

For now, goodnight.

Barry

Epistles to R.A.T

from

Erik, Chris and Barry

Room and Transportation

Theatre's means is its meaning.

Theatre's means of distribution is its appropriate subject (fate).

A hyperbole of it: Theatre is the moment of transition from fuel to ash in the fire of the present; the furniture of our days burned to lighten forced march to new exile. Commonly held potential passes through complicit action (no ownership of action) into audience-owned evidence.

Theatre begs martyrdom at attention on time and space.

Food, lodging and transportation (attention to bodies, time and space) are the appropriate stipends. All plays are about food, lodging and transportation, about laws of hospitality and the stranger (estranged).

The little house of la dee dah: I don't trust any flower from me but the esthetic rose. I don't trust anything I make but plays. I don't trust any valuation of my plays as much as I trust the plays themselves. I trust money valuations least; am least comfortable squaring text with cash.

I want a direct exchange of art for food, lodging and transportation. It's what I write out of and about; it's what I want to write into.

Because I don't trust something doesn't mean I don't want it or can't use it. I don't really trust the idea of linear time, but I wear a watch.

There are always obstacles; money will always be involved; money is not the appropriate obstacle (its pursuit and exchange do not satisfy the laws of hospitality cogently -- we don't give dinner guests money to buy their meal); money is not the first or last gate.

Spiritual poverty addresses, but is not defined by detachment from money; it's about detachment from created (from all) things (as they thing.). Theatre has things in it, but imitates only automatically and shallowly the transactions that define a commodity economy. Theatre is built on opportunities for self-absenting; opens that field in which one is owned by the event of the field.

Creation is that which God is not. Creation is God's act of self-cancellation. Art adores God insofar as it imitates God's continuous self-absenting.

Involuntary material poverty is always a great evil. Voluntary material poverty can sometimes serve as a meditative tool, but is no guarantor of virtue. Spiritual

poverty is a practical tactical ground for theatrical exchange; endorses giving over, over acquiring (go-giving versus go-getting --Maurin).

I'm only talking about what I see at work, what I see as sustainable: an art organized according to the rule of hospitality (welcoming the stranger, becoming the stranger). These observations are epidemiological. Material failures and struggles inflict deep, debilitating wounds and shape our self-perceptions; material failures are not our *defining* failures, struggles towards and with material are not our essential struggles. Money can't consume us - the art consumes us; money helps art but doesn't supersede it. If art is hospitality and hospitality is a position (an attitude and geography; the glory of the word "here," as in "here is what I am and have," and: the present, the presence), then who we are, in openness to each other, is our capital. Our wealth is *here*; we already have what we have been asking for. If what we are left with is our weakness, if all has been stripped from our hands, then, standing open-handed, we make the complete requisite gesture: offering all, all open ("through weakness, power reaches perfection" 2Cor12). An offer of money is a desperate appeal; a greenback is an application. The bearer of the note asks for access to the rewards of hospitality (movement through fire from self to nothing), without having to invest the actual labor of hospitality (wanting to have self and selflessness too).

Recipe: as an experiment: the next time you are offered a commission, ask for a loaf of home-made bread instead of a thousand or five hundred or two hundred dollars (ultimately, you should be able to do much better... bed, bread and bus... but the bread-limit clarifies the test). Someone at the institution has to bake the bread personally. The more heavily bureaucratized the outfit, the less likely you are to eat. State institutions seem the least able to make the adjustment. The state's hands are too big for the intimate touch; bureaucracies are our least natural partners in hospitality. The worst that's going to happen: you'll get a loaf of bread. Or ask for a bus ticket instead of bus fare. Privacy and a bed in lieu of and not out of salary. Days and not per diem.

Movies are more like money. A dollar and a frame of film share properties; they stand in for remote realities (gold; collaboration). They are documents, and promises; they are debts that invite debt (recreational bet-losing; I like to gamble sometimes). Advertising too. Movies, money and ads are efficiently transferred; widespread; take the place of culture; we operate a promissory culture, a debt culture; keep our gold (collaborations) rare and locked away. Moving people around, versus images of people, is slower, more difficult. In hospitality culture (artists and their art in transition, in all ways, moving; bodies in space, cared for) increases the reach of our disciplines without promoting sameness (hospitality is not fast enough to achieve standardization). We need less theatre (more constant, as in constancy, more foolish).

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REHASH HARANGUE

This barter system doesn't get you dental (although, Elvis used to trade Cadillacs for crowns*. Hospitality doesn't work as a day job any more than love or happiness work as jobs. Theatre is all means, the discovery and rediscovery of common, fragrant zone; it's not a transaction and has no serious artifacts (its scripts enter literature; video documentation enters history). Against logic, some creative artists are able to make a decent living. But the number of such positions is severely limited; theatre's nature won't admit for much more. The set of artists able to profit a) consistently and b) on their own terms is a fraction of a splinter. Neal Simon can't produce at will in the theatre named after him; Arthur Miller's having trouble getting his work out...

Money we will have with us always; and theatre fits with steady money by exception. In general, theatre on our own terms will be made inconsistently and outside the marketplace. We can get the grants, send the mailings, pursue commissions.... without pretending that we are building lasting structures. Make temporary structures perfectly; their lightness (emptiness, weakness, brevity) is their excellence.

We are not mistaken when we find ways to make our art *dys*function in the marketplace.

*Note on barter: offering to paint the barn in exchange for room and board while you're in town to work on a production is neat, but not exactly what I'm talking about. We should be able to trade labor as writers, directors, etc. for room and board; *direct* exchange. If Elvis had felt able to sing for his crowns he'd be alive today.

RATFEEST(ATION) 1997
a "report"

PRELIMINARY

On the plane headed to New York for the RAT Conference I read some of Ray Grigg's *The Tao of Zen*. Struck by how often one could substitute "RAT" for "Zen" in his sentences, such as: "Whatever you can say about Zen, the opposite is also true." Also struck by another, more unsettling, parallel: Grigg's premise is that the Zen in Zen Buddhism is really Taoism and that the Buddhism part is a later cultural accretion, though the official history was later altered to partially conceal the embarrassing fact that Buddhism, while perfectly admirable, is not the root of Zen and in fact has very little in common with the Taoism/Zen which somehow crawled into it, like a hermit crab trying on someone else's empty shell. If RAT is in some ways analogous to Zen (in my mind, anyway), then what is it about what we're doing that is the Buddhism part, the part that we take for granted as the core but is really nothing but someone else's empty shell? Is theatre itself a red herring, the empty shell that we all assume is the ground of RAT activity (or inactivity), when actually it's something else not dependent on theatre at all? Or maybe theatre is the core and the "something else" is the shell we could just as easily discard?

Have I lost you? Welcome to RAT.

FRIDAY 15 AUGUST

It begins with everyone in a circle introducing themselves and saying a bit about where they're from and what they're up to. And helping themselves to RAT SASS beer (see label), which was created especially for the Conference. The Seattle conference, which is the only other one I attended, began much the same way, but of course there are differences. The first conference, in Iowa in late 1994, had been an exploration of whether such a thing as RAT should exist. Seattle's conference, hosted by Annex Theatre in August '95, was a celebration of RAT becoming a reality. Since then there have been conferences in Minneapolis and in Austin, and now here we are in New York quietly carrying on the business of RAT.

What is the business of RAT? Not specifically to bitch and moan about making theatre in a society that remains, by and large, monumentally unimpressed, though there's certainly plenty of that. Not specifically to "network" and make commitments to work together, though plenty of that goes on too. Not specifically to swap survival tactics and how-to lore, though the bulk of scheduled meeting time is devoted to just such topics. So why are we here in this room together? Mainly, for the purpose of being in this room together. We're here to offer our emptiness --

not so it can be filled with others' know-how or shared gripes or job opportunities, but for its own sake, for the thrill of our own and others' emptiness. A RAT Conference, if it's anything, is a kind of revival meeting, a chance for companies and artists isolated by distance and marginality to see each other's faces, to shake hands, to tell stories. To look at the size of the circle -- and it's just the first day; by no means is everyone even here yet -- and realize just how many people are out there doing the impossible over and over, toiling in the trenches, handing on the fire. There, in these faces, is all the proof you'll ever need that theatre cannot be stopped; that the shredding of funding, the proliferation of junk media, the incredible frustration and burnout, haven't a chance against the power of what we continue to create, daily, out of nothing.

