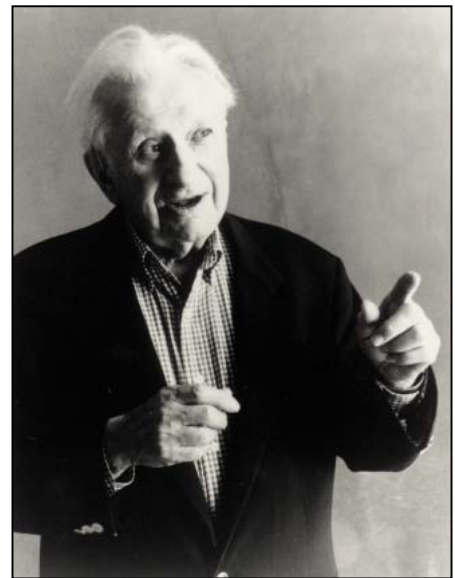


The Transom Review

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Studs Terkel **“Interviewing the World’s Greatest Interviewer”**



About Studs Terkel

Studs Terkel, a Pulitzer prize-winner, is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a presidential National Humanities Medal recipient.

Born in 1912, Studs grew up in Chicago. After graduating Law School in 1934, Studs' career has taken a great many turns. He has been an actor in radio soap operas, a disk jockey, a sports commentator, a television master of ceremonies and a radio host.

He has traveled all over the world doing on-the-spot interviews. Studs Terkel currently lives in Chicago.

Sydney Lewis - Interviewer

Sydney Lewis has worked as a waitress, bartender, office goddess, writer and oral historian. She first met Studs Terkel when she waited on him at a benefit concert for the I. W. W. in 1976. He ordered a martini.

Books by Studs Terkel:

The Spectator, Coming of Age: The Story of our Century by Those Who Lived It, American Dreams: Lost and Found Division, Street: America Giants of Jazz, The "Good War": An Oral History of World War II, The Great Divide, Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression, Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel About the American Obsession, Talking to Myself: A Memoir of My Times, Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do, Will the Circle Be Unbroken? Reflections on Death, Rebirth, and the Hunger for a faith.

A Word From Jay Allison

07.03.01

We now have a chance to interview Studs Terkel.

This is rare, needless to say. You can post your questions here and twice this month they'll be gathered by Sydney Lewis who will take them to Studs. He'll answer anything he wants to. Sydney will record his answers and we'll transcribe and post here, just as we did for his manifesto.

Here, by the way, are some email notes Syd sent last month before she interviewed Studs. She gave me permission to post them.

The thing is, and I'm probably repeating myself to you, the guy is a natural teacher. I say this all the time. He doesn't think of himself that way, he doesn't "lecture and point", but if you're listening, you can't help being taught. Younger oral historians and broadcast folk regularly ask him such questions as the "how to be a good interviewer" one, and he gives a brief answer, usually about what makes HIM a good interviewer. But just listen to him tell a story about an interviewing situation and think about what he's saying and you'll get the point: there's no one, two, three step. It's a state of being, it's a way of attending to, attending another person. I've been interviewed by him for a book as well as on the radio. The former is an almost mystical experience, the latter, somewhat like a great amusement ride for the mind.

Inquiring Minds

The Glorious Fourth

Carol Wasserman 07.04.01

I was awake in the early hours this morning, excited to hear - finally - the audio version of Studs Terkel's conversation with Sydney. I had been assigned the job of typing up and lightly editing a transcribed copy of the text. As a result, I was pretty familiar with the document but had not had an opportunity to HEAR it. It was as if I had memorized *Hamlet* out of a textbook, but had never actually been to the theater. So I was doing all the voices in my head.

Then, at about three o'clock, with the sound of bottle rockets and whizzers going off all up and down the street, I was able to experience Studs' familiar words in a hair-raisingly different way.

Having these two things posted simultaneously - the audio and the text - provides us with the plainest possible example of what Studs means when he talks about the power of the voice. A transcript isn't remotely capable of carrying the weight of his remarkable delivery, his theatricality.

It's like writing to you about the fireworks, and typing out "Boom".

Creating Context
Jackson Braider 07.04.01

As a writer (or producer) you created the context for many of the elements included in your pieces. What are your thoughts about your role as the creator of the context - not just in this case, but, more generally, as an interviewer?

Time Constraints
cw 07.10.01

My question to Mr. Terkel is: did you ever have to work under time constraints that made you feel as if you had not done justice to a certain story or person you had interviewed? And, if so, did you publish/air those pieces anyway?

Artificial Differences
Nannette 07.06.01

I'm trying to find the words for my gratitude. By publishing *Working* in 1974, Studs bridged the artificial differences between academia, journalism, skill, knowledge and every kind of wisdom.

Revising and Rethinking
Tony Kahn 07.07.01

When we met in Chicago about eight years ago (you were kind enough to record some promos for my series "Blacklisted" and then host me to lunch) you were on the verge, thanks to a grant, of going back through your radio archives to see what kind of gold you might remind from all that terrific stuff. Since then I've heard a compilation of about six tapes spanning the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. What next? And what was the experience of re-hearing yourself like? Given the incredible flow of new material you keep producing, how do you build in the time to rethink, maybe revise, the life-long mission you've been on of helping America hear herself?

