

The following essay is copied from an old/early website:

<http://www.ratconference.com/contents.htm>

It's easier to read as a Word document here,
but if you choose to read it on the website,
it's best to begin with "1, Pot Limit"

Theater and 7-Card-Stud [in its entirety]

Pot Limit

A version of play in which the maximum allowable bet is equal to the total chips in the pot.

Most want to play every hand. They force it. Push it. Actors moving from one cattle call to the next. Once in a while this or that production captures and challenges a certain time and place. But mostly it's second best... Nice hand, but a loser nonetheless. On to the next audition.

Theater finds the zeitgeist, the spirit and flow of the game. Sometimes it limps along, holding the winning hand but setting the trap while the other forces of society lead. Sometimes it is totally absent, but still active, attentive, always knowing the other players' strategies and moves. When the stakes are high and a win is imminent, push in all your chips.

cooler
COLD
DECK



Chips

Also ammo. Clay disks that represent money.

In poker, money is transferred into psychic energy before the game begins. Table stakes. No one is allowed into their unique pocket in the middle of a hand. Capitalism is merely one more player, not the dealer. The banker short on culture or ethics must buy the Van Gogh *Sunflowers* for \$40 million at Christie's before he looks at his cards.

The Lotto and NEA sell best in the welfare districts and small-stakes tables. The lucky few winners of grants are then allowed to bid with the bankers at the Christie's auction. They too are respectable now, able to enter one of the many satellite tournaments.

But at the big table, the final table, theater is society's suicide. Social Stigmata. Imitating the cancer sore, thus stimulating the body's immune system. Theater uses its own body parts for chips. If the eye is evil, pluck it out and place it on the table in front of you. Van Gogh's ear. The stack festers with psychic energy.

Theater cuts up its painting into small pieces and sells it for more paint. All is Rehearsal for the big game where *Sunflowers*, now worth its psychic weight in gold, comes into play. Rehearsal from the French *rehercier*, harrow again. Originally, "to harrow" meant to descend to the underworld to bring back the souls that reside there.

"Theater should be performed one time only.

On top of a graveyard."

-- Jean Genet

Cooler
COLD
DECK



Full Boat

Also full house. Three of a kind with another pair.

In late capitalism, the media are losing their hold on the simulacrum. Disney movies are being replaced by Disneylands. A pyramid rises in the desert, but not in Cheop. In Las Vegas, the "inclinators," not elevators, carry you up the angled walls to your room in The Luxor Hotel and Casino. Inside this huge pyramid, you can experience three different "virtual reality" rides, walk through a scale model of Fifth Avenue, NYC and eat in one of its restaurants, take a boat trip on "the Nile," while you listen to a narration of Egyptian history as you drift past slot machines, the poker room and other table games. The Mirage has a "live" volcano that erupts for an appreciative audience every hour. Every two hours over at Treasure Island, another large audience gathers around the two-acre mote between the casino and The Strip. Two replicas of 17th century ships float toward one another to do battle. The crowd is clearly on the side of the pirate crew over that of the stiffly dictioned Brits. So after all the acrobatics and explosions, it is the British Man-of-War that finally sinks. The crew has bailed out before this, but the captain goes down with the ship. Three full minutes later, you watch the ship rise again, complete with the British captain executing his curtain call.

These ships are replicas, but the boats springing up along the Mississippi and other rivers throughout the country are "real." Some of these riverboat casinos can make short, two- to three- hour round trips down the river and back, but most are permanently docked. Many times the river is artificially expanded and deepened to allow them to float. And like the ships at Treasure Island, these riverboats do battle against one another, but here the pyrotechnics are pure capitalism.

Gaming has exploded across the country. Now more than a \$30 billion a year industry, it has surpassed the combined income of the film, television and video industries. As Illinois and Iowa float their riverboats, their neighbors in Indiana and Missouri follow suit, lest the precious tax dollars cross state lines. As happened with the state lotteries over a short two decades, the dominoes are falling, state by state. Only Hawaii and Utah have no form of gaming filling their tax coffers. The ship has arrived and it's no Mirage.

The house has a built-in advantage in all games it offers, except poker. In poker, the house has no vested interest in who wins, so it simply takes its fair rake. Theater only plays poker, never trying "to beat the house," but always conspiring with it. At the poker table, theater finds the site-specific rehearsal hall rental for its script of late capitalism.

Cooler
COLD
DECK



Paint

Also picture card or face card. A Jack, Queen or King.

We wait until we hold the paired face cards. Court Cards in alignment. The Power. Artaud's exhibit late in his life at the Galerie Pierre. The portraits he'd drawn weren't meant as works of art, but attempts at expressing "the ancient human history" imprisoned in the human face.

Traditionally, the tepee lining outlined the history of the tribe in pictographs. Since we'd arrived, Gabriele had been busy drawing portraits of all our shantytown neighbors onto mailbags. They now lined the inside completely. The tepee itself she had sewn out of 78 mailbags, the number of cards in a Tarot deck. She had interpreted and illustrated all the Minor Arcana. The portraits were the court cards evolving into the Major Arcana.