SATURDAY 16 AUGUST

"The Electronic RAT" is the topic. RAT has a web page (rat.whirl-i-gig.com, still the best source of information on what RAT has been) and everyone agrees that there need to be several, decentralized RAT pages to avoid the appearance of a single RAT "party line" or official spokesperson. One self-styled "ex-RAT" who nonetheless showed up to say hi to everyone stated unequivocally "I need to hear what EXACTLY RAT is before I can say that I'm one. WHAT is the POINT? WHO can BE one?"

Previous convocations of RATs have struggled with these questions, none arriving at definitive answers, at least nothing more helpful than

What is Jazz? If you have to ask, you'll never know. Louis Armstrong

RAT is not an "organization"; it has no leaders, no board, no by-laws, no dues, no admission price, no structure, no incorporation, no affiliation, no requirements, no applications, no nonprofit status, no hierarchy, no ethic, no rules, no purpose. In fact it has no name: "RAT" was never formalized, it's just a term that stuck, a term which both is and is not an acronym (for "Regional Alternative Theatres," "Raggedy-Ass Theatres," "Rogues in American Typecasting," or whatever else you want). At the Seattle conference, in fact, we discussed changing the name, to further avoid becoming another blah-blah-blah arts institution; but how do you change the name of something that has no name....

None of this, of course, makes RAT easy to explain to prospective "members"; anyone can be a RAT, but the sheer difficulty of conveying what is "is" to "be" one has led at times to accusations of elitism, which is worrying everyone. Is it time to codify, to clarify... something?

SUNDAY 17 AUGUST

Thankfully, no. Nothing is formalized, but some things are clearer. Erik Ehn, a playwright based in San Francisco whose open letter in Yale's Theater magazine has been called the original catalyst of what became RAT, proposed a --gulp-- mission statement. The gist: RAT stands for "Room And Transportation." Participation in RAT hinges upon the offering of hospitality: coffee, donuts, a couch to crash on, a ride from the airport, RAT SASS beer. RATs are people who extend hospitality to other RATs: by hosting a conference, making or bringing breakfast, and on up to swapping scripts or productions. This relieves everyone of the burden of defining the "type of theatre" one needs to be or do, which is impossible anyway since RAT theatres fit no mold: budgets range from zero to millions of dollars, organizational structures vary from ultra-traditional to nonexistent, and programming veers wildly, not only between but within each company -- and besides, many RATs aren't associated with a particular theatre at all.

Erik's idea is generally approved of, but no one suggests we vote on it or otherwise "adopt" it. He goes on to suggest a trio of leaders elected annually by whoever's in the room at the time. Then basically admits he is being a devil's advocate even to bring up the idea. We agree to let things stand as they are, with nothing defined, nothing official, no one in charge. Palpable relief all around. We go on to discuss co-productions, several of which have already been happening. Annex in Seattle, for instance, has not only hosted a conference but in only two years since has collaborated with several RAT groups from all over the country. Is it possible for shoestring theatres thousands of miles apart to work together? Come on, nothing any of us do is possible, but who's letting that stop us?

Forgot to say that last night a bunch of three-minute plays were presented in an event directly inspired by Rain City Projects' Night of 1000 Playwrights held in Seattle earlier this year, and featuring playwrights, directors and actors from all over the map, inside and outside RAT ranks. Co-production? Nothing simpler.

MONDAY 18 AUGUST

Remember that quote about anything you can say about it, the opposite is also true? Today's seminar on "Grantwriting, Marketing and Schmoozing" is just as well-attended as yesterday's roundtable on "doing away with box office." And what we learned from both meetings can be pretty much boiled down to the Red Queen's advice to Alice, "Remember who you are...."

TUESDAY 19 AUGUST

Lots happened Tuesday but I'm not the one to describe it since Ed and I were out

exploring New York and seeing old friends there. I'll take this opportunity to point out that lots more went on than what I'm reporting. Lunches, dinners, late-night drinks were all a series of free-floating RAT Conferences in miniature. The best story swaps happened outside the printed schedule. Simply arguing over where to have dinner was often more stimulating (and revealing) than all the shop talk could ever be. Unfortunately, you had to be there. And I ought to take this opportunity to worry that I'm making all this sound way too serious. RAT is very important to its constituents; amazing things have happened under its umbrella, and many of our lives have been changed by those things. RAT is also kind of a joke, and taking it seriously can be the biggest joke of all. Were Ed and I, off playing hooky, the least or the most conscientious RATs today?

WEDNESDAY 20 AUGUST

Playwright Jeffrey Jones is here to participate in a workshop/discussion on directing/performing new work. We watch five very different stagings of his three-minute play *Camelot*, then use them as a springboard to discuss the relationship of director, actor, and text. Which of these is the "authority?" Which should "prevail?" While respect for playwrights, and concern for their feelings, is generally shared by all present, opinions vary on the "sanctity" of the page -- interestingly, it is the playwrights present who present the widest spectrum of attitudes toward "taking liberties" with what's written down. No one seems to have a personal hard-and-fast rule about it one way or the other; each case is different. Nick Fracaro (Thieves Theatre) asks if the director, actors and author can work as a jazz combo, each taking turns "taking it" for a chorus or two.

Jones, perhaps surprisingly, comes down squarely on the performers' side of the question -- a question which, in fact, he insists is only an issue "when there's an angry, untrusting playwright in the room." He realized, the first time he had to direct his own work, that he had two options: to give the text the status of Bible or dogma, or to focus on the actors and how to help them do what they do as well as they can do it. "Let's face it, the reason you go to the theatre is to watch actors kicking ass," for "the joy" they find in being terrific, which the rest of us can't help but get caught up in. If the play is working for them, it'll work for the audience; if something in the text is being contradicted by their performance, it will likely trip them up and, in fixing it for them, in making it work for them, you resolve the textual conflict automatically. It sounds far too simple to actually work. But here's this veteran playwright (who happens to be a hero of mine) calmly stating that that's what works for him. Who'd've thought.

FRIDAY 22 AUGUST

At last, the "Press, Critic, and RAT" roundtable. For a non-organization which does

not solicit press attention, and which in fact has angrily rebuffed certain attempts at coverage, RAT has generated an inordinate amount of ink, including large feature articles in our most prestigious theatre journals -- representatives of most of which are sitting at this meeting. RAT has never sent out a press release, never talked PR, never asked anyone to write about it. Yet the articles pour in (including this one). There's even a suburban family from Massachusetts sitting in the circle; they read the article on RAT in the Sunday New York Times and thought they'd check it out. The screams of those who called us elitist a few months back have barely died down, but look -- mainstream America is finding its way to our door and into the circle. In failing, we succeed....

There's also a guy named Aristide who, moments before the wrap-up, starts ranting about how he expected hundreds of people here and why aren't we getting out the hype? At which point he veers into a discussion about how New York needs more kiosks, or at least I think that's what he was talking about. Nick wonders aloud if he is the devil; he is, indeed, a kind of personification of the demon of hype, if there is one, eloquently proving many RATs' point about press without any RAT having to articulate it. Afterward his girlfriend wanders in and strips down to change outfits in full view of the street, making Robert, who runs the Ohio, decidedly nervous. Nick invites them both to perform at TIRZA'S WINEBATH (see below). They refuse, saying it doesn't sound like there'll be enough "agent-type people" there. No, there probably won't.

SATURDAY 23 AUGUST

The Conference convenes at the Coney Island Museum, right upstairs from the freak show, where various RATs assist Thieves Theatre in the "curation" of this weekend's installment of TIRZA'S WINEBATH, a fanciful recreation of the most notorious of the fin-de-siecle girlie shows at "Sodom by the Sea." The afternoon's setup was loosely divided into two camps; those who did not want to "plan" the event and those begging for structure, at least a list that people could actually touch, to assure them that indeed there would be something to show the audience that night (which ended up including a Village Voice stringer -- more irony). I can't possibly describe what ultimately came about. Mostly because you had to be there. Also because Ed and I had to fly out that day and missed the whole thing.

