You know the story; sharpened pencil, blank paper in the machine, the stance of determination, behind which the self-judgment. This, my writing has become a speaking of thought, it is a respecting of thought in its distance, as if after the work of knowing, against the blank pages, I am humbled to that. It is a crying of thought. It is writing not a place of writing, as it is the playing of music and not the piece. It is the direction I am going and not a recording, the direction unknown until it is taken, the path and clearing the path are one, I am the scratching-point.

(i could so easily insert apologies at every sighing, only to delete them later, that this is contradictory, that is a non sequitur. Words on a page smile confidently no matter what they say; even the stuttering covers its face.)

I am not choosing what I here call direction over planning, because choice implies equal access to each, and I do not have or desire access to planning and product that fulfills it, or I can't write in a straight line, then am I simply making a virtue out of necessity, playing freeform because I can't do the chord changes? But what is it with me, that see such re-ordering not a step in the writing process but a hindrance, what I can and wish to do is follow my thoughts, occasionally picking up after them like spoiled children, and not commanding their obedience.

What I sense now as direction, as I look back on my life in both music and writing, is some kind of bulldozer confidently clearing ground, matter-of-factly, effortlessly moving tons of wreckage, my own, that is, without a taste of antagonism, like it was its own passive onlooker. Instead of being driverless, as they say rebellious antagonism is, there is something called the imagination in place; it nods its head and I am listening to it.

The active part of this is that I choose to sit next to the driver, to pay attention, invest myself in all the details. The passive part is that I withdraw from intention and purpose, yet without denunciation of them that would corrupt that withdrawal. Just for the ride of that moment I lean back, become one with the driver, trusting what I don't understand. A victimless crime, so I tell myself, just words on a page. I can affirm that side of the paradox only to find myself all the more gripped by the other, that it has the power of life and death.

This is for me treacherous ground, but for some reason for which I do not wish to be held responsible, I am drawn mostly to this thin ice, have fallen through at times and sworn it off. But the emptiness I'm left with always calls me back, some kind of devilish "what if...?" What if I had only found the fragments, done the obvious, flattered myself, what if only one step further was a whole world unknown to me, that overturned everything I've known and valued? What if in spite of my intolerably petty limitations, that make me want to run in horror, what if there was that touching of truth, that opening of the skies. Boom!

I check back and confirm that it is what I want to say, smiling cautiously at the word.
cluding, of course, the fear that this would not work, not enough to make my life follow the pattern I had chosen for it. I suspended what I thought was the law for my life, replaced with a fever of self-preservation: play or die, now or never. Like getting off junk, you have to construct the drama and put yourself into it and forget you're the author...

I stop there, the door I know so well begins to close on me, the door of trusting what I'm doing. I go too far and then can't retrieve it.

When I first started writing, about twenty years ago, I was visited by the image of the reader, on whom I projected all my fears of writing. His predecessor during college was a guy from Harvard, who I imagined was ever ready with a snide put-down behind my chair. "Who do you think you are," slamming me for the pretension of my existence and thoughts. Better to crawl into a hole, melt into the sidewalk cracks.

The reader frightened me with isolation: "Who would be interested in this?" he laughed. He made me submit more than once, leaving a trail of unfinished writings, unmailed letters, and this writing may well follow suit. It seemed I could do nothing without him, the spirit of negation that had to be there to complete the circle, bring me back to the nothing that started it all.

My expectation was that I would publish a book and it would be ignored, or worse, read and yawned at. This was based on something real: I could not, I know now, get heart and mind working together in words.

The reader was all that projected hatred of the world, that I just knew wanted to crush me. He mocked my pain, my self-consciousness, with what I considered intelligence, reason, judgment. He was the gate of reality that would not let me pass. He encouraged me to nail things down, to defend myself, then he would disarm me with his mockery when I failed his tests. He convinced me I was nothing but much, perhaps capable of anger or a hollow dogmatism but not real thought.

Well, something changed here; or I wouldn't be writing this now. For one thing, I projected onto this reader, his superior being, the one who could "read" me, and I found that in fact he loved me, and that love cancelled out the hate after a time. Also, I saw the infinite regress of giving up and finally gave that up as the final step, actually a sidestep first over to music. Now I write again to you, dear reader, and you do not want to stop me, you are the god or world that loves me and wants this present, a blessing. What do I have to fear from that?