I argue with the tourista from Florida. NO PICTURES, PERIOD. END OF SENTENCE. But this particular argument almost has me convinced. He **needs** to video tape the giant tepee in the center of a shantytown in Manhattan with the World Trade Center in the background... "If my friends in Florida see it in the news, they won't believe it. They'll think it's a movie set or something that the news is trying to present as real. But if I show them my videotape, they'll believe me. Are you a real Indian?"

The touristas and journalists are relentless with their pictures. The journalists, especially those with the big cannons like CNN and the networks, we have to threaten physically. More, we need our own camera to record the confrontation. If push comes to shove, they will be the news story as much as we. With touristas, we've found a different tactic. Everyone in the shantytown has a disposable camera. We call it "Counting Coup." The idea is that if you see a tourista trying to get a shot, you sneak up and capture them with your own snapshot. Then you say, "Hello." And when they turn to look at you, you record their expressions point blank. "Gotcha!" Gabriele takes

these dozens of developed prints of confused, angry, embarrassed faces, sews them into fur pieces and hangs them from the scalp pole in front of the tepee.

Peter Jennings in a shantytown doesn't look or sound like an "anchor." For one thing, he wears glasses. Also, his hair is all messed and he always apologizes for bringing his celebrity friends up to visit the tepee. This time he has brought Jessica and Hume. The anchor knows that actors and actresses, the famous ones, are America's royalty. Kings and Queens, Princes and Princesses, we get to know whom they're marrying or divorcing, what scandals involve them, etc. Booths, Barrymores, Fondas, Redgraves. Divine Right. It's in the blood.

Jessica has something in her eye and is very uncomfortable, but Hume has a big smile. A little gnome, he asks if it's alright to light up his pipe in the tepee. For a second, I'm thinking maybe he's the Medicine Man I've been waiting for, but the pipe and the pouch he brings out are the normal, the habitual. The anchor, however, is all ceremonial now. "You can tell, by just looking at the portraits, why they put up the tepee..."

Cooler
COLD
DECK



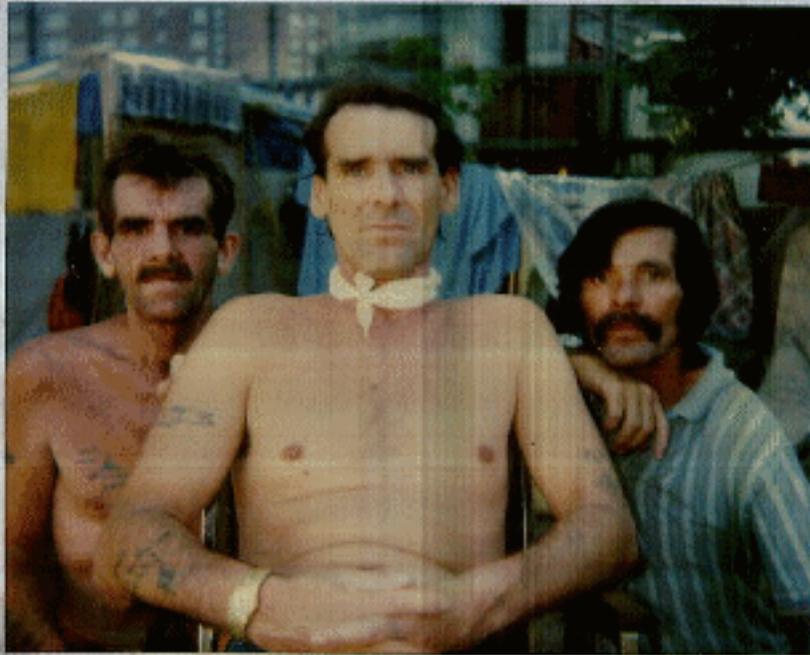
Three of a Kind

Also trips. Three cards of the same rank.

Theater is not in the blood; it's in the cards and how you play them. Most in the shantytown -- The Hill -- were HIV positive. Pushing all their chips in at the last table. They allowed us in the game only because they sensed we were doing the same, but in a different way. Gnostics called it the Second Death. When belief becomes knowledge, it is possible in our short lives, to begin to arrange our eternity. To etch the portraits, the experiences with others, into the face cards that will haunt and hunt us forever. Not all these people we initially love, but as we approach the Second Death, we learn how to live with them. Something like the family you had as a child. We sit at the same table, The Mise-en-Scene and its Double. Genet named it well, the title of his last book, *Prisoner of Love*.

3/26/91

Finally painted the brothers yesterday - Eddie, Donald, Mike - the James Gang, as I call them. The three of them on one mailbag, just like the pencil drawing I made for them a few weeks ago. I drew them on paper and made three photocopies. Told them the original was for their mother. She has four HIV positive sons. Donald came up to me later all nervous and appreciative. They're all so sweet and shy when they talk to me.



Cooler
COLD
DECK

FAMILY
POT

Family Pot

A pot in which all players at the table are involved.