Is This Stuff Journalism?
Jonathan Menjivar

I first came to your work through a class. It wasn't even my class. A friend had a copy of *The Good War* that she was reading for an American Studies class and I thumbed through it. What hit me then and still rattles me to this day is the way in which your work functions as so many different types of work at the same time. My stuffy professors felt comfortable considering it academic and yet I felt like I was just listening in on a conversation. And I had to wonder, is this stuff journalism? Scholarship? Front porch wisdom? Whatever it was, I knew instantly that it was more compelling and honest and real than anything coming out of those genres.

So the question is, how do you see your work? Have you made a conscious decision to break down the walls between different genres of writing? What's deliberate and what's just a happy accident? Is labeling what you do not really a concern? Have other people ever labeled what you do in a way that you felt limited what it's about?

The Oral History of Oral History **Joe Richman 07.08.01**

I wonder what are your thoughts on the term 'oral history'. I guess you've seen those words, their meaning, and their influence change so much over the years. We could start a nice oral history on oral history right here.

One more thing. I thought I should point out that the interviewer here, Sydney Lewis, is also a great oral historian. She put out a book on teenagers a few years back that I treasure.

A Nation of Bullies **cw 07.10..01**

The other day I was walking into a grocery store and an older man came up to me very meekly and said, "Would you sign my petition about bullying?" I was in a hurry and I brushed him off. Not until I was inside the store did I hear/comprehend his question and feel the effort it took him to approach me in the first place. Then I felt as if I had rebuffed/bullied him and went back out and signed the petition and talked awhile to make amends.

I am interested to hear more about what Mr. Terkel has to say about how we have become a nation of bullies and what radio has the obligation to say/do about that. If the idea that bullying is the key to success in business, the world, don't let them stomp all over you, get them before they get you etc., how do you get people to HEAR what you present? If bullying is key to survival for however many more years in American culture (or people perceive it is), how would you frame the discussion?

Would you leave it unframed and let the bullied people's voices be heard addressing their bullies and let nature take its course?

The Source of Your Energy **Phil Easley 07.10.01**

Studs, I wonder where you get your energy? I have a theory that non-bullies have more energy - is that it?

Studs Terkel Responds

07.23.01

Well, first of all, I was deeply moved by the responses to my appearance with Sydney Lewis on the internet. You realize that I haven't the slightest idea what the internet is. Not a semblance of an idea how it works or what. I'm just learning the typewriter, which is quite an advance for me. Nonetheless, the response indicates that you really heard me or saw me or did both, and I was moved by your comments. Carol Wasserman, of course, moved me, beginning with her editing my transcript. Sydney Lewis, whom I know, has done the transcribing for the books, as well as being my chief scout.

Aside from transcribing, being able to make out my hieroglyphics, Sydney herself is an oral historian. One of her best books hasn't been mentioned, the first one she did, called *Hospital*, which is the best study of a hospital. It's interviews, conversations with the people connected with it. Whether it be the doctor, the trauma unit head, whether it be a hospital aide, whether it be the elevator operator, whether it be someone, a patient. It's a real study of a village called Cook County Hospital. And there's her other two books, of course, which indicate that Sydney's a hell of a writer, as well as a good listener.

Free Association: Context and Connection

Jackson Braider asked "What are your thoughts about your role as creator of the context?" He said something prior to that that may explain it. He also asked about my putting things together, seemingly unrelated.

Did those who are corresponding, answering me, hear or see the script of *Born To Live*? *Born To Live* is the documentary that free associates. It's - how can I explain? It was what I guess you'd call Joycean in nature. Stream of consciousness. It dealt with the human voice. A phrase that's seemingly unrelated to someone else connects to that someone else. And how can I explain that? For example, right now I'm thinking of a book - it's just germinating. I thought of an interview I did with Lil Hardin Armstrong, Louis Armstrong's first wife, who was the one who really taught him the amenities and everything. She was his real teacher and guide and mentor when he first came to Chicago from New Orleans as a young trumpeter. And she, by the way, was a very literate person. Anyway, at the end of our interview she bangs away at a Chopin polonaise, just horsing around.

Well that Chopin polonaise reminds me I once interviewed a great American classical pianist named Garrick Ohlsson. He won the first Chopin award in 1970, the first American to win it in Warsaw. And since then he's been quite remarkable. And he's banging away at Chopin, only not. He's interpreting Chopin. I thought to myself, why not connect the two? Seemingly unrelated. Here's out of New Orleans and Chicago Lil Hardin Armstrong, who died twenty-five years ago. Here's this young American pianist. And the one thing they have in common is a love of Chopin. And somehow, the human voice - in this case, the human instrument, the instrument really played by humans - is the connecting link.

I love to connect seemingly unconnected phenomena. Whether it be a human being, whether it be an instrument, whether it be something else. And I love that connection. I suppose the word is connection, the Important Thing.

Time Constraints

cw asked if I'm constrained by time, as many are. No, I don't have that misfortune.

I first broke into *WFMT* for the run of forty-five years, in 1952. You remember, it's a little brand new station. Then it became worldwide, world renowned for its taste in music and the spoken word. Bernie Jacobs, the founder of the station said to me, "The hour is yours. Whatever you want. I don't care what you do, it's your hour. And you will never, ever, do a commercial for me." And he spoiled me.

"Under no circumstances will I ask you to do a commercial."

So he had me free for that hour to do anything I wanted. And that allowed me to explore then, as no one in radio - commercial radio - would ever be allowed to do. Or for that matter, in public radio to some extent. So I was fortunate in having the freedom that I had. It's as though I was given my own garden, a piece of land to plant whatever I wanted. And in a way it was thrilling. So I've had this break that few have had.