The Conference wound down without us on Sunday, but talk of the next one is already brewing. Wendy Knox is convinced it should be in Cuba. Well, we could smuggle cigars and pay for it that way. I suggested Tijuana; David Bucci laughed and said, "Oh, yeah, we'd be having some pretty serious discussions about theatre in Tijuana." Actually, we probably would. But there is no telling when, where, or what "the next one" will be, or even if there'll ever be another. As Erik said a while back, "One way that guarantees that we continue to deconstruct and fail in a

productive manner is that every time the RAT Conference comes together, it has to be put together on completely new terms."

On the plane back I again pick up the Zen book; a few things have crystallized for me. The attitude of Zen, as it is taught in traditional Zen monasteries, might be summed up like this: Buddha is a nobody; let's all bow to Buddha. Scriptures are bullshit; when the bell rings we chant the scriptures. Meditation is a masochistic superstition with no real value; we meditate for hours every day.

Looking back on a week with RAT, I start looking at the "what we're doing" question this way: Theatre sucks; let's all make more theatre and help each other make even more. Money is the root of all evil; let's share ways to get more money. A life in art requires uncompromising idealism and integrity; a life in art is a giant scam, let us count the ways.... It's never been so hard to do theatre; but look how many of us keep throwing ourselves against that wall, over and over, year in and year out. Maybe that's you too. How do you become a RAT? Erik suggests the "ceremony" look something like this:

"I'm a RAT."

"No, you're not."

"Have a donut."

"Now you're a RAT."

AUGUST 1997

Contemporaneous Account of the Conference

Hey gang,

Nick hollered at me today because I had said I would contribute to the daily updates on what's happening in NYC that Lee Wochner (a fine man with a fine beard) is posting. I didn't post last night because I passed out: I'm not proud of it, but I'd had a lot to drink and nothing to eat.

So I'll tell you what happened to me at Rat today.

First, we met at HERE this morning for a discussion with Michael LeLand, Shelita Birchett and Dennis Moritz from Theatre Double in Philly about Multiculturalism. Their company is multi-racial, not by design, but because Michael and Shelita are black and Dennis is white and they wanted to do work together. They described some of the work they've been doing and how it has involved artists of different races organically, because it was the work they wanted to do. Of course, the topic of the "whiteness" of Rat came up; how can we bring greater diversity to Rat without being patronizing or trying to include someone based solely on the color of their skin? Can it happen more organically, or do we have to make an extra effort. We still don't have answers for these questions but it was an exciting and lively discussion and, for me, a great way to kick off the conference.

Something that came up during the Multiculturalism discussion that was off the subject but one I hope we'll come back to tomorrow: by coincidence, all of the people at HERE at 11 am were East coast companies. At some point, we tangented off onto sharing our work and working together, because of our proximity. Someone (I'm sorry, Auntie Mame was a little hung this morning and I don't remember who... I'm sure they'll tell me after they read this, though!) asked, "Why don't we try to organize smaller meetings among Rats in a particular region?" This may already be happening in other parts of the country but I don't think anyone in this area had ever thought about it, or if they did, they'd never said anything to me about it! I think it's a great idea, especially since it's a helluva lot easier for us to work on a co-production with Gabriel in Baltimore or Theatre Double in Philly than it would be to truck across country for a project (not that we don't want to do that, too). Someone has to bring it up in the "Rat: What Do We Want?" discussion or the co-production discussion, otherwise I'll have to and I'm already to verbal...

After a short break for lunch, we were back with "The Electronic Rat", led by Nick and Gaby from Thieves. After all the e-mail the last few months, I don't think

anyone would be surprised to hear that there was a little trepidation about this discussion. And I hope no one will be surprised to learn that it was very fruitful and some great ideas came out of it. We talked about having multiple Rat websites and pretty much agreed that while full sites might not be possible (since we're all time- and resource-crunched), Mary Agnes is going to work on putting together a central, neutral site with links to individual Rats. The idea being that Rat is not an entity, it's a group of individual organizations and we each have our own descriptions of what Rat is -- and that's how we should try to present it. Instead of one "editor" distilling Rat, we have ten or more with their own take on what Rat is or means.

We also talked about the efficacy of the e-mail Ratlist -- I don't think a consensus was reached, or that we would have implemented anything even if it was. I want to go on record as saying that I think it's a great tool and should not be discarded out of hand. I'd like to hear from the people who are subscribing to the list.

I'm sorry to say that I missed the Meyerhold/Biomechanics workshop that Carlo Altomere from Alchemical Theatre led. I won't get into where I was but I got soaked in a sudden thunderstorm -- 'nuff said. Kristin Marting was telling me about it tonight and said she thoroughly enjoyed it and that Carlo's explanations of how his company uses the techniques, how and why it works for him, was incredible. I consider this high praise, because Kristin's work is strongly rooted in movement and gesture. But why am I talking about this? This should be coming from someone who took part in the workshop.

Anyway, I'm batting .500 because I was also unable to attend Ratso's Ratchet tonight. Fortunately, Catherine, my wife and partner was there and so I'm turning over the keyboard to her now...

Ratso's Ratchet, beautifully put together by Josh Furst and Johnny Pascoe at the East 4th Street Theatre, was 4 straight hours of by-the-seat-of-your-pants marathon theatre. It was late starting and those "3-minute" plays were all more like 5-10 ten minutes each, but we got to see incredible work by the likes of Mac Wellman, Ruth Margraff, Jonny & Josh, Dick Zigun, Lenora Champagne, Lisa D'Amour, and tons of others, performed by a stalwart posse of performers. There was singing, both good and bad (I personally did some of the bad), political-nuclear porn, a fish dancing with the World Trade Center, a boy named Evian, accordion music, Captain Ahab spurting milk from his breast -- it's all turning into a blur to me now. We also got to hear Jonny pronounce director Patricia Ybarra's name every possible way as he introduced each of her pieces. It was exhausting and rockin' and fun. More to come from Ratso on Wednesday night...

Barry back... damn! I wish I'd been there! I did get to see Mitch Gossett's

production of Erik Ehn's "Three Day Jesus" and Trav S.D.'s "Hecate & Beckett" in tiny mythic's American Living Room series. Both works were great fun and very well done. You haven't lived until you've seen Erik do Jesus!

I know we sound like rabid cheerleaders, but those of you who've been to a conference know how infectious sitting in the same room with all of these people can be. We're having a great time and we wish you were here. We'll send you a new update tomorrow, unless we have to do it a 4 am again....

Barry and Catherine

Oh my god it's after 3 am again....

I was going to write an update tonight for everyone and I just can't do it... been up since 7 am this morning after going to bed three and a half hours before and I have to be at work at 9 am.... I just can't do it. Having too much fun with some great people and it's taking its toll. Catherine's already fallen asleep in the chair next to me so I'm taking her to bed.

I promise to spend some time tomorrow on today's seminars and send them out to you tomorrow night with my Monday update. At any rate, I'm sure Lee's going to more than make up for my slack; he was suggesting we run by HERE to see what was going on at 2 am!

Barry

Subject: Sunday's Daily Report

Hey gang!

So I started to write out some notes on yesterday's conference at work today. Very Rat of me, I thought, scamming my e-mail update off of a big-time advertising firm that is paying me to create layouts for pharmaceuticals. (Yes, in my day job I'm a drug pusher). Of course, I work on Macintosh computers at the ad agency and my computer at home is a PC; not a problem, because one can save a document in MS Word for Mac as a WordPerfect for Windows file.

Until tonight.

I don't have all of the lovely things that I wrote for everyone to enjoy about what happened on Sunday. So I will try to encapsulate what I can, add what happened today and then, dear friends, I'm off to bed. If I ramble, forgive me; I'm sleep deprived at 3 am again.

