

copy for Janet

Thursday 24 February 2000
Northern Refuge

Peter,

Got to the post office, at last, yesterday with Phil and Alex (we all got haircuts in Wasilla) and your letter with the Slovenian photocopies arrived so I didn't mail this packet but brought it back instead, thinking I'd want to add to it after reading your letter. So I'll add this note to it and you will get it about the same time as you will be getting back from moving Mary Pat to San Diego and probably about the same time I return to Seattle.

Cool you ran into Charlie Kraft and Larry Reid at the Bells. Reminds me how totally out of touch I've gotten from about everybody. I don't feel I know Charlie or Larry very well, but know they were prime movers when N S K came to Seattle. I was in a COCA show with you and a bunch of our friends when Larry was curator at COCA. I remember that I didn't take to him too well; no real problems, just that he was sort of annoying - like Dave Crow, although less so.

Yes, I did kick butt in Slovenia and my exhibit in a fortress first built by the Romans two thousand years ago in the mountain fastness of the Julian Alps looked real good... but **anything** would have looked good there. Other than England (Mexico, Canada) I had never been to a foreign country before and was really blown away by the experience. Eda Cufer (editor of **TRANSNACIONALA**) and Marko picked me up at the Ljubljana airport and drove me to Kluz to see the site of the exhibit **Atomic**. Eda had been at the conference we held at your foundry (although I didn't recognize her in my usual stupid way) and I really fell in love with her. She took me to her ancestral home, a small farm perched in the Alps outside of Bovic and it was the most lovely refuge I have ever seen (all stone buildings; house, barn, chicken coop, out-buildings). She was the last member of her family to be born there, on the kitchen table, and her grandmother was the last Cufer to live there until she passed away in 1995. The place is now maintained by some of Eda's uncles who live in near-by Bovic. Eda made some strong coffee with pear brandy and she gave me an English copy of **Transnacionala**. We sat outdoors on a low stone wall, surrounded by snow-capped peaks with some sheep grazing within a stone's throw and talked as best we could. Eda had last lived there when she cared for her dying Grandmother and she and Marko had been lovers then... since broken up.

I'll never forget that afternoon. Eda asked me what I thought of the portion that dealt with Seattle and if I could help her find a distributor for the book in the States. I gently pointed out the mis-captioned Bevis - Crow photo. Eda was very apologetic and will change it if the book ever goes into a second printing. She gave me three copies to trot around to Seattle bookstores in hopes one would be willing to carry it. I gave one to Linley and one to Janet Galore before I returned to London last summer and asked them to do it for me (Janet is on the board of COCA). I asked Janet on the phone last month if she had had time to do that and she said that there was a U S distributor and she would e-mail me the details but I since haven't heard. I'm writing Eda now (I'm trying to clear the decks of correspondence before I burn out of here) and wish I knew what to say to her. Eda is fluent in Russian and has offered to accompany me if I use a Russian reactor, if the grant goes through. November last, my intern from 1998, Ellie Kidson, and I cruised the art book shops in Soho and **Transnacionala** is available in England, so I can tell Eda that, anyway.

My last night in London I went to the opening of an exhibit of Marko Peljham and a number of other Slovenian (Irwin - NSK) artists who I had met last summer. I was just back from my meeting at Oxford with Dave Wark and very high on having finally found a physicist with enough guts to partner with me for a Wellcome Trust *sci art* grant. Eda hadn't come over (she wasn't in the show) and Marko had his new, younger, more beautiful, larger-breasted girlfriend with him that I had met at my opening at Kluz. The show was somewhere between minimalist and conceptual and didn't really blow me away, but was strong, and now, knowing these people and the role these artists are playing in forming a new nation, I really appreciated it.

And this brings me to what I wanted to say. The artists (Irwin - NSK and WochenKlausur, many of them the same people) I met in Slovenia (and at the foundry) not only blow me away but put me to shame. These people are leaders. They have used their art to lead their small nation to independence. They have been jailed, shot at and bombed. Amongst the hundreds who came to my opening (which ran all night and had hundreds sleeping in sleeping-bags in the Kluze Fortress courtyard in the morning) were a bunch of artists who had just returned from an "art project" of going to refugee camps of Kosovska and installing satellite dishes and computers, with programs the artists had written, that created a net so that the refugees could create a data-base to check on family members, kin and friends. They had begged, borrowed and stolen the hardware. And these people think I'm cool and bus to my opening up in the Alps???

I can't speak for Charlie, Larry or David Crow but I'm really discusted with the lameness of American art. And I guess I feel like a fraud myself. With a lifetime of skill-building behind me what do I do? I use it to make Brian Goldbloom and John Hoge look better then they are, creating public sculptures of no consequence. Your series of road-kills and spill-kills, in addition to beings lovely bronzes, addressed important cultural issues, and are art-works that people here in Alaska are still talking about years after they saw them. The reason that Marko and Eda and the gang think so highly of me is because of my efforts to turn nuclear waste into art through transmutation and that I'm bucking powerful capitalistic monopolies of nuclear power and the US government (DOE) [and they won, by the way]. They pay me far to much honor. I try and tell them, as you and I have so often talked about, art comes out of solitary rooms at midnight: always personally referential and devoid of exterior politics. But they don't listen - they see me as one of them, someone wielding art to change the coarse of human events.

Oh that I were that good and that successful. I would be so proud. All I really have in common with them is the high-level of risk I've taken. And my x-wife Margaret Morrissey was right: I couldn't win against the DOE, the project would cost me everything and, in the end, I would lose everything - and she was right. I think I knew she was right at the time she told me but couldn't alter my course, so sure was I of the rightness of my cause. So I've lost everything but become conscious that my long-dreamed-of transmutation art project has a societal value in addition to the artistic value I hope to bring to it. Perhaps, just perhaps, all my loss is not in vain, and I will be found worthy of friendship with all the Slovenian artists.

This morning, as I started this letter to you, I found an e-mail from Philip Schuyler. It wasn't to me, it was to Munger, but it mentioned that this weeks Seattle's **Stranger** has a big spread on Hanford by Arthur S. Aubry and Brian Freer. I know these guys and they are able and good. I'm sure they did a good job of whatever they did. Perhaps the Hanford community has found some artist and commentor they can deal with. I'm proud I could plow the ground over there, (along with you, Helen Slade... the many who helped with "Save the Reactor", came over to visit me, go to American Nuclear Society dinner meetings in Richland, etc.), and recognize that the pioneers rarely get the settlements and hope I will be able to complete the transmutation project on a different continent.

Well, I write you all this because I miss having a friend/colleague in sculpture to talk with. I'm sure we are both aware that we have drifted apart. We each track our own isotope of life as it leads us and I never expected less. You've been a good friend for a long time and sculpture has been the binder of our friendship. With the loss of my Hanford studio I feel even more rootless and alone. The creation of sculpture, in the end, remains all that I have to anchor my life upon. I wish you well on your path and really look forward to having a visit with you early March.

Every Best wish,

CC: Schuyler, Linley, Janet (I'm so damn tired of being blind-sided in interviews with "he said you said" that I have adopted a policy of sending copies of anything I write to anyone I mentioned in the

original letter.