Objectivity

When someone says, "I'm objective, I take no position," I say, "Well, of course you do, you've just taken a position." Nobody is objective! Unless you're a robot - unless you're a machine. And you may be that. And if you are that, then you have no point of view.

Well, of course you have a point of view. Even a guy covering a fire, a journalist covering a fire. Well, how'd that fire get to be? What is it? From who's viewpoint? The woman dropping her kid out, hoping the fireman's going to catch her in that net? Who may be springing to her death? Or the fireman who's risking his life and going through the smoke and all that? Or the absentee landlord? Through whose point of view is it seen? And then we say no point of view?

James Cameron vs. The Official Point of View

Have I mentioned the name of James Cameron? Some people ask me who is the writer I most admire. I can tell you the journalist I most admire. He was an Englishman named James Cameron. Not the James Cameron who directed "Titanic" - a wholly different animal.

James Cameron, whom I knew, was the highest paid, most celebrated correspondent of British journalism during the forties and fifties. But he was on his own, he was independent. He was fired from one job. He was exposing things. And he said, "Of course I have a point of view." A lot of journalists were furious with him because he was one of the founders of the CND, the Committee for Nuclear

Disarmament in England. And he was one of the lead marchers. He, along with Bertrand Russell, helped define it. Now how could the most celebrated journalist in Britain, where he was at the time, actually step out and be a founder for The Committee for Nuclear Disarmament? He was taking a definite point of view, along with known pacifists like the Dean of Canterbury, known as the Red Dean. And Bertrand Russell.

There was Jimmy Cameron. He said, "Of course I have a point of view! Everyone does."

I'll paraphrase what he said. Oh, his language was so beautiful. He said, "If anyone says he has no point of view and covers news, as he says, 'objectively', he deprives the public of true journalism. The very fact that you breathe tells me you have a point of view. In fact, the air you breathe is political." It is literally so today. We talk about pollution. You have to be as balanced as you can. By all means, you offer all details, all the facts, as they are. You must not write from a slanted point of view.

But you do have a point of view. He had one during the war. I suggest you find a book called *Point Of Departure* by James Cameron. It's available somewhere in paperback. It's one of the best pieces of writing that you've ever read anywhere. It's sort of memoiristic, through essays from different places he's been in the world. I met him when he first returned from North Vietnam. He was the first Western journalist to visit and speak with Ho Chi Minh during the bombings there - the very first. Of course Ho Chi Minh knew him, they all knew Cameron. His stories are wonderful. They're funny and they're brilliant, and incisive.

When he came back to the United States he was clobbered. He wrote a book called *This Is Our Enemy*, and in this book he described the North Vietnamese people as - guess what? Like us. He said they're human and they have frailties and they have nobility. He said there are jerks among them, there are others among them, wonderful people. Very much like us, he said. Guess what? He was called a conduit for Ho Chi Minh. He was clobbered, especially by some of the liberal journalists on CBS. Eric Sevareid and Morley Safer among them.

They clobbered him. And that's when I met him. I said, "That's a wonderful book." We became friends and spent many weeks together here in Chicago at the '68 Convention. His coverage was funny and brilliant. And Cameron's point of view is, very simply, that they were human. That was his point of view in covering the war. And think of the guys that we had with no point of view covering the war. Which is how you got the official point of view. How often was Henry Kissinger quoted as the official, as the truthful stuff. "A reliable source upstairs," this Henry Kissinger. You realize that Christopher Hitchens has written a fantastic, incisive book about the war criminality of Kissinger. He brought that up because of Pinochet and others, of course.

And so that's the matter of point of view. Do I have a point of view? You bet I do. And do I want to get the facts right and straight? You bet I do. And that's it.

The Book And The Street

Nannette wrote about bridging artificial differences.

Well, of course. It's all one. I guess it's a question of I call upon the book as well as the street. Or the street as well as the book. Of course. When I say 'street knowledge' that's only half of it. Of course the book knowledge is important. Of course books, no matter what. No matter what.

Blue Books

There used to be nickel Blue Books, they were called. And they *were* a nickel. E. Haldeman Julius was the publisher, from Girard, Kansas. He sold books for nickels and dimes, in the various left magazines of the old days. *The Guardian*, and all the old magazines. This is turn of the century, pre-World War I. You could buy twenty of them for a dollar. And it's Darwin *On The Origin Of Species*. It's Melville. It's Shakespeare. For a nickel or a dime you had all this stuff.

You had everything. Mark Twain, of course. Clarence Darrow on immortality. And in those days, by the way, working men - I'm not romanticizing them now - but the great many men who worked with their hands read on occasion. It's pre-TV, pre-radio in many cases. Certainly pre-TV. And there was something: respect for the book. But there was also no ivory tower stuff. There was also the street.

I did attend the University of Chicago Law School. Bleak years they were, as I've said before. And the hotel I lived in played a role.

The lobby of that hotel was really my university as well. And there I heard men arguing. Actually they were old time Wobblies, IWW guys. That's what they were called in those days, IWW - "I Won't Work". Their title was the Industrial Workers of the World. And the goal was one big union; of course that was the dream. And they were, in their own way, educated.

There were arguments pro - we had a number of scabs up there. The company men who were called Scissor Bills. That was a Wobbly name. A guy said Scissor Bills were capitalists with holes in their pockets, you know. They ripped each other. There were arguments. They were drunk.