Genet in Prisoner of Love, "If you put back the fourth wall, all characters in the play become real people." Theater puts back the fourth wall beyond the foot lights and behind the audience. In poker, all is flux. Hand to hand, moment to moment, it is not only hard to tell the playwright from the director from the actor, but the audience are players as well. All are still learning the game, but theater is the card shark. When it looks like it smiles just like the others in this friendly game, theater is showing its teeth.

The biggest casino in the world is run by the Pequot tribe in Ledyard, Connecticut. Most days you can find Gabriele or me at one of the high-stake poker tables there. We've met the chief. He's got red hair and an Irish surname. There are 300 members of the Pequot tribe, and their casino grosses 500 million a year. The tribe itself looks more like some kind of multi-culti commune attempt than an Indian nation. The Hill at one point in its history looked about the same. Chinese, Arab, black, white, Puerto Rican all in one shantytown village.



The Perfect Poker Face

A player who has no "tells."

You can tell, by just looking at the portraits, why they put up the tepee... Could the anchor know something we didn't? Could he read our horoscope in the Tarot of face cards we slept with every night? No. Even the anchor of the major network can't know the "why" of the big game, but he can bluff with the best of them. The simulacrum has mastered the bluff but not the game. The shuffle is not enough if the deck is marked by the mapmakers. Theater demands a new deck (which is the same as the antique

deck), and the territory is wild again, a Tarot of past, present and future. A few blocks south of The Hill, a controversy is developing about the old Negro Burial Ground accidentally unearthed. Teachers and church pastors are regularly appearing now on The Hill with groups of high school kids. Mr. Lee's hut and the tepee with its portraits are the main attraction of the tours. Gabriele has assigned herself the task of giving the history lesson.

12/27/90

Nick xeroxed something from the library yesterday. The only evidence of an Indian village in southern Manhattan was found right here where The Hill is now. Shell banks were found down on Pearl Street, for example. In the 1600's there used to be a fresh water pond called Collect Pond, whose perimeter was the present-day Canal, Bowery, Centre and Elm Streets. It's one bank was a hilly area. The Dutch settlers called the area, as well as the Indians and their chief, "Warpoes," which means "little hill." Some evidence suggests that the famous \$24 sale of Manhattan was transacted with the Warpoes. But the fact that colloquially today this area is called The Hill and that 400 years ago it was called Warpoes or little hill, will 400 years from now be... well, at least interesting. Garbed and interesting. Told the story to Sammy, Billy and Donald. They're now telling it to anyone who'll listen. Like kids recounting the day's history lesson to their parents. Of course their version keeps changing. Becoming more real?



The anchor visits with, I guess, *Roone Arledge*. "Nick, I'd like you to meet my boss." I'm supposed to know his name, but I don't and he doesn't offer it when we shake hands. "Nice to meet you, Boss. My friends call me Chief." We have a little laugh and both look over at the anchor. His blush is real.

All blushes are real. They are the most obvious "tell" at a poker table. Actors can't blush on film. The camera can't make real such subtlety. When the actor blushes, know, that like when it occurs in life, he has forgotten his lines. The illusion is gone, and the true script has arrived.

Theater is that blush. It pulls anchor. The anchored ship is both simulacrum and reality. Unfettered, it drifts and becomes theater, its true self.

Cooler
**COLD
DECK**



Eye in the Sky

The surveillance cameras in a casino ceiling.

A couple of days after Gabriele and I put the tepee up, I was walking across Chrystie Street at Canal when a 5x8 print blew up at my feet. Curious, I picked it up and continued walking. As I studied it more closely, I suddenly stopped and looked around quickly to see who had "planted" this photo for me to find. Of course, no one was there but the wind. I walked up on the Manhattan Bridge carrying the picture, trying to find the perspective of the camera which took it. Difficult, because the image was at least five years old. Walking back into time, I finally found it.

Where the tepee now stood there once was a scrawny tree. The rest of the triangular lot was barren. No shanties. I would learn later from one of our neighbors who had been there the longest, that at Christmas one year, they had put ornaments on the tree and some mornings when they woke, they had found different kinds of gifts under it. When we put the tepee up on Thanksgiving, 1990, there was no physical evidence of the tree, only the memory that it was once there, right where the tepee now stood. The print I found proved the memory true. I saved it. An eerie talisman.

One day a photographer somehow escaped the coup counting and stole a nice shot of the tepee and The Hill. Friends told us of a gallery that was exhibiting the photo. I went and cased the place. I had the talisman blown up and framed in the same matting as the gallery print. On The Hill, Ivan was the best at "playing chickie," the partner in crime who looks out and distracts while the deed is done. We went to the gallery and did the ol' switcharoo. No one noticed and the talisman stayed there for the entire run of the show.

One Sunday, some movie producers bring up a banquet for everyone. No cameras yet, but they want to use The Hill as a location. They are making a movie about the homeless, starring Danny Glover and Matt Dillon. The location scout comes by a week or so later and won't take no for an answer. Finally, frustrated, he brings out the trump card he has probably used over and over in trying to secure locations for this movie. "Don't you care about the homeless?" The blush. The actor hasn't forgotten his lines, just recited them in the wrong place. He exits stage left amidst catcalls from the audience.

