 copies of paper.

no computer. Weighs down, might break.

"Revision of a published text—say, Whitman's leaves of grass—is not necessarily contingent on augmentation/ adding technologically superior material but rather material of the same technological state." Revise?

Conference Streams:

Literature & Science

Gender & Media

Art History

Art & Media

Theory Across Disciplines

Orientalism and simulated frontiers

Should rehearse paper.

2. 6:30 AM shuttle to ATL airport. Hurry up and wait. Read. Scholarship.

Flight tolerable, but in a daze the whole time. Half asleep.

Security lines very congested: roller coaster corrals. Behind me: we didn't have to do this before 9/11, I can tell you that.

No one talked to me on flight, which is good, as travel small talk is the stuff of jet set fiction a la Fitzgerald and his Riviera girls.

Short flight to Austin from Houston [flight numbers not important].

Most attractive women at airport I have ever seen before. They are everywhere and for some reason women dress for flying: so many in airport. Business trips? Meeting clients? Meeting boyfriends/lovers/loved ones?

Have not slept decently in 72 hours.

I have never sat next to that very attractive girl the one everyone is either looking at or trying not to look at and perhaps saying not saying I want to sit next to her.

I want to sit next to her. I will not talk to her. I will observe protocols: Excuse me. Pardon me. One must speak correctly the language of the airport: avoid eyes; body language; establish boundaries and observe barriers.

For instance: I do not want to talk to my neighbors, and I communicate this clearly by displaying open book (the culture industry) prominently and deliberately reading it.

3. Arrive at hotel 3:00 Friday 24 October. Shower. Observe others. Retrieve name tag.

3:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m. Session 5A. Astronomy and Cosmology I: Victorian and Modern Literature. Eliot, Woolf, blazers with padded shoulders,.

Reception area: graduate students working the desk and generally being servile as this is important to learn when professionalizing: I want your skull.³

Small talk with robots...

5:20 p.m.-5:50 p.m. Buses make short roundtrips to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, UT.

...small talk about robots.

5:30 p.m.-7:15 p.m. **SLS Reception** at the Harry Ransom Center exhibition "Make It New: The Rise of Modernism" (refreshments). Quickly stuff face with assorted fruits and breads, with food not meant to be a meal but acting as one to bribe the guests for they have been trained in hunger but have recently forgotten the lesson. Have not eaten decently since previous evening and must subsist on high fat items designed to be excited by red wine.

Hand made sign: LONG HORNS FOR CHRIST

Modernism exhibit traces of once living artists typescript death shrouds, cocoons, paper like old wasp nests. On wall: ten nonsense words, "each a jumbled amalgam of words meaning thunder."

Joyce's typescript as well as a diagram/schema for Ulysses

British recruiting poster, no date, silhouettes of soldiers: BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF. BE CERTAIN THAT YOUR SO-CALLED REASON IS NOT A SELFISH EXCUSE.

Cocktails at museum with Paul F., U of ___; Michelle G., U of ___.

Collotypes of Muybridge prints: One step. The next. And the next.

Horse running, captured over a period of time, so that the illusion of movement is exposed as a series of still photographs in a refutation of continuity. Over heard behind me: "the constraints of observation."

4. Bar w/ Paul, Michelle: The Red Eyed Fly. Star tattoos in the lone star state abound in the Fly which is deep in the heart of Texas.

Jukebox, 1 dollar, 4 plays: A. the thing that should not be/metallica; B. the ace of spades/motorhead; C. supernaut/black Sabbath; D. hybrid moments/ the misfits.

Bar #2: Club Deville. Large flashing sign of Cadillac hood ornament (bulbs like Vegas but not neon like Vegas). Surrounded by concrete wall w/broken glass bottles at the top.

The anxiety of border states. Remember? The Alamo.

Flyer: telegraphic tattoo every Monday in September [crossed out]
FOREVER! [superscript] is GG ALLIN DAY! \$20 tattoo for any tattoo worn by GG

[photocopied pics of performance artist GG Allin featuring prison-style tattoos].
Thus, Texas is inscribed in colored skin again.

5. Saturday, October 25 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Registration/8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Book Exhibit/8:00 a.m.-8:30 a.m. Coffee and Pastries.

Osama Tesuka created Astroboy and therefore anime. Anime is a cultural artifact which was once capable of estranging American viewers from their object but has since been the subject of western appropriation and Texas Tech for one plays up its Asian intellectual goods as a kind of lure for its future technocrats. Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with... in one of two ways: either by rejecting it and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself.⁴

WRITING IS A ROBUST TECHNOLOGY.