How could I ever have imagined what I would be writing now? How could I have foreseen all this interior stuff, to say what I really on my mind, and not be confused with what I should be saying in my persona of writer, theoretician, scholar? Fifteen years ago I started a private journal out of some anger and ambition, that I could not control my thoughts. I thought I could build a foundation the way many approach spiritualism, only my aim was rationality. Is what I do now a humble task, or just a bit more sly?
have something to lose. A less obtrusive and
crude mask is desired in "cutting edge-
performance spaces, one of cool, depersonal-
ized artistic integrity and status. Since I
rarely get much gigs and since my music is
anything but cool, I rarely experience the
pressure of this expectation.
If I am valued, and hired for that value,
(and what could be more reasonable), and
work to increase that value, then this mask
gains power over me, ultimately repelling,
shaming and alienating me from what I do. I
would even say such mask-making is the ap-
propriate task of anyone who gets hired for
the stage. And so, in this sense, I feel ill-
legitimate in my business efforts, pretend-
ing to be a professional, yet trying to coun-
teract mask-expectations in order to play my
own way. This includes the mask of avant-
garde entertainer, whose cool sophistication
prepares the audience for receiving "diffi-
cult work." Perhaps it is unfair and cyni-
cal to call this a mask but rather the pre-
vailing style with which a sufficient number
comply. The necessary impression is that of
proud defiance of the marketplace and its
desire for masks.

Once I heard a prominent avantgarde sax
player describe another approvingly as one
who had been searching for and found a mar-
ketable style and was now on the way to suc-
cess himself. I was sad and angry that I
could not satisfy this requirement for suc-
cess (even if I don't agree with this anger
or act on it). I would have to create a
marketable value-for-others and ignore ex-
periential value-for-myself. I hit a snag
of confusion here since I suspect that these
two are not necessarily separated. By what
right could I plead as a special case? The
music (and literary?) underground and at
least part of my political past says it's
impossible and naive to think I can slip
past the guards, to enter the established
avantgarde world, with all its straightness,
fear of disruption, hierarchy. Would those
who have survived in their caves all
these years be too shocked and shamed if the
categorizations that have held since the
60's were undermined and brokenup? Because
I could not enter that world, knowing who I
am and what I tend to do, and leave it in
one piece. I have always suspected that my
failure to expand beyond the limits of my
own organizing efforts is because those who
hold the key know I would do this if the
door was opened for me.

I want to release these thoughts and crush
them with the same blow: impertinence, ego,
anger. Is what you believe always what you
want to believe? (even in its complicated
version). Showing I suspect it as illusion,
putting words in your mouth and preventing
you from saying them, only makes matters
worse. It gives my thoughts weight just as

i'm trying to lighten the load.
I operate as a musician looking for gigs,
sometimes like a striving legitimate rela-
tion to the world, if I ignore
certain irrationalities. Even as I struggle
with the world, it is a commonly comprehen-
sible role and ethic. Even as I have had similar roles in the past, as college
teacher, and enjoyed the continuity with the
social environment even as I railed against it.
Achievement is necessary is a part of the
role, its justification, and it is composed of
certain discrete acts, means that slide
over into ends. As I get close enough to
that achievement to try it on, it reveals
itself, time and again, in all its banality,
and this revelation, especially since it is
no longer novel at all, traces its way back
to all my actions. I wonder, what did I
want with it, anyway. It is just not all
that exciting, that is, the company I would
have to keep, the professional avantgarde,
as far as I know them, are just not the kind
of people I would associate with. Do I im-
agine they would become livelier if I came
to their party?

Sometimes I delude myself—and why not if I
despair of my self-respect—that if only I
put out self-promoted records or flattered the
right people with my approaches I would
get some doors unlocked. This is just des-
peration thinking, not only are these things
inimical to me for moral and artistic rea-
sons, I know from actual trial and disap-
pointment what would lie in store for these
efforts. So I try to look up from my bitter
delusion and sense an end to this search.
I can always imagine something I haven't yet
thought to do, something to entice me once
again into not giving up. Where do I get
the assurance that I've done all I can short
of changing my music? And then what would I
do, just be a good boy, the ideal artist who
ignores rejection, even recoils at the pos-
sibility of acceptance?

I have hesitated with success, depressed
most often by failure, and by my explanations
that blame either myself or others. What is
my compensation? I resist so strongly the
notion that one is either successful or ad-
venturous and honest. I just want it all!
This desire for success is very shameful,
and I apologize for the confession. I won't
even tell you my own efforts. However, I
say I've resisted the desire; it seems to
get stronger as the climb gets more arduous.
It would be nice to feel morally superior;
in fact I'm confused and inadequate, all the
more since I can't fault my music and settle
back into self-pity without it slamming me
in the face. I still hear the boyish and
hopeful voice that assumes that if only
those performance organizers, critics, musi-
cians—that small group that has so much in-
fluence over who gets heard by a wider audi-
ce and who doesn't—and if they only heard my
music, would listen to the tapes I send them,
they would be on the phone in an instant.
This is pure craziness, untrue, mythic pro-
jection. I look at those who have chosen the
current stars of the jazz and pop avantgarde,
and their environment, and I know that's not
my world. There's nothing there but fluff
and show, and safe, convention distance.
That isn't what I do or want to do. So
where do I belong? Well, I have had my
own touring circuit, my ways, playing with
anyone, never refusing to play, exploring.
Having nothing to lose is most enjoyed by the young, as it is assumed nothing will soon be replaced by something, and the hunger often makes first albums real musical breakthroughs. Well, my music is breaking through, but half the people I ran across feel they enjoyed it, there is no one to tell them, and that is good in itself. I should be more than satisfied, I really should, and some few times I might think so, but I am.