The Prince of Washington Heights is on location at the Manhattan Bridge a few hundred feet from *The Hill*. Red is in a wheelchair, disabled from his latest occupation. He has been stealing surveillance cameras and selling them. I always thought Red was either taunting or delighting the overlooking gods of theft by stealing

surveillance cameras. Mostly he stole them from ATMs. Of course he merely stole the camera, not the video tape showing him stealing the camera, and stealing from federal banks probably made him vulnerable to more than a misdemeanor charge. One day he was in a precarious position on some scaffolding two stories up at a surveilled construction site, and when he grabbed the camera, the scaffolding gave way. He fractured his right arm and right leg, so he couldn't even use crutches. Ivan pushes him across the street so he can get a better look at the movie shoot. Danny Glover is between takes sitting in a chair about a half a block away. From the wheelchair Red yells, "Yo, Danny!" Danny looks up, returns the wave and smiles in a do-we-know-each-other kind of way. The film actor never blushes. Besides, Red doesn't at all look like his co-star Matt Dillon.

11/25/90

Then there's Red, a handsome, silent loner type with oddly reddish blond hair. His mother still collects newspaper articles that talk about the current high school basketball teams at his old school that just have never had another player as good as Red in his day. Now he spends all day hunched over, digging, prodding, looking for things to sell. It's Red who fascinates me the most because he's the most like me: white, middle class, raised in suburbia. Last night he was speaking of himself in the third person. Turns out his real name is Matt.



Cooler
COLD
DECK



Cold Deck or Cooler

Cheating term for a pre-arranged deck.

Periodically, a cheating incident or a procedural mistake will occur in a poker game, making it necessary to consult the video tape. All public card rooms in casinos have video cameras in the ceiling keeping surveillance on each table. Only the most blatant cheaters need worry here. The subtle work of the masters is undetectable except to the naked eye, the trained eye. The real eye sees what the eye in the sky cannot. It's a matter of depth perception.

If the simulacrum is a one-eyed, man-eating Cyclops swallowing us during our allotted 15 minutes of fame, theater is Ulysses tricking the giant by claiming his name is "Nobody." It is amazing how well those on The Hill play the homeless game. No one would suspect that most support \$200 a day habits. How many of the sympathizers make a thousand or more a week at their jobs? The media is in two distinct camps. Pro says don't blame the victim. Con says don't make them out to be victims. Back and forth the debate rages without any real depth. Who's to blame? The answer is simple. "Nobody."

Theater blinds the simulacrum by first abiding by the adage, "Never bite the hand that feeds you." But more importantly, theater knows that the hand that feeds you is also food. Never nip at the simulacrum like some pet toy poodle. Take the hand that feeds you off at the elbow. Theater doesn't get reviews, it makes news. The media is manipulated and they have "nobody" to blame. Theater is the big lie that becomes the big truth.

When *Prisoner of Love* was finally published in English translation, we immediately put an order in to London for 50 paperbacks. They arrived around the same time we put up the tepee. We knew it would be a while before anyone would publish it in the States. Grove Press had the original rights and, knowing one of the editors there, we were privy to the fears involved in the ultimate decision not to publish it. It's interesting to contrast the covert censorship here with the whole Viking Press/Salman Rushdie thing occurring at the same time.

Many of our neighbors made their living by building and selling fake camcorder boxes on the street. It is an old and very skillful art. Talking to one of the oldtimers, I was told they used to sell fake radios the same way back in the 40s. The 50s saw TVs. In the 60s, the Polaroid Instamatic and 8mm home movie cameras were in demand. Ten years ago, VCRs were hot.

The art is in both the packaging and selling, just like in the real world. If these products for recording experience exemplified best how the simulacrum has infiltrated and usurped our daily lives, then the empty boxes we sold from The Hill were either its crowning glory or its complete exposure and overthrow. We never referred to our product amongst ourselves as either a video camera or fake video camera, only as "I sold two boxes today." Generally, the women were more skilled at creating the package, while the men excelled at selling. Gabriele learned to make the box with enough finesse that she could have sold them at "wholesale." That price was forty dollars; then the "retailers" would resell it on Canal Street for \$100 to \$400. But hers were a modified version that I alone could sell. Instead of filling the box with old newspapers, she put a bookmarked copy of *Prisoner of Love* inside. The bookmark offered a phone number to call for a refund if not completely satisfied. Nobody ever called. Maybe Genet was smiling down on us from his special heaven. Surely he enjoyed watching his book being sold in America for the first time as the equivalent of old newspapers but worth, if not its weight in gold, at least ten to forty times its market value.

Cops know all the con artistes. If they've got a hard-on for you, they'll arrest you. The standard is that they will take your box. But not to destroy it. They carry it with them in their squad the rest of their shift. Cops are looking for bigger fish and trade the box for information. If that fails, they can sell it for twenty bucks easily enough. Then they can use that to buy information or put it into the piggy bank toward the video camera they're saving for.