Sunday began with a discussion Mitch Gossett led about what does Rat want... or what do Rats want, or even what do we NOT want, depending on who you talk to. What we don't want is a leadership organization of any kind. Erik made the suggestion, or opened the idea up for discussion, and then promptly said if it came to a vote, he'd vote against it. He also suggested that Rat stands for "Room and Transportation"; I don't think anyone disagreed with him but I also don't think anybody (perhaps even Erik himself) thought that that's all it stands for, if it stands for anything at all. A mission statement was proposed (which, sadly, I don't have the text for... maybe Lee does; if not, I'll get a copy from someone) which basically re-emphasized the ritual and purpose of hospitality or giving as determining membership in Rat; to be a Rat, one only has to give something, barter something, offer something to another. It was not denounced. Mitch raised the issue that the personal attacks on e-mail should stop, and then Erik said that he thought was room for all language. Did we reach a consensus? No, but then perhaps, as Chris Jeffries said tonight, sometimes consensus equals inertia.

Halfway through the first discussion, the coffee was ready. Thank God; we all needed it!

The next discussion, which Catherine had dubbed "Theatre Adm-Ehn-Istration" in the schedule, was led by Erik Ehn. I had groaned at the pun, but in many ways it was accurate. Erik gave us a list of ways he had been thinking of to reorganize theatre companies to make them more suited to what he sees missing in their structures. I include the two columns here (since I can't do columns, know that the words between commas have a corresponding opposite in the other column):

COLUMN 1: No Box Office, No Salaries, No Season, No Plays, No Reviews, No Grassroots Cash, No Money, No Unions, No Advancement, No Audience.

COLUMN 2: Benefits, Fees, Ad Hoc/Ads as Mnemonics, Opera, Discourse, One Drive to Endowment, Barter, One Big Union, Prayer Life, Collaborators/Dramaturges.

Bear in mind, these aren't the tablets brought down from Sinai, though I think Erik would be most pleased if we could all completely implement them. They are an ideal. As such, I looked at the two lists as the archetypes, or possibly-unattainable-goals, that we still strive for, and the discussion they created confirmed this for me.

Most of us are doing many of these things, out of choice or necessity, and I think they're great guidelines to weigh when we make decisions within our companies. Are they completely practical? Probably not, but that doesn't invalidate them as benchmarks or goals.

Three hours of talking and we moved to co-productions. Kristin Marting and Mitch Gossett talked about their venture bringing Bottom's Dream to tiny mythic's American Living Room series in NYC this weekend; Mitch said they did the whole production for about \$100 and I think we all agreed that it was an effective collaboration. He also talked about the "Erotic Curtsies" co-production between Bottom's Dream, Annex in Seattle and Undermain in Dallas; how they each rehearsed Erik's pieces in their respective cities and then put them all together in Los Angeles for a short production. A couple of people pointed out that presenting groups from other cities is not always as effective in terms of bringing an audience or piquing the interest of the press as true co-productions involving artists from both cities. I know it made me feel that WE are the only things stopping us from making these co-productions happen; once we've decided to collaborate with each other, we'll find the ways to overcome any obstacles.

After a short break, Kristin led a workshop and discussion on the way she and the artists she works with are creating a language of gesture to use in the pieces tiny mythic presents. I had to go get a VCR during the first part of it for our reading/workshop during "Bits of Rat with Your Take-out", so I missed a big chunk of the discussion. Catherine filled me in on it later: it's an on-going project to build a gestural language to use in her work that is added to with each new production. As audience members return to these new works, they will recognize the language they've seen before and see how the more recent gestures add to that vocabulary. I'm not doing it justice... maybe Kristin will read this and clarify/correct my misstatements. I got back in time to see people get up on their feet and begin creating the elements individually that were then edited by Kristin, in collaboration with the participants, into a series of gestures to indicate passion. It was particularly interesting for me to watch because I've seen much of Kristin's work in the past few years and knew about her emphasis on gestural vocabulary. I'm always curious about other peoples process and, with Kristin, how she created and developed her work with the actors. I'm really looking forward to her next piece in October to see how this process is manifested and impacts the work.

By now, most people had been at the Ohio for over six hours and it was time to take a break. People got the hell out of Dodge for a couple hours, Ralph and I put some finishing touches on our setup for the "Bits of Rat" presentation and then took a little break ourselves. The pizzas arrived shortly before 7:00, and by 7:15, everyone had a slice and seat and we began the reading of our work-in-development,

"Privileged and Confidential."

We particularly wanted to present this work during the conference because it's something we're developing for a production next spring and we wanted to get some honest, straight-forward feedback from people we knew shared a similar aesthetic with us. We emphasized to everyone that we wanted to know what they thought about the work, even if they hated it (and believe me, we were not unprepared for that eventuality). After the presentation, we were overwhelmed by the response-- while everyone had reservations (as did we -- we knew there are some big flaws in the work), we got some incredible ideas, suggestions, possible directions to explore, ideas about what worked and why, what didn't and why.... and it was all given exactly the same spirit that we hoped we were offering the work. We can't wait to get back to work on the piece and try to see how many of the huge variety of feedback we can incorporate into the next version.

We had decided to postpone the Failures discussion until later Sunday because so many people wanted to see Mitch's production at tiny mythic. By the time the play was over, most people were so exhausted from the day that they decided to call it day. I can't blame them; if I hadn't suggested the discussion, I'd have taken it to the sheets myself. However, Lee Wochner, Nick and Gaby, Sean McGrath and Bob (whose last name I never heard, damn my bad ear!) all came back and joined Mary Agnes, Ralph and Catherine and me and we decided to talk about failures anyway. A pattern that seemed to emerge for all of us was that our biggest failures were most often failures in our professional relationships -- someone we entrusted had let us down. For PWP, it's often that we have a hard time saying "No" to friends. Lee told us about one production where 4 of the 8 actors were given an opportunity to work with the company before they fully understood what the company was doing. Nick and Gaby shared a time when a personal letter was released which almost stopped a production they had been working on for over a year. I think it's important to state though that none of us were blaming the other guys; everyone accepted the parts we played in our failures. These were OUR failures and they have made us stronger because of what we learned or are learning from them.

Around about 1:30, we were surprised to hear someone calling out to us. John Clancy and Aaron Beall from the NYC Fringe Festival had come over to see if anyone was still hanging around and say hello. We all sat down together, opened some more beers and had a few laughs about the Jihad, as Nick dubbed it, between the Rats and Fringe. (There was an article in the NY Times on Sunday about the arguments from last January). How do you describe a moment like that without resorting to hyperbole? I can't. So I'll just say that I was just glad I was there.

Well, ladies and gents, it's after 4 and I've got to go to work tomorrow... again. I

wish I could recap what happened today before I go to bed but I know I'll be up all night if I do. Maybe I'll have better luck writing at work tomorrow... yeah, right!

Wishing you all were here,

Barry

P.S. -- I'm writing this postscript on Saturday morning -- There's a problem with the listserve and, since we're all at the conference every day, there hasn't been time to fix it. So I'm sending Lee the list so he can use it too. If there's someone who isn't on the list and should be, please e-mail me and I'll add them to it, or just forward the stuff to them.. We're off to Coney Island today and Catherine and I still have to write Thursday and Friday's reports. We'll be back in touch with you as soon as we can! Probably not tonight, though, since it's going to be a late one.

Subject: Monday & Tuesday at the Rat

Hey again gang...

I'm getting an early start on this tonight -- it's only a quarter to three now. I had every intention of heading for home about 10:30 and then Catherine said she wanted to go over to HERE for a quick drink and say goodbye to Jason Neulander (he's going back to Austin tomorrow)...

By God, I'm never going to get caught up on these updates if I don't double up before too long so tonight's the night. Monday and Tuesday both comin' right atcha!

Since I had to work part of the day yesterday, I walked in for the last couple of minutes of "Alternative Doesn't Have to Mean Disorganized." Sarah Hughes from Undermain wasn't able to make it to NYC so Lee led the discussion. I haven't signed on since Lee posted last, so I'm looking forward to reading what he had to say about it; he's told me some things about it, but that was yesterday and he and I have talked about a lot of things since then. Hey, I can't be expected to remember everything!