A flower springs up in a field of weeds and I want to cut it down, eradicate it and its memory. I get away from this writing and a crash of dishes and pots, sparks flying out and starting distant fires out of control. Let it die, let it burn, worms, nothing with corruption. Ingratitude I hear screaming first, that I have so much—love, happiness, security, freedom, health, a nauseating list—and I walk away from this table of friends and go out looking for trouble. The kid could settle down, live a happy life as an unrecognized genius of his own making, but he wants to jump in the ring, fight the heavyweights and win.

Writing is the ever-widening container of all this. I am beginning to loosen the bond here, bondage to this project, keeping it alive when there is only a crack of light under the door. Maybe there's nothing but envy and hatred inside, let's see! So do my ritual walks of Denial, letting the flood waters rush over and drown me, and then the flower I can't eradicate. To write from the indiscriminate need to write, the balance of the safe place at the center, a rug or raft surrounded by demons. No, pull back from that, better say the project is so shaped, its rules, you know, that every low point, every discouragement, is taken as the road to follow. There is really no turning back. There is only a turning, lost in the woods, no way out, only a way which is given after the fact, posthumously. The writing as product is the trail of crumbs, as process it is love, safe only when feeling the warmth and flesh of each other's bodies, as close and tight as possible, two walking as one. The terror is doing anything self-motivated, drifting away, losing it, slapped with every failure that stands for all the others and every false hope. I declare a container, a cell to go crazy in, a cell to enshrine defeat, if that's the way it goes, then watching the wind blow, listen to the humming.

Oh God, let me eat this stuff! I shake like the dog jumping out of the river and howl with illusions.

Who could envy persons who live so comfortably with themselves? The envy has only to appear for a moment for us to recognize him behind his mask and laugh at him, at the envy, for its sad and self-pitying demeanor. You ask for relief but there appears only a plunging into conflict, deeper, ever more costly. Integrated, self-acceptance? Such noble thoughts as much could argue? But there is always an argument, a voice of negation that is a voice of fear and truth, which pulls dishes off their shelves, spills pots of soup from the stove, drives nails through our heart.

So the discipline of this seems thorny, but thorns are the subject, climbing out of bomb craters looking like a cartoon character, that's the story. The subject of sub-

**at times this sounds like a glorification of blindness and I mean the opposite. How do I know what is "pressed up against the glass?" And how many straw men do I have to slash to bits before I hit flesh? Then I'm left with only the picture of the wild slasher. Did I think this would be enough, to display the futility of my compulsion? I step back just barely missing the slasher myself. Yes, I do want consistency, but not at the expense of all the images that keep pushing and crowding through the door. I'll clean up the mess later," then later, orderness appears arbitrary and still obligatory.

In some way I am satisfying myself in this writing, because something is so obviously moving, and it moves every time I try to point to it. This yields frustration, the irritation that seems to lengthen my distance from it. As it lengthens, however, it provides a new pleasure, that of seeing its growing immensity outside myself, a mountain of paradox. If I just said, let the river of images flow and submerge the whole world in its depths, the mountain submerged, the whole movement I am following would disappear.

**Knives and blood all the time now. Full awareness that fears are also projections is more dangerous than fears alone. Eradication of the knife, like the flower, they would both have to go, lose their transubstantiation.**