A woman asked Gabriele and me if we would put a box in an art show about the homeless she was curating at some gallery. We bought one wholesale from the master on The Hill who had taught Gabriele the craft. We exhibited her box as well as one of Gabriele's. The real and the fake. To the unknowing eye, they were identical. When the show was over, the curator came to us all distressed. One of the boxes had been stolen. Lucky for us, the fake and not the real one. The question regarding *Prisoner of Love* is whether it is a work of art or the real thing. Most think Genet's last work in theater was *The Screens* some thirty years ago. "Nobody" suspects something else.

Theater, like Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, is a time bomb. Dying of throat cancer, by the time Genet began writing his memoirs, his subjects were already a pile of old newspapers. The Black Panthers existed only as a history lesson, and as the cause of the PLO became more and more legitimate to the world eye, the rebel Genet so loved was disappearing. "I love the rebel, not his cause." Theater is an alchemy of the past and present for a gold in the future. "Pulp fiction," reality chewed and half digested into a large cud. Genet does not spit out "a page torn out of history." His swan song is the ugly duckling of legend. Theater never becomes history, always becomes myth.

Cooler
COLD
DECK



One-Eyed Jack

Jack of spades or hearts. The king of diamonds is also one-eyed, but it is the king of hearts that is called the Suicide King. The picture depicts the king with his own sword through his head.

Dip was the first to sell dope on The Hill. But Panama was the mailman. Panama was the name of the individual as well as the collective. Whether Tony or Spencer or Shaft, they all took the name Panama. Panama was now king-of-the-hill. Dip once invented the story that he fell asleep on the subway and somebody cut his pocket open, taking the money he was delivering. The delivery for most days was between \$1200 and \$1500. Periodically, someone would disappear with it. Panama knew this was part of the price of doing his kind of business. The price for Dip and others like him, wasn't always obvious, although there was what was called "The Crack Smile" on some. A scar from ear to ear on the throat. One can only imagine the terror of being held down and having that permanent tattoo administered with a razor or knife. Dip was lucky the first time. A beating, then he was locked inside his hut to sell. Maybe he was lucky the second or third time as well, I'm not sure. Nothing much showed. He lost his eye in one of the beatings. "Some shit, man. Some stupid shit. They just didn't believe me. Some stupid shit. I tried to tell them. Some stupid shit." He kept shaking his head No. Denying something. I kept saying, "It's your eye, Dip. It's your fucking eye." No. No. No. He had me shaking my head, too. In Gabriele's portrait of him, he's got two eyes.

5/30/91

Ray (another new, youngish black guy who is blind in one eye), Moe and Cano hung out again today trying to recapture last Sunday... Took a picture of Ray and after he told Nick that this morning, Nick, trailing behind Mr. Lee, found a one-eyed Jack on the ground. The synchronicity in the portrait drawing is becoming uncanny. When do the court cards become the Major Arcana?



cooler
COLD
DECK



Spade Flush

Five spade cards.

The hardest word for me to learn how to say was nigger. After Panama came, the white boys slowly started leaving The Hill, until I was the last. Then I became one of the niggers. "Fuck you, nigger." "What you talking about, nigger?" "You're a crazy nigger, aren't you?" "The cops are going to clear all us niggers out of here soon." Of course, I was also known as the white boy in conversations where I wasn't present. Nigger and white boy aren't as loaded words in jail as outside. Just descriptive. The Hill wasn't jail. It was like a holding tank. A matter of time and everyone would eventually head back there. Jail was the only escape from the habit. The habit, I'm sure, felt like the only escape from jail.

Still, I was Chief most of the time, White Boy only to strangers. Gabriele was Mrs. Chief. The name "Blue" is descriptive by skin color. There are more blacks named Blue than anything else. "You know, Crazy Blue" "Old Man, Blue" "Traffic, Blue" "Slim, Blue" "Blue, Blue" "Young Blood, Blue". When you get a flush in spades, you say "all blue" when turning your cards over. To the eye, spades give off a hue that makes them appear blacker than clubs. Most hands, All Blue is a winner.

Theater is a royal flush, an impossible hand to beat. But unless someone else is in the game, betting against you with another great hand, you might as well have nothing. I remember seeing Fugard's play at Yale Rep. The white boys' standing ovation at the end of this anti-apartheid play that was banned in South Africa. If "Lloyd Richards, Blue" or Athol Fugard or any of the other white boys in the audience went more than three blocks away from the Rep in search of their parked cars, the New Haven niggers would have mugged them. It happened all the time. Everywhere the Have and Have Not. Theater is performed where it is banned, not applauded. Otherwise the royal flush may as well be a lousy stinking pair.