We took a break and then came back for Andrew Mellen's "Arts Management, Grant Writing & Schmoozing." Andrew talked some about making contact with the people who administrate funds, then we began talking about our most difficult "ask". Kristin told us about the difficulties the founders of HERE had when they were securing a loan for start up costs to get the space going; they had been given positive feedback from a reliable source and events transpired that almost lost the funding until they had to sit down with the funding institution and go through their budgets and projections with a incredibly fine-toothed comb. Kerry from Wooly

Mammoth told about some campaigns that had been particularly trying, one of which is still getting underway to secure a larger space for the company. Kristin and I both said that our companies were investigating the possibilities of finding sources for earned income: PWP has talked for over a year now about selling holiday cards created by "name" visual artists and HERE has an idea for a calendar. Since the focus of Monday's discussion was grantwriting, we decided to meet again on Thursday to share ideas on earned income further.

Of course, one of the things about all of the discussions we've been having is that someone will say something that sparks an idea or thought in someone else that tangents the discussion temporarily. One of those moments happened and the subject started to shift toward the Mary Feast debate. I don't want to go into here -- it's too long a story to explain and I don't think it's important to the overall discussion. Why am I even mentioning it, then? Frankly, if I ignore it or pretend it didn't happen then I'd be disingenuous and I want to be as honest in these updates as I can without fanning any fires. No, this Rat is not a love-fest, but neither is it a hotbed of unrest and discord.

The "Bits of Rat" Monday night was Rob Nash performing excerpts from a new work he's developing called "Freshman Year Sucks." I really didn't know what to expect; I see a lot of solo performance and, like most theatre, it ranges from the spectacular to the mind-numbing. I'm happy to say that I was completely bowled over; not only was it very sharply written but Rob is a fantastic performer! He played at least nine different characters, each completely distinct and recognizable (meaning, I KNOW these people). The first bit was an introduction of the school environment which he achieved by showing us three teachers lecturing to their classes -- establishing each individual with a series of short, rapid fire lines of dialogue and identifying gesture. I've never seen anyone shift between so many characters so quickly and clearly... he's manages a to give a great deal of information and story with amazing economy and humor. He was already on my short list of things in the Fringe that I have to see (since I'm only going to be able to see three or four of the twenty-odd things I've been invited to); Catherine and I have highlighted his performances that we're pretty sure we'll be able to make.

After a dinner break, we reconvened at the Ohio for a discussion of what Nick and Gaby are planning for the Tirza's Winebath event at Coney Island on Saturday. They're exploring the sensuality and erotica that the winebath represents and encouraging as many people as possible to contribute to the event. Catherine is planning to perform something (and today she and Nick and Gaby decided that they would definitely do at least one of Lisa D'Amour's pieces that they worked on in the Ratso's Ratchet on Saturday); Kristin wanted to know if the bathtub might be available to contribute an element that was in her piece last year, "The Courtesans";

Chris Jeffries and Ed Hawkins said they might like to do something if they could rearrange their plans for their return flight to Seattle (they said something about it today, but I was out of earshot so I'm not sure if they were able to make the change or not); and, of course, Naked Elvis will be there. The money that we'll use to pay the performers for "their entertainment" will all be contributed to a fund for actors that is being set up to honor a friend of theirs, Spencer, who died recently. I'm really looking forward to see what happens on Saturday.

Today (Tuesday), we kicked off with Tim Maner from tiny mythic and Ruth Margraff inviting us into a rehearsal for the "Vinyl Pressings" DJ project they'll be presenting Saturday night. To tell the truth, if they hadn't told us it was a rehearsal, I'd have never known it. I don't really know how to describe it... it was a soundscape unlike anything I've ever heard, and it was being created and improvised from the script while we watched. Tony Boutt, and Dina Emerson were sampling and mixing and distorting their voices and Ruth's voice and recorded music played through headphones... no, I can't do it justice. I hope that they can record what happens on Saturday, on video or audio, because you really have to see and hear for yourself how all these elements contribute to make an incredibly unique experience. Although, from what Tim was saying to us afterwards, that might be antithetical to the project; he was telling us that he hopes people don't just sit and watch and listen because they don't intend it to be that kind of performance. It's more like a club scene and you wander in and out, go get a drink, come back, listen a little and talk a little...

In tonight's "Bits of Rat," Lee showed us a tape Moving Arts made that they're using to help with funding their company. If anyone else is interested in this kind of marketing tool, talk to Lee. I felt like I got a really honest portrait of what their company means to their community, what's important about their work, who is doing the work, and where they see Moving Arts going in the future. The production values were good without being slick or too polished and you got a sense of the kind of work they're helping to develop. It was really the next best thing to actually taking a trip to Los Angeles and seeing their work for yourself, which I'm anxious to do.

It's incredible to me how much has happened in this conference that includes or involves performative elements. Maybe it's because there's almost ten days to fill instead of just a couple, as there were in Seattle, but we've had some sort of performance every day. And not in the show-offy way that could easily have happened -- it's much more a sharing of ideas and concepts that we're all exploring or developing. This evening's discussion with Jason Neulander began with getting us all up on our feet and going through an abbreviated warm-up and then developing a gesture to incorporate in a reading of Ruth's "Centaur Battle of San

Jacinto", which Salvage Vanguard had presented earlier this year. One of the things Jason was particularly interested in was getting feedback on a complaint that they'd had from some of their audience members that the work was too difficult or confusing. He had arranged us into an audience/actor relationship similar to what they'd had in the Austin production, with the actors surrounding us, and then six people read through the battle scene. It was difficult, particularly since it was an unrehearsed presentation of a scene late in the play which had a great deal of overlapped dialogue. After the read-thru, we began to talk about it and ask questions about what exactly he had gotten from the people who had problems to see what might be done to communicate to an audience that they didn't have hear every word to get what was important in their production, besides making a curtain speech. The discussion got so fast and furious and engaged so many people, that we weren't able to go back and rework the scene as Jason had originally intended. I think that's because it's a question that many of us have: how to challenge an audience and yet give them all the clues and information to help them understand the work without spelling it out to them, which wouldn't really be challenging them.

So now I'm up to date, thank God! I wish I were a better journalist for those of you who can't be here. I feel like I've had to leave so much out of these notes and yet I could hardly do any of this justice on e-mail. What I really wish is that everyone could be here so none of this would be necessary. The people who've already left to go back to your homes and jobs, your absence is felt. I didn't have half the chance to talk with Tim and Gabriel from Baltimore that I'd wanted to; I hope that Dennis, Michael and Shelita will come back from Philly to rejoin us before the conference ends.

I know that this must all sound like the rantings of some evangelical extremist but it's been an electrifying few days. I find myself unwilling to go to bed, regardless of how tired I feel. But since it's after 4:30 now -- I've got to get some sleep. I'll be in touch with you all again tomorrow.

Barry

Subject: Wednesday's Child Reporting...

Once more unto the breach, dear friends...

It was a quieter day on the Rat-front today. We started off this morning with Lisa D'Amour leading us in a discussion of site-specific production. She told us about a piece that she and Katie Pearl presented over the course of twelve hours in a grove of trees beside a major street in Austin. The intention of the piece was to draw the attention of the motorists to this grove that they passed all the time. She and Katie

had mapped out a schedule of events so that most of the images used fewer people in the earlier and later parts of the day when participants weren't as available and more people in the midday hours. She said they had some difficulties when some things they had planned to last for an hour were accomplished in less time. Participants began to experiment with things that attracted more attention to what they were doing rather than focusing the attention on the grove and the trees. She also told us about another piece that she did in Portland, Oregon that she had created about a suspension bridge built in 1931 and its impact on the community.

Nick and Gaby talked about the tepee that they built in a shantytown beneath the Manhattan Bridge. They stayed in the tepee over a long period of time (over a year, I think, but I may be getting that wrong) and presented a production they developed of a Heiner Mueller play. They said that they had been doing the piece for quite a while before someone visiting the site pointed out to them that there was a bas relief on the bridge of an American Indian aiming a bow and arrow in the direction of their tepee... and they hadn't noticed it.

One of the things that I found interesting about the discussion was the recurring idea that having theatre in a site permanently changes the way the people who attend the work perceive the site, especially once the piece is gone. You can never look at that place again without linking it automatically to the work that was once there. It's almost as though the absence of the piece is as strong and effective as its presence. I know I've passed buildings that were once theatres, like the old Cafe Cino, and thought about what it must have been like to have seen them in their heyday. And it's exciting to think about art transforming a site, for everyone who saw or even heard about the work presented, into a theatre space.