But there *was* argument, there *was* debate. Instead of silence and couch potato-ism as is so much the case today. So all was related. Journalism and the world of academia. All were one. And I liked the idea of fusing them all. Just in the way that disk jockey program I did called *Wax Museum* had opera and jazz and show tunes and turn of the century gay-nineties song. Anything. It had Brazilian Portuguese Faro songs and Spanish Flamenco, as well as some of the African anthems. It had everything. Even lieder. I liked them all. And I liked that combination.

In a sense that program was almost a metaphor for the way I work in print.

My Life, The Sweet Honey in The Rock

Tony Kahn reminded me he did a series called Blacklisted. And I'm something of an authority on that. [chuckle]

By the way, I shouldn't say this - or maybe I should. Were I not blacklisted, I wouldn't have done what I'm doing today. Now, I'm not suggesting to be blacklisted as a good career move. I should tell you that my background in TV was in the early days, the pioneer, frontier days. At that time TV was limited to six to ten at night. I'm talking about 1949, 1950. And it wasn't quite the sales medium it is today. We were adventurous because there was nothing at stake. So it was in the hands of the creative spirits; the writer, the director, the performer.

There were three programs that came out of Chicago. *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie*, was the best. For those of you who may not know, too young, it was a puppet show. And a man named Burr Tillstrom was a genius. He had little hand puppets, little rags in his hands. He made them come alive, called them the Kuklapolitan Players. And you believed these were people actually. You didn't see him till the end. There was one human face; that was his colleague, the singer and actress Fran Allison. She would talk to these little puppets, Kukla and Ollie and Beulah the Witch, as though they were real.

I once had a delightful experience when Burr Tillstrom was helping me out. I was blacklisted, and he said he'd appear on one of my programs, *Studs Place*. I had an audience of about twelve and a half people.

And he said he'd be on it. So I actually talked and worked with the puppets. One was a woman named Madame Oglepuss. I said, "Madame Ogle..." He had a little piece of cloth on his hand, and he'd put a little piece of cotton in it and it'd have big breasts, you know. And then he had the voice. Madame Oglepuss was sort of the matron of the arts, of the community. "*Oh yes, dear boy, darling boy. Studs, you love opera...*" And I actually thought she was real, though I was two feet away from her. These little rag things, in the hands of Burr Tillstrom. She was real.

The second program was *Garroway at Large*. Dave Garroway had been a radio disk jockey, as I was at the time. And he had a certain easy quality. He had this program, which was a variety show, he was in charge of it. He recognized TV as a new medium. So a chair could fall, you'd see the sound man, you'd see the cameraman, and it was a natural thing. Later on, he became the very first face ever, ever seen on daytime television. He was the first host of something new, daytime, called *The Today Show*. The very first host. The sales manager of NBC who thought of it was named Pat Weaver, which means nothing to young people unless I say he's the father of Sigourney Weaver. Then they know.

In any event, there was *Garroway at Large*, and *Kukla, Fran, and Ollie*. The third show from Chicago was the one I was involved with - *Studs' Place* - with three colleagues who were quite wonderful.

[editors note] For video clips of "Studs Place" and other Studs Terkel moments, go to CNN.com: A Chicago legend steps aside:

www.cnn.com/cnn/bureaus/chicago/stories/9709/studs/detail/index.html

An actress named Beverly Younger played the role of Gracie the Waitress, who revolutionized the idea of a waitress. Until then, the waitress was stereotyped, gum-chewing, Brooklynese. Beverly had been an actress in stock companies, traveling week to week, legitimate stock companies. She was a soap opera queen as well. And during her stock days she didn't eat in fancy hotels, she ate in diners. So there was the waitress. Someone, a mother, a woman, maybe married, maybe not. And she learned from them. Beverly made up the lines she said on the show. We all did. We'd have a small plot.

Win Stracke, my friend who was a lieder singer, sang labor songs. He and I were blacklisted together so we called ourselves "The Chicago Two."

And there was Chet Roble, a horsy, bluesy piano player, who was wonderful. He had a language of his own we called Roblesian.

Well, this place, Studs' Place, people thought was real. They thought it was an actual place. It wasn't, but it was our words. And it was pretty hot at the time. Then the Cold War came along, and Korea. This was 1950, '51, '52. And I was bounced, because I signed all these petitions. I think I said this last time, didn't I? That I never met a petition I didn't like?

So I signed them all. And, "Would I take it back?" No, I wouldn't take it back. "Can't I say I was duped?" No, I wasn't duped. And people to this day think I was a hero. I wasn't. I was scared. If you'll forgive me - I was scared shitless. But my ego was at stake. I'm not dumb. They wanted me to say I was duped, but I wasn't. And so, that's how it came about.

Sydney Lewis:

So blacklisting was kind of this rock in the river there that changed your course.

Studs:

My life. The sweet honey in the rock.

A Nearsighted Dishwasher

So Tony Kahn was looking at some of the compilations of old programs and he asked what was the experience of rehearsing myself like? Well, that's one that always comes up. That is, it comes up to me, in my mind. Could I have done better? Of course. The question is do I revise, would I like to revise? Yes, of course! But that's not *it*. It's what happened at that moment, that's what it is. It's different from doing a book, see.

In doing a book I want it to be exactly right, see. I want what happened at that moment. For example, a good case in point: *Talking to Myself*, my memoir. It's called an oral memoir of my time. Oral memoir. I actually did talk into the tape recorder. And I wrote too. It was a combination of a number of things. It wasn't just talking into the tape recorder.