I collapse with apologies and confusion. The only thing saving the situation is the analogy to playing music, or rather waiting in the wings beforehand; I console myself that the pipe gets thinner only to give the stream that much more pressure. Halting, groping for words, staying with it, this is the thicket followed by the clearing. Now I have almost grasped that these backward pressures are only preparing a leap, so I look forward, and the sky is too bright,
like living in the center of the sun, so i
close my eyes and can still hear music,
and writing now the two legs holding me, go-
ing where they go, not intuition, nor the un-
conscious, not a theory. The crashing gets
louder, i feel its ending, the silence, it
comes and it is even louder. I have no idea
what i am talking about but it is not inde-
cipherable, my reader knows what this is.
Everything takes on less than an instant and i am left with a pile of piss.
But my project turns things around, since i am
not being urged on by anything external to
myself, that's all in the rules. I stand
outside, thinking, well, if someone wrote
all this internal stuff for me, i'd read it, i
would see the process in it, i wouldn't
scratch my head over the form, or the sub-
jectivity. Thank you. So much more genial
than the reader i used to have, who would
pick it apart like a professor.
Can there be discipline without an inter-
nal critic to stand over you? Can there be
a discipline that is more like evoking you,
to hear the exact word in a chorus of sounds,
to be pulled out, a discipline of conscious
following? Isn't that the internalized professor
really there just to enforce consistency,
the laws of contradiction and tautology?
Isn't that all he knows, how to achieve form
but not how to form? All those demands for
a truth that is rigorous, tough-minded to
show muscle and red neck behind the cultured
academia. The theologians of the Church of
Objectivity are masters of their field, have
weathered every storm. Writings such as this
would have to be pathology, even if pathology
is recognized as the essence of life. The
discipline of pruning, leaving only the
strongest, this is the hand of man the culti-
vator, the husbandry of writing that we call
culture. So in my pathology i pick up only
what these harvesters ignore, what is weak
and rotting, that is, love and pain, self-
pity, self-indulgence, what dies, panting
and roaring. Composed music and writing have
their logic, that of improvement, perfecting,
the pruning mentality, the search for the
best as a product of comparison. Its
strength in our culture is self-fulfilling,
it is the more obvious definition of our art,
the only way to talk about it and assign
value. Where is there no way to judge whether it has been fulfilled.
Without pruning there is no way to perfect.
Without comparison there is no way to claim
quality for anything.
Even those who play freeform music have
to submit to this, and exhibit doubts about
the value of what they are doing because there is
no criteria of discipline within our cur-
rent modes of thought. How can we play well
without an external referent, something we
can agree is poor? And where's the rationale
for the judgment? But freeform continually
and of necessity undermines the distinction
between good and bad music. It provides the
proverbial Philistine a field day; he has to
know what he likes. We are training our-
selves to hear music where the others hear
noise. Should we call a halt to this infin-
ite regress here, or here? And if we don't
are we ever to rise from the underground it
hole to which we've been consigned? What if,
instead of the violence of pruning, the hard-
ening and cooling off that enables us to
blue-percuss ourselves, ignoring the sin-
gle gem in the ton of rock, what if we used
another model, not the scarcity of art but
its overabundance, luxuriance. Better writ-

ing, better music there might be, but not
without the crime of the marketplace, the
democratic judgment of taste, the compari-
son shopping of the art world. To submit to
that judgment is to be rookied, to refuse it
is to be in principle isolated and patron-
ised for that isolation as the artist who
must sadly sacrifice his or her all-too-human
desire for acceptance.
So we throw out pruning and comparison,
lean back and congratulate ourselves, then
ask again if in all this self-acceptance
there is any discipline at all, any work to
be done. Is there any choosing of one sound
or word over another without a specific cri-
terion for judgment? Is there any sobriety
in all this, any perfection -- that is, ful-
fillment, completeness -- without perfecting,
any steps that can take us deeper? Music
is the work of the imagination, and the
point of creation is the work of the imagina-
tion. We are removed from that moment in
all forms but free play, there it is right
before our senses. Given our current modes
of thought it would appear there are two
operations, the imagining and the pruning/
organizing that in the latter is supposed to be
abandoned, and that is the repository of
discipline. This is the romantic view of
freedom that first puts it on an exalted
level and then patronizes it as the work of
children. In this view freedom must be al-
lowed as innocence, but then must have its
excesses corrected by the discipline which
alone can make it a product, i.e. give it
status. What i am suggesting on the contrary
is a notion of imagination that bears its
own discipline, that is not one side of a
bifold process. This is the monumental job
of free players, not to be trapped in the
gratification of anarchy, meaninglessness,
and spontaneity, but to discover the paths
of the imagination, so that the musical
images become ever clearer and full of detail
and content, to all who participate. The ne-
cessity for the music must be found inter-
nally. Discipline is not the repression or
the toning down of what is trying to come;
it means a following, a leading of oneself
which can only be learned and studied. It
is a history of surprises, and the interest
in this history is at the very center of the
project.
Contemporary improvisation has hardly be-
gun to do this, it has as of yet hardly
lapsed the imaginal realm. When we do fin-
ally grasp this, then we can redefine prac-
tice, the relation to instruments, to each
other, performance. We now understand what
we do under the sign of the past, improv as
social negation, as the naughty boys of mu-
ical culture. Improvisation does not fit
contemporary modes of understanding the place
of music in our lives; it is dressed up to
suit the rest of the musical kingdom and
comes off looking like the fool. It has
largely accommodated itself to this role.
Once we begin to understand the implications
of what we are doing and get down to learn-
ing what we could do, the wheels will spin
in another direction. This is the achievement
by the individual alone but is our work to-
gether if we choose to do it.