When we came back from lunch, we had lost a few people--some to work and others, I think, to sheer exhaustion. The workshop/development phase that Lisa had planned really wasn't practical for the smaller group available so we decided to postpone that work to Saturday at 4:00 when we're all out at Coney Island. We took a walk over to HERE and a group of us sat around and talked the rest of the afternoon away. I for one needed a little time to relax that wasn't in the wee hours of the morning. Josh came in and he and Lee Wochner made plans to see Paula Vogel's "How I Learned to Drive" on Friday, and then Josh got Lee to direct one of the multiple presentations of Jeffrey Jones' "Camelot" at Ratsos Ratchet tonight. Lee asked me if I'd be willing to play one of the parts and, after a moment's hesitation, I said, "Sure." Of course, I hadn't read the script and all I'd really heard about it was from Brad Rothbart who had intimated that it was kinda racy. But I thought, what the heck? I don't act much anymore and it'll be fun.

We headed back over to the Ohio around six and then Lee and an actor I'd seen in a couple of tiny mythic shows, Alan, and I went back and read through the script. It's actually not what I'd expected at all, although I could see what Brad had meant. Basically, it's two characters, Jack and Bob, who the script says speak in "broad Boston accents", talking to each other on the telephone. Jack's first line is, "So Bob... didjafucka?" I was surprised to learn later that a lot of people didn't realize until later in the piece that the characters were the Kennedys talking about Marilyn Monroe, planning her murder. I'm not doing it justice; it's kind of funny, actually.

After we'd read through it a couple of times, Lee suggested that we drop the Boston dialects (does anyone except the Kennedys really talk like that?) for the purposes of the reading and then sent me out of the room to give some suggestions to Alan, then reversed us to talk to me. It was interesting, being someone who hasn't acted at all recently, getting another director's interpretation of a script. He'd picked up on some nuances in the dialogue that I hadn't and suggested that we try the scene as though Bob was a closet case being goaded by Jack for not fucking her... and not having the moxie to kill her, as well, which was just as important to him. It was an approach I wouldn't have thought of and it fit really well with the few given circumstances in the play.

There were four different prepared presentations of the piece by different directors; we were fourth. I'll let Lee talk about how they differed because I didn't see any of them since Alan and I were taking the opportunity to go over the lines a couple of times so that we could try to get as much of the things we'd prepared in 45 minutes. After the four presentations, Johnny Pascoe brought Art Aulisi, a wonderful actor whose work I really enjoy, up and had him play Bobby again (Josh had directed him in one of the scenes) with the entire audience shouting Jack's lines to him as though in a press conference -- a lot of fun and incredibly funny. After that we all talked about how the different presentations highlighted different elements in the script -- not surprising, but how often do you get to see several back to back presentations of a piece (other than the Chris Durang "Clapping for Tinkerbell" monologue at auditions, I mean)?

We ended the night with Bob Fisher (finally, I have his last name!), Sean McGrath, Catherine and I going to see Assurbanipal Babilla's company, Purgatorio Ink, in the Fringe. Bani's a friend of mine and I've seen a lot of his work and had convinced Sean and Bob to check it out with us. We had a great time -- Bani has very bizarre sense of humor and his work mixes a lot of religious images with overt sexuality and (though not in this particular piece) homoeroticism in some really interesting ways. As I describe it, I realize that he has a lot in common with Erik, though I think I can safely say their work is completely different. Bani paints with extremely broad strokes on his canvas, though it's still very intellectual and VERY base at the same

time. It may not be something I'd create, but I always have fun at one of Bani's plays.

And then, dear friends, believe it or not... Catherine and I came home. We were tired and home was closer than HERE and it was midnight. As ridiculous as this sounds, it's an early night for us (he says typing at 2:43 am). I'm working tomorrow so I'll only get to go to a little of the Alternative Money Making discussion during my lunch hour (I work a couple of blocks from the Ohio). Catherine has said she'll take up my slack and write tomorrow's posting. Incidentally, Lee and I have both posted every day but there's some kind of problem with the list server; Seth and Nick and Gaby are working on it, but you'll probably get several postings all at once. Just wanted everyone to know.

That's enough, I'm going to bed, dammit.

Barry

Subject: Ratfestation - Thursday

Hey, gang! Catherine of Peculiar Works here to do the daily wrap-up (a coupla days late, of course). I'm filling in for Barry, who didn't make the daytime because he had to work.

At 2pm we all convened at the Ohio for a roundtable about alternative money-making ideas. This was born out of Andrew Mellen's discussion of fundraising/schmoozing a couple of days ago, and facilitated by Kristin Marting of HERE. Kristin started things off by telling what HERE was doing - the Cafe (a successful community-building enterprise, but not as profitable yet as they'd like); serving as a venue for businesses to hold tele-conferences, using the ISDN lines left over from an earlier piece at HERE (just getting off the ground, start-up costs not available); location and/or holding area for film shoots (holding area better - actual filming on the premises can interfere with the shows if it runs over in the evening, as it invariably does). Chris Jeffries and Ed Hawkins of Annex weighed in with the rock show idea (great because Annex was an early venue for Nirvana and Soundgarden, crappy because rock shows trashed the joint); also, they talked about how they rented the space to art classes who wanted a space for sketching models.

Nick and Gaby talked about how Dick Zigun at Coney Island was taking advantage of film rentals too, with Spike Lee wanting to film there. Also they had a tattoo festival with Astroland (the amusement park), and basically approached it as a huge rent party with beer sales. Everyone agreed that mixed drink mark-ups were HUGE. Then we all started to talk about memberships -- HERE was trying it, but not having

a lot of takers so they were thinking of having artist memberships for folks that worked there instead. We all agreed that the subscription model was deadly theatre. I told how when we did an event at a church and weren't allowed to charge admission, only suggested donations, we got concessions donated and gave them away too -- people were so surprised that they gave a buttload of money in tips! Lee Wochner said that a BIG money maker in L.A. was parking; several people had heard of "valet parking" scams where the cars were just parked on the street.

Annex has held a cake walk, with artsy cakes, and raffles. Kristin told about HERE's raffle of original art work that functioned like a blind auction -- the artists were told to create an art work that would fit in a box, then wrote up (fake) bios of themselves to put alongside their box and audience members bought tickets for them. We talked about how Exit Art in NYC had a department store, and the mail order catalogue idea. Then Bucci told us about how Salvage Vanguard does their printing and selling of scripts (based on Seattle Rain City's model), but only really breaks even. Ed told how Annex was thinking getting a sponsor for a particular set piece (an end table) that appeared in every show, everyone loved and prompted us to talk about auctioning off set and costumes at the end of a run. Annex also set up a department store for a particular show at Christmas time, billing it as "Annex Sells Out" and selling Annex refrig magnets, night lights and other stuff with their logo.

Other money makers kicked around were festivals, zines, concerts of music from upcoming shows, an artist cookbook or calendar, Singing Telegrams, being a fiscal umbrella for other groups, holding a carnival, program ads or ad/sponsors on your own radio show, and publishing a play anthology or scene/monolog books for actors.