I included old pieces I'd written. I once wrote a Christmas story, based on an actual event at the Wells Grand Hotel. And it's funny, wistful. It's about this old dishwasher who's nearsighted, you know. He's a goof ball, but he carries the Scripture, he reads these wild passages from Scripture, a Welshman. And

this Greek restaurant owner comes in with this pretty girl, it's the Depression, and sure enough, he goes upstairs to the room with her, you know. And then the guy comes down the stairs. Apparently they hadn't gone into the room yet, and something happens in the lobby, and she winds up with the dishwasher. It's a story I like very much. Based upon people I've known. Well, I put that in the book, too.

See, this is a good way of anticipating another question then about journalism and everything. And oral history. I am none of these. Am I a journalist? Ah, no. I call it guerrilla journalism.

Oral History and Guerrilla Journalism

I was a guerrilla journalist when I did the first book, the first oral history, *Division Street America*. Meaning I knew my terrain.

A guerrilla journalist is like a guerrilla fighter. We know the American Colonials were guerrilla fighters against the Redcoats; they knew the terrain. Marian, the Swamp Fox. We know the history. We know that the Vietnamese were guerrilla fighters. And we were the Redcoats there, quite frankly. And so I'm a guerrilla journalist in that sense.

But, at the same time, I wrote a column about jazz for a year, for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. I reviewed records. It was called "The Hot Plate." Jazz records, and blues, and show tunes. It was a terrible column. I know because I've read them again - an old friend of mine who goes to the Chicago Public Library looks through all the microfilms and sends me stuff. They were pretty awful. They were slick and facile. In any event, I did do that. And now and then an op ed. But I was never a journalist.

As far as being an oral historian - oral yes, I talk a great deal. But being a historian involves scholarship. Oral history is something else.

Griots, Transvestites, and Neo-Cartesians

Oral history is the oldest form of communication there is. Long before the medieval monks used quill to put down stuff in Latin on parchment, early writings, long before that, around fires were shaman, were medicine men, were all kinds of seers. And they were the oral historians. When Alex Haley wrote the book *Roots*, one of the first things he did was to go to West Africa, to Gambia, the land of his forebears, to meet the griots. Storytellers. Generation to generation. And we know this among Native Americans. Same thing. Among peoples everywhere. The story. Word of mouth. The man around the fire, telling the story. The transvestite, the medicine man, the others. Storytellers. And so then came the printing press. The stories preceded Guttenburg. And then came writings of all sorts.

One of the men I most admire, Henry Mayhew, was a contemporary of Charles Dickens. Some say Dickens modeled Micawber after him. There's a book called *London's Labor and London's Poor*. He revolutionized things, Henry Mayhew. The papers, the English papers, the respectables, knew nothing about the hawker outside, or the chimney sweep, or the chambermaid. The upstairs didn't know what

the downstairs was doing. And these people were like children, well-behaved children. Seen but not heard. And he starts to interview these people: the needleworkers, and the chimney sweeps, the sewer workers. And all of a sudden people read these. He had a slew of people working with him. I work alone. But nonetheless, he did this. There was no typewriter. I mean there were no tape recorders or anything. And he did this, for the London papers, Birmingham papers, and Manchester papers. It was astonishing, because everybody could read: *Oh, that's what they think.*

Well, I follow that written tradition. The one difference is I have a tape recorder. And though I inveigh against technology, runaway technology, here I am. I use the radio, I'm talking right now into a mic, and I use the tape recorder.

Have I mentioned the connection between Richard Nixon and myself? Well, you see, I am enamored of the tape recorder. Obviously. I'm enthralled by the tape recorder, as was only one other American - and that was Richard Nixon. And I say Nixon and I are neo-Cartesians. *I tape, therefore I am.* I hope our purposes are somewhat different, though.

This is by way of telling you what I am not. Not a journalist, nor a historian. Oral historian, possibly.

A Two-Legged Whatnot

But what I really am is a whatnot. You know what a whatnot is? It's a piece of furniture. Look it up in the dictionary. It's a piece of furniture in which you put anything. Old letters you've saved, or notes you've written, or stuff people have sent you, or pieces of newspaper articles you cut out. Anything. Diaries. It's a whatnot.

And that's what I am, a two-legged whatnot.

So What is This Stuff?

Jonathan Menjivar asked a question I think I've sort of answered. He asked is this stuff journalism? The answer is no. Is this stuff scholarship? Certainly not. Front porch wisdom? No. Back porch. He said "Whatever it was, I knew instantly it is more compelling and honest...." Well, thank you. There's no label.

He also asked if I am limited by labels. Yeah, well, they label you. And a label is one thing I don't want. For example, let's take the word liberal or conservative for the moment. Both words have been so misused. So I decided to call myself a radical conservative.

Think about it.

Getting to the root of things. That means radical, literally. Ah, conservative? You bet. I want to conserve the blue of the sky, the purity of the water, the greenness of the forest, the unpolluted air. And

I'd like to preserve the First Amendment, Bill of Rights, and whatever sanity we have left. So I'm a conservative in that sense.

But there is no label. These labels, liberal and conservative, are utterly misused. And so I think *whatnot* is my favorite description of myself.

Bullies

Oh, this is one about bullies. Now, cw is Carol Wasserman? No, I think it's somebody else. Well, cw writes about an older man who approached him or her. Said, "Would you sign my petition about bullying?" And cw walked away and then later on realized he/she was a bully here, and then the whole subject of bullying.