Slide: proud parents of a mass marketed, conformist, subculture cliché.

Will the growing popularity of anime decrease its value as a producer of culture shock? Will its newness to young American eyes be compromised?

Grave of the Fireflies.

12:00 noon-1:45 p.m. Lunch (included in conference registration) followed by the **Annual Business Meeting**: Salad, good: field greens. Some vegetarian soup featuring cheese, and sweet tea. More coffee. Servers aggressively demanding empty plates.

Speak w/ John G., ___U. Re: Christopher Walken, acting.

Walken apparently does not read from script: rather, isolates lines, cuts them out of script with razor and arranges them on the floor to be memorized as rhythmic elements.

Content secondary if present at all.

Therefore, while acting, isolated from other speakers (actors).the performance ends up being comical or uncanny b/c either

A1. the audience is not conscious of his deliberate alienation from script, language of screen, but nonetheless detect this b/c attuned to being connected to the language, trying to make it tell stories. This estrangement makes him mechanical,

A2. Bergson: humor is life behaving as a machine

OR

B1. audience is in on joke the entire time, knowing after all that sources of language on screen are actors

B2. laughter arises from knowledge of a performance of deception

B3. awareness of actors becomes awareness of construction/ performance

B4. actor gives this away

B5. audience laughs

This leads to a production of history via dishonesty, a conception of history as awareness of and complacency with lies, or "a history of errors" (John).

Travel awards given to graduate students at business lunch. Name called, I approach podium. Step up to receive check; envelope is empty except for an apology: "I've forgotten your check. Please contact me to account for this with your current address."

Should rehearse paper.

Austin wide open, streets bare of population save men that sit there and do not ask for money or seem to look at anything. Too big for an actual populace.

A ghost town? Seduced by westerns?

Fried tofu w/ ground peanuts & basil sauce (2.50); gang ju woonsen soup (3.50; cabbage tofu mushrooms); jasmine rice balls (3.00). Breezy, agave plants.

Submit abbreviated versions.

Dark energy lecture.

Address of building: ONE AMERICAN CENTER.

Store selling ninja swords, dragon statues, throwing stars and t-shirts that say FUCK Y'ALL I'M FROM TEXAS.

Billboard w/ 2 color print of johnny rotten, the word "OBEY."

Congress street by bus-stop: a pile of human hair. Waiting for this sort of surreal detail through the whole damn trip now the desert is really unreal

More cocktails, though avoid the dance night "mixer."

John: "you can't trust a fat guy."

Undergraduate girls in ghoulish hippie attire ask Paul go to corner of 6 and Trinity, tell man on corner that "the warlock is coming." Goth bar: elsyium. (John's idea). Halloween all the time, particularly attractive in a desert town.

Paul completes quest by delivering message but as usual the local girls are just fucking around with the college boys.

6. Sunday morning 8 am I present paper in a blur, too nervous to be hung over, and one woman in the back nods her head, and I stand while I read tripping over cords occasionally but no power point anyway and I am watching myself and hearing myself and my fellow panelists and the shifting numbers of audience members as they sip coffee, sneak in and out of paying attention and consider their comments for the q & a and when it is over there isn't much to say and the thing doesn't satisfy and I walk out to get some air but my paper's in the way.

What was that you said about?

I'm not sure about.

Have you read about?

Plaque at edge of hotel property: says b/c of our concern for your safety, the hotel discourages all travel beyond this point.

7. At the Warhol museum: the reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine.⁵

Exhibit: camouflage, guns. Children crying . Lunch: Saigon tofu (6.00).

Back at hotel now where I flirt with the idea of ordering a pornographic film.

Leave tomorrow for Houston, Athens.

Being out-ed as a professional geek in the last stand capital of the country, still making it new, somehow, and being an alien in a desert town which is dead alive is more fitting to me than any red ink on any paper and instead of pornography I have the academy.

And instead I watch a cable nature documentary on killer ants

The sifafu of Africa destroy everything in their path.

Apparently the top predator in Africa.

If we are to believe the narrator.

Martin Rogers

1 Traditional.

2 Glen Danzig, "Bullet." *Static Age*. Caroline, c. 1978.

3 Glen Danzig, "Skulls." *Walk Among Us*. Slash/Rhino, 1982.

4 Robin Wood, "The American Nightmare: Horror in the 70s." *Horror: The Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge 2002): 27 (emphasis added).

5 Andy Warhol, source unknown.