We took a short break, then all came back for Press, Critic and Rat, led by Gaby. Because of the recent Village Voice and New York Times articles dealing with Rat, there was some definite apprehension around this one from all quarters. We all went around and introduced ourselves; invited press who attended included C. Carr of the Voice, Todd London (American Theatre, art. dir. of New Dramatists), John Istel (Stagebill, various), Jennifer Woodward (OFF), Jesse McKinley (NYTimes). It was a little strange that Sean McGrath of Playbill Online didn't fess up that affiliation or that Lee Wochner didn't identify himself as a journalist either, but plenty of people were eager to claim the role of writer. (This created an odd atmosphere of tension/suspicion, tho' -- I was taking copious notes throughout for this very post, and Josh Furst who was sitting next to me was sure I was covertly writing for some publication. Hey, just the facts, here.) Nick of Thieves put on a suit and tie for the discussion, an odd theatrical act which, ever odder, no one commented on. Gaby wanted to know what expectations we all had of each other. John Istel talked about the erosion of space for arts in publications and how the Net was an alternative to

this lack of space. Jennifer Woodward encouraged those who weren't happy with coverage to start their own publication, as she did. Todd London talked about wanting a partnership between press and artists in audience education, and how the failure of the regional theatre movement was that that hadn't happened, leading to the NEA crisis. Andrew Mellen wanted to distinguish between reviews and criticism and arts journalism -- the latter two seldom happen. Nick was concerned with who had the authority for a story and how he thought the Net meant more control of a story, but that he had felt attempts to usurp the story of Rat. Todd London felt that this desire of Nick and Gaby's to control the story had put them in accidental collusion with editors of the Voice on the article Steve Nunns wrote -- it gave the editors the controversy they were looking for, so that they could shape a much longer article around the Monkey Wrench conflict (for those who don't know, Monkey Wrench, who "dropped out" of Rat, was focused on in the Voice article). This led to a lot of discussion about how writers feel powerless to their editors at times; Cindy Carr told of how a story she wrote on Karen Finley was presented in such a way that created huge controversy and a Karen Finley cult, which horrified Cindy. Josh Furst expressed a desire for a conspiracy between artists and press to counteract this.

Robert Lyons said that Rat's debates/arguments/discussions are what Rat IS, and was frustrated with how that was viewed by press. I said that it does make one question motives -- it could be viewed, "how cool that these folks are so passionate about their art that they fight and debate and hammer it out" but instead was presented as "all those people do is fight." Susan Bernfield of New Georges also expressed frustration that real trends in theatre are not being covered at all. Todd London said that Rat was a group in process, and he knew from New Dramatists how hard it is to get coverage for any kind of process.

Jonny Pascoe wanted to bar certain press from shows, but Greg Allen of Neo Futurists thought that empowered them too much. John Istel said that what he really wanted was to see good work; Todd London agreed, adding that he wanted to be of service. Jennifer Woodward said that Rat's "gimmick" was our non-definition; everyone took exception that what we ARE is a gimmick. Andrew Mellen said he wasn't interested in generating a Rat conference buzz; that when he went on to collaborate with another Rat on work, that's when he wanted buzz, and if the fact that it was a Rat collaboration helped the buzz, use it! When it was all done, Gaby was extremely frustrated that we had only scratched the surface of this issue, that it still felt so Us and Them.

A final note on this session. Three tourists from Massachusetts showed up at the session from reading the "Rat vs. Fringe" article in the Times. Of course they got used as an example of what the press can do, good or bad -- they thought from the

article that they were going to see a performance at the Rat conference! They and another guy who showed up from the Voice article (!) thought what we wanted was more press and had ideas on how we could get more people to attend the conference (when of course, many of us want a grass roots, each-one-teach-one movement). It all just pointed up that, no matter what you do, people will misinterpret or be confused.

After that awkward, tentative, kinda frustrating discussion, a bunch of us went over to HERE to see Jason Phelps from Austin's solo show, a mixture of song, poetry, theatre and dance. Jason is a terrific performer; Kristin has asked him to stay up here for a couple of months and be in her fall show -- another successful Rat collaboration! We were late getting back to the Ohio for the Alternative Media session. Robert had invited a guy from Manhattan Neighborhood Network, the NYC public access group, and Sarah Mitchell (?) from Soft Skull Press, a small rat-like publisher (since I was late I didn't write down their names; maybe Robert can fill us in with their names). We got the whole lowdown on the nuts and bolts of how to get on public access in NYC -- they've been taking proposals first-come, first-served, but want to move into a more curatorial approach. Nick seemed concerned about who was "the boss" in this venture (in this case, ultimately Time Warner and the city of NY) and Jonny Pascoe wondered if a show called "Time Warner Sucks" would ever be chosen. Actually, though, it seems that a pretty fair process seems to be in place, you just gotta fill out paperwork and get your tapes in on time, and the choice time slots come up for review every six months. Then we moved onto small publishing. We got the lowdown on the beginnings of Soft Skull: they met working at Kinko's, where they got to read all of the crazy, poetic, interesting work that came through there. They made friends with the people whose work they really liked and started making copies and using the equipment on the sly. They made the books small, which had two purposes: they were just about CD size, which was great for the rockers whose lyrics were often printed in the books; and they were the size of half a sheet of paper, which meant double the run for the price. They're actually using a printer now, instead of Kinko's, but have remained friends with a former boss so that they can use their cutting machine at night if they pay to re-sharpen the blade. They also still paste the covers on by hand, very rat. They do have a distributor now (instead of just going around to individual book stores as they did at the beginning), and have begun signing contracts with their writers; that started a discussion about how big do you get and still maintain a rat approach. Josh wants to start a Rat press where we sell each other's scripts all over the country.

Finally, after this once-again exhausting, stimulating day, a bunch of us went over the incredible Soho loft that Andrew Mellen is house-sitting for the month and talked and drank for hours on the incredible roof garden while it drizzled. Another

2:30am night, wish you were here...

Subject: Coming to a close...

Hi there.

The last couple of days have been long ones -- so long that we haven't really been able to keep up with the daily postings the way we'd like to.

Today's the last day. The past eight days have been incredibly tiring and exhilarating at the same time. So many times this week, I've thought how I couldn't wait until it was over so I could get some rest, clean my house, cook dinner at home for a change, maybe get back to work on a script and start planning the next project we're developing. Last night, as I sat in the cafe at HERE watching each person exchange street and e-mail addresses and say their goodbyes (Lee likened it to Agatha Christie's "Ten Little Indians"), time to myself began to seem less attractive than it had a few days before. As I think about the prospect of communicating with people through e-mail that I'd sat around a cafe table with until 2 am, it leaves me unsatisfied. Too impersonal... too convenient... maybe I'll try old-fashioned pen and paper and see how that works... maybe that can be the next best thing to being there.

But I digress...

Friday we got a late start on the day and, partly because I had to work that morning, I was glad for the delay. I think everyone needed to have a little time apart, a chance to take their time getting to a discussion. The 3:30 discussion was one that had been proposed the day before by Jim Rush, a writer/filmmaker who had joined us after the conference had begun, for writers to share their thoughts about process, development... how we do what we do, basically. The dynamic of this discussion was... I hate to say tainted, but certainly strongly influenced, by the presence of a writer from The New York Times Magazine who said she was writing a story about Aaron Beall from Nada/FringeNYC and asked if she could sit in with us to get an idea about Rat.

Kristin and I were talking about it later and we agreed that we were more than a little disconcerted by the addition but... well, neither of us (or anyone else I've talked to) felt that we could say no when she asked if we minded her sitting in. What could Rat have to do with an article about Aaron other than a rehash of the ridiculous Rat/Fringe debate, and that's such old news by now that I can't imagine anyone being seriously interested.

All that aside, I enjoyed the discussion. I don't talk to other writers very often about

what they do or how... or even why. Because I came to writing for the stage relatively late, I share more stories about process and experiences and so forth with directors. We went around the room and each of us talked about the work we've done or are doing, how we get started and how the work develops throughout the process. Some people started with extensive research on a subject that interested them before they start writing, others just sit down at the computer, start writing and allow the work to develop from that point. Some enjoy the revision process -- rewriting and reshaping -- and others felt that they had only diluted a stronger work by second-guessing themselves or trying to incorporate too many disparate elements. I think the discussion stands out for me because it was completely about each of us as individuals, not even as entities or companies; it had a sense of personalness that was unlike any other I'd joined in all week.

That evening, we met with Brad Rothbart for The Plague Workshop. I think we'd made a mistake scheduling the workshop for so late in the week; people were very tired and didn't really have the strength of body or mind to participate the way we would have to for the workshop to be effective. Brad read us the plague metaphor from Artaud's "The Theatre and It's Double" and then described how The Living Theatre had used the description to develop the ending for a performance piece they had done a few years ago. Brad had also used in some of his own protest performance work in more recent years. It sounded like intriguing work but we all agreed that we were just too physically beaten to be able to take ourselves to the level of involvement that the work obviously required. I told Brad afterwards that even though it wasn't the workshop he had intended, I thought the discussion the workshop had prompted was still effective and intriguing.