Are we taught to be bullies? Think of Columbine and the kids going berserk there. Well, who were those kids who did it? They were kids who were put upon. They were kids who were called nerds. "Is bullying key to survival for however many more years in American culture?" Yeah. "How would you frame the discussion?" Just for the moment, these were the kids who were bullied and something exploded within them.

But are we taught to be bullies? Well, of course we are! By the very nature of what we call the free market. My God! You get there no matter how. You know the movie *Wall Street* with Michael Douglas and Charlie Sheen may have been exaggerated. But it was basically true. He was caricatured. But sometimes in caricature you find the truth, as in a political cartoon, for example. We're taught from the very beginning that to be a success is to get to the top. You get to the top by climbing onto other people. No matter how you do it. We're told this. And this is all in reference to bullying. To getting on top. In our commercials, especially with ghetto kids, they're told to go to school - you know these TV commercials - go to school, go to school so you can compete. Compete is the word that makes for bullying. I thought the word was cooperate. I thought, "The United States of America instead of The Competitive States, you want to make it that?" But to compete means to beat someone.

(This is free association. Now you realize I'm small Joycean.)

I did this in the documentary *Born To Live*: after the opening, drums being played. And there's a man from Ceylon talking about the drums played on a Sunday afternoon. Two drummers are banging away. I said, "They're competing with each other, aren't they? See which is the better." No, no, they're not competing. They're playing, and finally they come together. And it works out beautifully, in unison. And suddenly the whole community feels so good on that day. So that's precisely what I'm talking about. The kids are taught in the commercials about going to school to learn so you can beat someone else out. Well, inevitably, inexorably, it leads to bullying.

What were we in Vietnam? Well, the bully got a black eye, didn't he? And the he is us, isn't it?

Isn't that interesting? Throughout the world, for all of our long time. The Holy Roman Empire were bullies, but were bright. They'd conquer. And then along came these people, these subversives called Christians. There was an answer to bullying two thousand and one years ago at Calvary. And here was

this sect called Christians, and they were crazies, because they were saying the opposite of what the Empire was saying. The Empire was saying, "Conquest! We're number one! We're it."

And the others were saying love thy neighbor, instead of beat thy... Love thy neighbor?! Love thy enemy?!

Well, of course that's subversive. They put it up before the House Un-Roman Activities Committee. They were going to try the leader, this guy is up there, he's going to be crucified. And down below, at the foot of Calvary, you've got the crowd watching. Well, where there's smoke there's fire, you know. And then a little girl or a guy, one of these raggedy ones, comes up to this young Roman soldier. And he's a kid, from one of the regions, from Thrace or Crete or where the hell ever he's from. Or from Anglia. And he's got this heavy Roman hat on, he's got acne and pimples, he's eighteen years old. And he's watching another crooked soldier, another guy shooting dice, crooked dice, for the robes and the sandals of the guy who's just been executed. And this kid's afraid of this girl who says, "Can I talk to you about loving thy neighbor?" You know. And it's, "Oh my God, it's the enemy."

And so, he's going to be executed, and there is the wife of Pontius Pilate. He's just a judge, he's just a hack judge. And he's washing his hands. His wife, who's a good person who believes in what this group is for, says, "Why are you persecuting this good man?" And he says, "Will you stop nagging me, for Christ's sake." And that's the only time Christ's sake was ever used properly.

In any event, that was the first attack I know of on bullying. Imperialism, of course, is naturally bullying in a governmental way.

Two Thousand And One Years Later

I told you about that little Roman soldier who was scared of that little girl or boy, raggedy, who whispered in the ear, "Listen, love your neighbor." Well, in real life, in one of my books, in our time, I met a woman named Jean Gumpp.

Jean Gumpp, who is one of the heroines in a couple of my books, was a very respected woman in a middle class suburb in Chicago, a western suburb. Catholic. Mother of ten kids. Head of the PTA. Her husband was very devout. She was also a devout Christian. One day, it's Good Friday, she says, "Well, I think I'm going to go with some of these young kids down to this place in Holden, Missouri where there's a missile site. I think we should do something about that. It's Good Friday." So she goes with these kids, and they're able to cut through the barbed wire easily enough. A missile site is the most banal looking thing there is. It's a little mound. It's like a little not quite nubile breast of a kid, a little thing, you know. And so they go and they spill some of their blood on it and they pound at it with a hammer, it's symbolic. They put up the sign, "Study War No More. Beat Your Swords Into Ploughshares, and Study War No More." Isaiah something. They start singing songs, hymns and antiwar songs.

They call up the military authorities. Here they are protesting. And sure enough, the army trucks come along and the commander hollers out, "Will the personnel on that missile site get off? Hands raised."

And so she gets off, and her hands are raised. Suddenly she realizes she's about to sneeze. She has a cold. So she reaches into her purse to get a handkerchief. And a little kid is pointing a gun at her. Remember that young kid I told you about, in Christ's time, at Calvary, two thousand and one years ago? That same little kid. He's from Iowa this time, you see, or he's from Dakota, or he's from Arkansas. And a little kid, he's got pimples, he's got this soldier's uniform on. He's got this gun. And he's trembling. As Jean Gump is the enemy, he's terrified of Jean Gump. And suddenly she reaches for her purse. "Don't you dare move!"