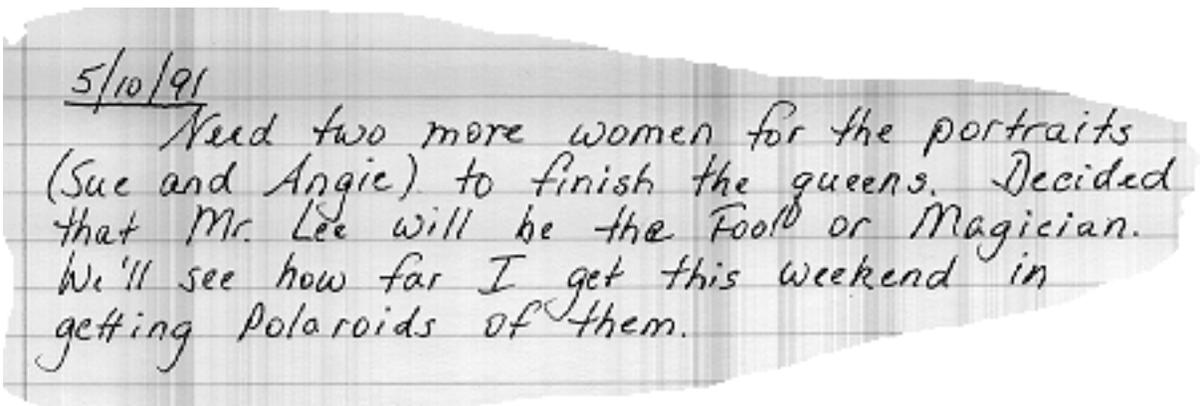
cooler
COLD
DECK



Joker

A wild card that can be of any value or rank the player wishes it to be.

Gabriele has finished her portrait of Mr. Lee. It's not as realistic as the others. I read her journal entry and show her an esoteric layout of the Tarot deck with the fool controlling the entire Major Arcana.



Gertrude Stein commented to Picasso that the portrait he had done of her didn't resemble her in the least. Picasso replied, "That's not who you are, that's who you'll become." Gabriele has painted Mr. Lee sitting on his roof, tying his knots.



Cooler
COLD
DECK



Three Queens Full

Also three ladies full or three whores full. Three queens with another pair.

The women on The Hill are prostitutes. They seem more "homeless" than the rest. Like hitchhikers who are never allowed to sleep except for short naps in the cars of strangers. We ask someone to interpret the Chinese characters adorning Mr. Lee's hut. "The Great Inventor lives here." Inside, he has various "rooms". This one belongs to the Queen of Germany, this other to the Queen of Italy, another belongs to the Queen of China, and so on. He explains to me he has 500 wives. Another sign on the outside reads, "House of the United Nations." One more says "Help wanted. Need many workers."

I wake most mornings at just after sunrise. More than likely, it is not the birds that wake me, but the early rush hour traffic on the Manhattan Bridge that is twenty feet away. Mr. Lee is already outside. At dawn he begins his unique Tai Chi. His hut is created anew each day, a maze of fresh knots holding in place newly written-upon walls and collected ornaments. He recites aloud in Cantonese the message of the day. The Hill is in the middle of Chinatown, and in the early morning there are many people in all the small parks practicing Tai Chi. An artist, Mel Chin, stopped by one night. He told me that some Chinese magicians had revealed to him that The Hill was "The Mouth of the Dragon." He asked if anything strange was going on. Perhaps he didn't see the tepee or Mr. Lee's hut with its 10,000 knots, its 10,000 Chinese characters, 10,000 adornments from the Tao.

After his daily morning ritual, Mr. Lee leaves and walks the streets picking up 10,000 new things. He carries four or five burlap bags. The big mystery to everyone is what is in those bags. So typically some say the bags are full of money. One of the signs on his hut says, "Man with money, comes and goes here."

I say that I followed him one day and saw what he put in the bags. "Don't be stupid, there's nothing in there but junk. The same junk you see all over his hut." I keep Mr. Lee's secret and study his knots. Gabriele has bought a book on the nearly lost art of Chinese knotting, the symbolic communication that predates the *Book of Changes* and gives a record of "wild history." Perhaps a precursor of Chinese written characters.

SAUVASTIKA KNOT

In Sanskrit, the sauvastika, sauvastika or swavastik a rotates to the left and the swastika to the right. This truly archetypal form, though having undoubtedly different origins, is found in Greece, Egypt, Africa, Crete, Mycenae, India and China... right through to Ireland, the Celtic world, Lithuania* and Tibet, Pre-Columbian America, the Eskimos, the Christian cultures... through all the ages of man, in fact, from prehistory to the 20th century and Nazi Germany. It is possible that the swastika reached China and Japan and became widespread via Buddhism, although it had probably already existed previously in the primitive cultures of those countries. In Chinese, the swastika was called *lei-wen*, which means 'thunderbolt,' and is therefore also a reference to a heavenly phenomenon. The Chinese gave the sign the meaning: 'The ten-thousand gods.'