Catherine and I slept late yesterday because we were going to see The NeoFuturists' production of "K" in the Fringe with Kristin. It was a fantastic work adapted by Greg Allen from Kafka's "The Trial". I had never read the book before, though certainly I knew the basic story and the major themes. The set was a series of doors on casters that they rearranged at key moments in a intricate "dooreographic" performance -- for instance, at one point the character of Joseph K. during his arrest begins to leave and two people grabbed the door he was heading for and pulled it toward him and, as he stepped through, the image of leaving one room and entering another was accomplished in one relatively small moment. The NeoFuturists' work is highly theatrical and stylized and a big part of it is their acknowledgment in context that they are artists presenting a play in a theatre. My only complaint was that it was performed in two acts and the break made the second act seem slower and more deliberate than the first, though certainly still quite effective.

After that, we all hopped on a subway and headed for Coney Island. It was the perfect way to end this week. When we got to Coney Island USA, things were still

being set up for the Tirza's Wine Bath performance that evening. Lisa D'Amour led us in the workshop part of her site-specific discussion from Wednesday; we broke up into three small groups and developed pieces in different locations throughout the space there. I had done this kind of work before but I, as I told Lisa later, I really enjoyed the way she used the process better.

I'm going to have to stop now because I have to get ready to go to the Ohio for the wrap-up discussion, strike and party. I want to talk more about what Lisa did, Tirza's (which was a blast!) and lots of other things. If it's not too late when we get home tonight, I'll try to write more then.

Barry

Subject: Our last official RatFest(ation) post

Hi there.

Sorry about the delay between posts; we had our last night of drunken debauchery on Sunday (not really, but kinda) and then crashed kinda hard last night. I'd thought I'd try to summon up the energy to finish around 2 am last night (well, it seemed appropriate) but I went to bed instead.

Where did I leave off? Hang on a minute, I'll pull up my Sunday morning post....

Okay, I was going to tell you about the "peep show" work we did with Lisa during the afternoon at Coney Island USA. I was in the women's restroom that served as a dressing room for the Tirza's performers with Sean McGrath and Bob Fisher (we were later joined by Lee Wochner during Tirza's Wine Bath). After we'd explored the space and talked about images that it prompted, Lisa then gave us a series of elements to include in our pieces (a seduction, a betrayal and a rejection; a slap, a caress, laughter, a pratfall, a chase, hemorrhage [from which we choose five]; a lie, a moment of truth and something else that I've forgotten), along with some props (scarves, lanterns, candles, and beer bottles). We created a piece where I invited the audience in in little groups to see Bob cajoling someone the audience couldn't see in one of the stalls to "Let him have it, give it to him" while Sean wore a scarf as a shawl and held a candle standing on the ledge outside the window laughing (the sign outside the building made it a lot safer than it sounds). Then we urged the audience to go inside and "give it to him" and rejected them by chasing them out when they couldn't follow our instructions. It was a silly piece, actually; everyone said the best part of it was the anticipation of what the hell was going on in the room as you waited your turn.

The other two pieces in the "peep show" were quite different: Catherine and Gaby were in a long stairwell enticing a woman, Cheryl (who's last name I didn't catch), up the stairs with "A winner every race", which they'd found on a sign at the foot of the stairwell. As soon as they got her to the top of the stairs, they chased her back down the stairs and out onto the street (which got several passersby involved in the performance that evening. Outside, on part of the roof of the building next door, Kristin, Josh Furst, Claudia from New Orleans and Nick each developed part of a piece individually which they then combined into one larger piece. They all had the text "I love you" and "I hate you"; Kristin enticed people to follow here to one end of the roof and then positioned them where she wanted to; Josh was sitting under a beach umbrella holding a beer bottle (which he told "I love you") with his hand inside his pants (to which he said, "I hate you"); I couldn't get to where Nick was but I saw him taking people onto a ledge between that roof and the one next door as though they were going to jump. It was interesting how differently we had all integrated the various elements into the works and a lot of fun to work on.

We had a little break before Tirza's that night, so several of us went out to check out the Cyclone roller coaster and other rides at Coney. If you've never been to Coney Island, it's almost impossible to describe. I've only been there twice now, both times with a big group of people, and I think that's a great way to experience it. After a couple of thrill rides and silly haunted house dark ride, we all went over to Nathan's for hot dogs and curly fries before we headed back to Coney Island USA for Tirza's.

Nick and Gaby put together a great evening for us and it was really a perfect ending for the week. The work they're doing with Tirza's Wine Bath is part of their preparation for the production of "The Balcony" that they're creating. They had a couple of performers from the temporarily defunct Blue Angel (which, when it finds a new locale, is where they plan to present "The Balcony"), Bonnie who sang torch songs and performed a fan dance, and Guadalupe who breathed fire (and made a couple of us a little nervous as the flames tickled the plaster ceilings) and later did a strip. Jonny Pascoe was the emcee, Naked Elvis sat in a tub (replete with four foot foam penis) while Elvis/Nick coaxed us to "Vote for Me" through a megaphone, the band played, Lisa D'Amour sang a punk ballad to an old merry-go-round horse that she'd written that afternoon, John Belusso read from his Puppies' Porn piece a very funny "I never thought it would happen to me" letter entitled "Plutonium Rod" (which included a nuclear reactor, high levels of radiation, a shower and our hero's helpful friend, Rod... I think you can piece together the rest). Gaby was made up as a mermaid and the transformation was so thorough that several people asked me where she was that night (I'd seen her in the make up before). At the end of the evening, we all lined up to pour a couple of gallons of wine over Naked Elvis.

We all jumped into gypsy cabs (they're not licensed by the City so they're cheaper) and rushed back to HERE to see Tim Maner and Ruth Margraff's "Vinyl Pressings", which we'd seen a rehearsal of earlier in the week. I'm afraid we were a little late, I was a little too out of it and the room was a little too crowded, so I decided to sit it out. Everyone who I talked to loved it so I'm hoping that they'll be presenting it again. I really enjoyed the rehearsal and was looking forward to seeing the full work. I guess I'd just pushed myself too far; all I could do was sit in the cafe and drink Diet Coke and talk with other latecomers. As usual, we were just about the last ones to leave and walked Jason Phelps from Austin to where he was staying (he's going to be here this fall, performing in Kristin's new piece at HERE and I can see where he'll be great in the work she does), then Catherine and I got an omelet from the diner and split it at home before we went to bed (the best thing about the end of the conference is that we'll stop eating at 4 am!).

Sunday, after we caught up on the unfinished postings, we went to the Ohio to help strike. There were several people, so the work went really quickly. We stopped briefly to see Greg Allen of the NeoFuturists perform a new work, "My Father the Chair." There's no way to adequately describe the piece so I'll just say that it was excellent work and very enjoyable. I think I said earlier in the week after Rob Nash's piece that I'm not usually a big fan of solo performance because it's usually not very artful, or at least most of what I see isn't very artful. Both of the works I saw this week contradicted that assessment -- they were great.

We all hung out at the Ohio and I chatted with Robert Lyons and Richard, his Soho Think Tank partner, about what they're going to be doing in the coming months. They've got some great ideas for the space (which, as anyone who saw it this week will attest, is a GREAT space!) and, like everyone else, the only thing standing in their way is time and/or money. Sadly, we began to lose people again and finally it was just Ralph, Catherine and me on our way to dinner before we went to join Andrew Mellen for drinks on the rooftop of the apartment where he's housesitting.

That night, Kristin and her husband Carl, Andrew, Catherine, Josh and I sat on Andrew's roof and talked for a couple of hours. We all said that we wished Nick and Gaby and Brad hadn't left because it would have been a kind of RatFest(ation) planners wrap up. As it was, we didn't talk about theatre very much -- much of it was politics, history, spirituality and how much fun we'd had all week, not necessarily in that order. It was a nice quiet end to an incredibly exhausting week.

I'd thought I might add a few thoughts and impressions on the week but this is already gotten to be a kind of long post. Maybe I'll try again later. Or maybe someone else will put their impressions to e-mail... I know I'd love to hear what one of the others thought about the week and I'm sure I'm not alone.

For now, goodnight.

Barry

Epistles to RAT

from

Erik, Chris and Barry