She'd been told that was dangerous. She said, "Sonny, you're old enough to be my grandchild. Listen, sonny, I gotta blow my nose. I'm sorry. I have to blow now."

He says, "Don't you move!"

"Well, shoot if you must - I'm going to blow my nose."

Jean has a sense of humor, of course, and she's on the truck, sitting opposite the kid now, under arrest. "Look, sonny, I want to talk to you."

"Don't you dare!"

So you see, two thousand and one years ago, same kid and that woman. Jean Gump and that same kid. Now the kid's far from a bully, he's just a terrified kid who was taught there's an enemy. And the enemy is anybody who challenges whatever that establishment might be.

Bullying is the very nature of our society. We're taught that, and so I'm glad that cw signed that petition for that person. I'm very happy she did, or he did.

Energy

Phil is asking where do I get the energy? He says: I have a theory that non-bullies have more energy than bullies. That's funny. I haven't heard of that one.

Let me think about that. Where do I get that energy? I have no idea. Maybe my mother's genes, perhaps. She was a tough little sparrow. I really don't know. I think if you're involved with something and you like the work you're doing, there's an energy forthcoming. Here's an anecdote about energy:

There are certain groups in all cities, certain lecture bureaus, or clubs. They want to hear the wise people talk. This was in Hartford, Connecticut. And it's big, an annual event, the sages, and there were four people involved. Ah, let's see, Gordon Parks, and Gloria Steinem. The moderator was Pete Hamill, a journalist. I was on it, and William F. Buckley, Jr. Well, naturally, as you probably expected, Buckley and I tangled, but it was polite. It was a polite tangle. And it was very, very funny. I won't go into it now, but it was quite funny, except for one part. He says, "Where do you get that dr-i-i-ve?"

But my hearing is very bad. I have volume but not the clarity, so words don't come out clearly. I say, "Where do I get the gripe? Is that it? The gripe?"

"No, the dr-i-i-ve?"

"The gripe? Well, you provide me with much ammunition for it, Mr. Buckley."

"No, where did you get the dr-i-i-ve?" His eyes rolling wildly, you know. And the tongue darting out frequently. And I was trying to answer him and keep from laughing at the same time.

Publishing in Uncharted Territory

I was asked whether I had not done justice to a certain story or interview because of time constraints. I haven't had that problem of time constraints because I haven't been in many commercial shows, not since the blacklist days I'm happy to say. I've had the luck of being on *WFMT*.

And I haven't had the experience of time constraints as far as publishing. The books I've done are at my own pace. And I should mention my publisher, André Schiffrin. Were it not for him, I wouldn't have been doing this. He's one of those independent publishers who became legend. He was the publisher of Pantheon Books, which was part of the umbrella of Alfred Knopf's Random House. He had an excellent track record. His father was one of the founders of it. His father and another couple named Kurt and Helen Wolff escaped Hitler and they founded this press. Pantheon was taken over by Random House, and André was head of Pantheon. One day he was reading some stuff of mine that had been put in the magazine of the station, transcripts of broadcasts. And he liked them. He had just published a book about China written by Jan Myrdal, whose father Gunner Myrdal wrote the great book, *American Dilemma*, on race. His mother was a member of the Swedish group that won the Nobel Peace Prize. He was from a very distinguished family. Jan Myrdal was in China, with his wife, Gwyn Kessle, who's a photographer. And they were studying a Chinese village and how it changed. The before and after of the Mao Revolution. How it was bound feet before, and unbound feet after. Other changes, good and bad.

And so André called me one day. It's the sixties, and a revolution is going on here. The civil rights revolution, cybernetics and mechanical revolutions going on. He said, "How about you doing a study of an American village. Chicago."

I say, "Are you out of your mind?" He speaks very softly, he speaks very gently. And so we do *Division Street: America*. And it's well received by the public as well as critics.

Three months later he says, "How about a book..." He has that soft voice, with a slight British accent - he went to Cambridge. And his soft voice says, "How about a book about the Great American Depression? The young don't know about it."

I say, "Are you out of your mind?"

And so that's how it came to be, all of these books. And he's responsible to a great extent for them. I write my own ticket as far as time is concerned, since it's unchartable. For one thing, it's uncharted territory. And so I chart my own course.

Editing and Injustice

I think I probably have done injustices in many cases. At the moment names don't come to mind. I would like to have done more but sometimes, by the very nature of editing, some one had to be cut out, see. That's one of the tough ones of the book world.

Sydney Lewis

You feel that it's an injustice that you've cut out some of the people.

Studs Terkel

That's what I mean. The injustice. As Sydney, here, knows. The toughest part.

How do I do my work? I always say, "What's the analogy? A gold prospector." I hear about a certain person, one way or another. A friend tells me about it, I read an item in the papers. No one rule.

One day, I remember, I was on the radio, *FMT*, the subject was race, and about this community. And I got a call from a listener, very indignant. I remember her name, Jane Miller. She won't mind because it's a good connection here. And she was bawling me out. "You don't live in this community. You don't know what it's about. You, you sound just like my mother."

"Your mother? What's your mother's phone number?"

Her mother was wonderful. She was an elderly woman, seventy-something or other. This was about thirty years ago. Chapin was her last name. She was someone who knew Chicago and she says, "There are so many places to see and things to do, for nothing." But she was describing Chicago, and the people, and the makeup, and war, and her son. How did I get her? Because somebody bawled me out on the radio. So I find people that way, see.