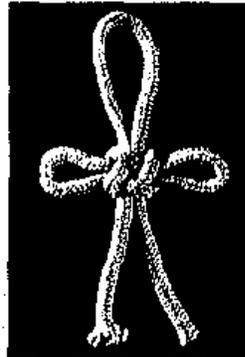
Sometimes this gamma-cross is a symbol of fertility and prosperity--a lucky sign therefore. But it can also be simply a talisman, or even a prophylactic. Some writers see in it a union of male and female (J. Hoffman), others a symbol of the phallus, and yet others a symbol for the female principle, a sign of fertility. According to Sir George Birdwood in *Report on the Old Records of the India Office* (London, 1981), for the Hindus, the swastika is the symbol of *Ganesh* (the male principle): sun, light, life; the sauvastika is *Kali* (the female principle): darkness, death, destruction. The first-mentioned is related to the path of the sun from east to west, the second from west to east.

* In Lithuania, which, among European languages is closest to the Sanskrit, the word swastika means 'well-being.'

BASIC KNOTS



卍字

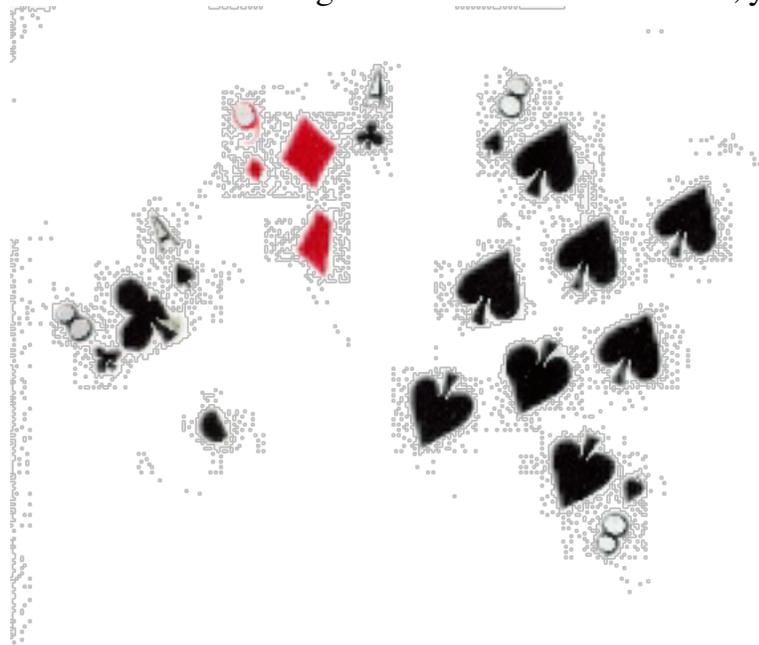


sauvastika knot

Dead Man's Hand

Two pair, aces and eights.

Theater is not history, theater is legend. And legend is the poor man's history. It becomes the myth read between the lines of official written history. The Chinese have a word for that history that is in many ways more real than the recorded version. The word is best translated not as legend or myth, but as "wild history." There are three poker tables in Saloon No. 10 in Deadwood, South Dakota. If you are dealt two black aces and two black eights with a nine of diamonds, you win some kind of



jackpot. Legend has it this was the saloon where Wild Bill Hickok got shot by Jack McCall and this was the hand he was holding. Down the road, Kevin Costner and his brother have broken ground on Dunbar's which will be the biggest hotel/casino in South Dakota. They are building a 50-mile railroad through the mountains from the nearest airport. Dunbar is the name of the character Costner played in his *Dances with Wolves*.

During the shooting of the film, he was adopted by the "real" Sioux of South Dakota as well as the fictional Sioux of the movie.

The fire happened at dawn. Mr. Lee should have been outside already. So should I. I hadn't slept in the tepee that night. I arrived there at about 8am. Half the shantytown

was in a black rubble and five or six police detectives were standing around. Walking up and around the tepee, I walked right by Mr. Lee without noticing him. I asked one of the detectives what was going on. There had been more than a dozen fires at The Hill in the two years we'd been there. Firemen always, but never police. "Somebody was killed." The detective turned and pointed. A couple of feet away was what looked like a mannequin. Bits of clothing but no features. Amazingly, the body was still in a half-crouch with outstretched arms, a Tai Chi position.

6/10/92

We are standing in the ruins of Mr. Lee's home. Mr. Lee built his home without sawing boards, without piercing nails, without pounding a hammer. It was built in silence and without violence. His home - a fantastical creation of carefully chosen treasures from the streets of this city, all lovingly knotted together with brightly colored ribbons and cloth - was not simply his shelter from the elements. It was his spiritual sanctuary, his temple.

Every morning Mr. Lee began the day with a meditation upon his temple. He was often seen sitting on his roof, painstakingly retying, rearranging and adding to the visual feast of images, speaking all the while in a mixture of Cantonese and Spanish. He would write characters in volumes on the skids and cardboard and mattresses that graced the outer walls of his temple. Names, many names, invitations to queens and messages to beholders were the occasional translations. Once satisfied with his work, he would leave and return again at dusk.

He always carried with him a bag of precious belongings - dozens of snapshots of smiling people, religious symbols, remnants and discards from the lives of others, and five hand-made, hand-written passports speaking of hundreds of wives, thousands of children and many more grandchildren.