No Rules of Thumb For Prospectors

Another case in point, a very dramatic one: I was interviewing an Appalachian couple in Chicago in an Appalachian community. Blacks came from the South, and Appalachian people, to look for jobs in the steel mills and everything. Chicago was a city called heaven among black people in the South. In Chicago were the farm equipment plants where you could walk in off the street, so they thought.

So there was this Appalachian community. And I'm going off for an interview, and it's raining like hell, but fortunately a cab comes along. I get in the cab. I was wearing a heavy tape recorder then around my shoulder. It was a Uher, a German tape recorder. And this young cab driver, he looks like L'il Abner, and he says, "Are you a journalist or something?"

I said, "Well, sort of."



He says, "Did you see Lord Jim?" He means the movie of the Joseph Conrad novel.

I say, "Yeah, I did, yeah."

He says, "Well, that movie's about me. See, I was a coward all my life. And that movie's about that one moment when I became not a coward. That's when I joined the John Birch Society."

"John Birch Society, no kidding," I say. I gotta get this guy. I say, "Listen, yes I am a journalist. Here's what I do." I told him. So we met for the next three days.

And you know what? It's not the way it seems to be. The discovery I made is you can't have a rule of thumb. There's a paradox in people, there's a conflict in some people. John Birch Society. "Yeah, you bet, you gotta kill those damn Reds."

Well, yeah, he'd just as soon die fighting the Reds. He joined them because they're big shots. He says, "I gotta join," and suddenly he's part of the big shots. All his life he's nothing. When he goes swimming with his family he'd go to overcome a fear of water. Not the joy of water, the fear of water. And so this is the same guy, joining John Birch.

And the same guys says, "I got fired a while ago." He was working as a prison guard in Chicago. They fired him because he fraternized with the inmates, most of whom were black.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, what happened is, the guy says to me one day, one of the guys in the prison, he's a black guy. He says to me, 'What time is it?' 'Why, are you in a hurry - you gotta plane to catch?' And I realize, what did I say that to him for?"

The same guy.

"What did I say that to him for? And I went back to apologize. And I found a very nice guy. You know, I think I trust - you don't mind my saying this? I trust black people more than I do white people." The same John Birch guy.

And to top it all off, Florence Scala, one of the heroines of the city. She was the very first person in the very first book, *Division Street: America*, who tried to save her community. It's a great one, the Harrison-Halsted-Jane Addams community. Tried to save the soul of the city and lost. When she ran for alderman, who do you think her biggest backer was, biggest campaigner? This guy! The John Birch. So you see, there is no rule of thumb you can judge. That's how I interviewed him - accidental.

Then when you've found them all, what do you do with it? You do the transcribing.

The Deep Pain of Editing

Now you become the gold prospector. First step is finding the piece of land. Remember 1849, gold discovered in California. And you find a stake. And I find the person. That's my gold. And now he starts digging. And I start interviewing. He digs and all the tons of ore come out. And I dig and all these fifty pages come out. Oh boy, now, now comes the sifting, sifting. He's got a hand full of gold dust. Now comes my editing.

And that's a key moment. Now I'm now longer the gold prospector - now I'm the brain surgeon. Now you've got to pick out the right things exactly. What do you edit? What do you keep in or out? The words are the words of that person, none of my words. Sometimes you switch the sequence, because there's no one rule of thumb as to how you begin an interview. About the Depression: "What's your first memory of the Depression?" It might be, "I hear you don't like bananas. How come?" "Rotten." There's no one rule. So you may change the sequence, but never the thought. You highlight it.

And then comes putting one against the other. Because the gold dust is still not a watch, or a necklace, or a tiara. So now you connect others, and it becomes that jewel, or that thing. And I connect all these.

Now comes the terrible part. How can I cut out people? The people I've left out in all these books are just as good as the ones in it. But now you become the stage director. See, now you've got two good actors. But you balance that against the rest of the cast. So one of the painful things in all the books is cutting people out of it who have given you their precious time. They've given you their everything. Now you have to cut them out. That's a deep pain.

So in a sense we're talking about being a whatnot.

About Transom



What We're Trying To Do

Here's the short form: Transom.org is an experiment in channeling new work and voices to public radio through the Internet, and for discussing that work, and encouraging more. We've designed Transom.org as a performance space, an open editorial session, an audition stage, a library, and a hangout. Our purpose is to create a worthy Internet site and make public radio better.

Submissions can be stories, essays, home recordings, sound portraits, interviews, found sound, non-fiction pieces, audio art, whatever, as long as it's good listening. Material may be submitted by anyone, anywhere -- by citizens with stories to tell, by radio producers trying new styles, by writers and artists wanting to experiment with radio.

We contract with Special Guests to come write about work here. We like this idea, because it 1) keeps the perspective changing so we're not stuck in one way of hearing, 2) lets us in on the thoughts of creative minds, and 3) fosters a critical and editorial dialog about radio work, a rare thing.

Our Discussion Boards give us a place to talk it all over. Occasionally, we award a Transom.org t-shirt to especially helpful users, and/or invite them to become Special Guests.

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ATLANTIC PUBLIC MEDIA

Atlantic Public Media administers Transom.org. APM is a non-profit organization based in Woods Hole, Massachusetts which has as its mission "to serve public broadcasting through training and mentorship, and through support for creative and experimental approaches to program production and distribution." APM is also the founding group for *WCAI & WNAN*, a new public radio service for Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket under the management of *WGBH*-Boston.

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