Mr. Lee had no family here that we know of. We learned from him one day that he was born in China, grew up in Cuba and fled to this country during the revolution. Did he have to leave his family behind — mother and father, wife and children? Did he dream of the day he would be reunited with them? Was his heart full of them?

We were his neighbors here. We came to The Hill as artists wanting to erect a memorial to those massacred at Wounded Knee and to the disenfranchised of today. We had come to learn and to explore our own lives within a tipi, a structure that was also both home and temple to a people once. A people whose body of knowledge and wisdom was so great that it should have saved the world. Instead, it was decimated by the lethal combination of arrogance, greed and ignorance.

And it just never ends, does it?

Mr. Lee, you taught me the meaning of the word artist. I will strive all my life to incorporate what you have taught me about patience, purity of purpose and devotion to the truths we carry with us somewhere in our hearts. The knots you forged extended far beyond the confines of your temple. The power of your bonds brought the three of us together. It united your other neighbors who were proud to show off your creations to the many people who shared their fascination with your incredible home and wanted to know the man who built it.

You quietly created your own world amongst your neighbors here on The Hill — possibly the only community anywhere that was able to welcome and coexist with an extraordinary soul such as you.

Most think Gabriele and I play poker for a living now. Few know it is just our "day job." We sit and wait. We wait for the pairing face cards. The Court Cards in alignment. The Paint. The Power.

Novices in poker believe you need the killer's instinct to win. The true masters know different. You need to entertain and make everyone comfortable at the table. That keeps them digging into their pockets. The idea is to win, but to destroy a player only in extreme prejudice. For most, the instruction should continue without end.

The game is more dream than reality. Reality is that slow walk toward the Second Death. There we find our peers. The masters in our caravan we call The Seven Dramaturgs. Here, fools and magicians exchange messages and practice a theater meticulously recorded and detailed in wild history.

Cooler
**COLD
DECK**



Head-to-Head or Head-Up

When only two players are left in the poker game.

Assistant District Attorney Greenbaum had me in his office. I was trying to make a point to him about his investigation into the arson and murder. I told him about the picture that had blown up on my feet a couple days after we put up the tepee and the rest of the story: how I found out that a photographer "artist" was displaying a "stolen"

photo of the tepee at a gallery; how I had gone to the gallery and taken measurements of the print and matting and then enlarged my found print and put it into the correct sized matting; how Ivan and I went to the gallery and did the ol' switcharoo; how it stayed there for the run of the show; how the photographer got back not the photo he had taken and tried to sell for \$400, but a photo of the same place from a different perspective and time. ADA Greenbaum was smiling as I confessed to him all this. I said "Now, you can imagine how the photographer felt when he found that photo instead of his. He would have thought some kind of magic and voodoo were happening, at least momentarily. He would never find out what really happened. So more than likely he would be plagued with doubts and paranoia. He would exhaust rational explanations every time he reflected on it. But of course it wasn't magic. I'm not a magician. The magician was the person who blew that print up to my feet two years ago."

Greenbaum lost his smile and then gave a nervous laugh. Later on he would target and intimidate me with his arson and murder investigation to the point where I no longer knew who were the police and who were the criminals. To be fair, he didn't know either. It was obvious that nets were going over other nets at the time. That's always the case, or at least the fear: No one is safe. Anyone can be set up, dealt from a cold deck.

A District Attorney has quite an array of weapons in his arsenal. We were two hunters, predators pitted against one another. Graffiti began appearing all over the Lower East Side. "White Boy Represents." "White Boy Rules." "White Boy Avenges." The suspect for whom the police were searching was known as White Boy. Meanwhile, Internal Affairs and a special commission created by the Mayor had the whole Fifth Precinct under investigation. After I escaped a half dozen set-ups, some imagined, some real, the remnants of my sanity were held together only by certain talismans and knots I had inherited from Mr. Lee. But I was able to keep the secrets I knew to myself. I found some children's drawings in the trash and started painting and altering them. One a day keeps the doctor away. Until I healed. Scarred. The final one had a tree in it. I wrote GREENBAUM into the trunk and branches, baum being German for tree. I watched as a light breeze carried the drawing along the sidewalk on Canal Street, hoping one of the collectors of such objects would find it. A year later, Greenbaum convicted someone for ordering the fire, but "nobody" was convicted for actually setting it.

I have learned how to tie a knot. I use it sparingly. It is placed around the neck, the same place where the "Crack Smile" appears. Even the Suicide King fears this knot, because it speaks of a Death he knows nothing about. I weep not out of fear or moral

trepidation when I place this knot around the neck of "nobody," but out of a love so scarred and strong that it feels like avenging hate.

I once believed theater was graced with a boxing ring. Referees and doctors, angelic metaphysicians who guarded the perimeter. The street fight and war were kept at bay because ours was the holy catharsis of such. But theater is just one more player at the table. And grace, like luck, is too pure a force with which to gamble.

After the shantytown was bulldozed, the City put a cyclone fence all around The Hill. Gabriele and I climbed over it one night and planted a white pine where Mr. Lee's hut was, where he was. It lived the first year, graced us with hope, then it died.



Cooler
**COLD
DECK**