

Tom Johnson

Wednesday July the 15th  
Tarrytown

Dear Sylvia:

Hope this note finds you well and everything. Carol Anne and I just wanted to let you know how very much we enjoyed our visit with you at Fire Island. We really had a delightful time and just wanted to let you know. It was also nice getting to know Joan and Sonia and we hope to see one or both of them again some time. And lastly but by no means least, please convey our warmest regards to the incomparable Mimi.

I'd like to take a minute if I might to touch on a couple of things we were talking about out there. There is a heavy malaise in the air, everyone from the bishop to the policeman seems to have dirty hands. I have till recently (perhaps since JFK - Vietnam) always looked to the Left for ideological succor; not to Soviet Communism, to be sure, but to the democratic socialism of Western Europe and especially Scandinavia. My hopes in this country have been with the Democratic Party, the patrician liberalism of the East, organized labor and the farmers (until corporate agribusiness drove more farmers from the land than the banks did in the Thirties). But now I find myself with very little faith in any of these. It worries me quite a lot. My case is not one of the so-called natural decline of brash, youthful enthusiasm that comes with age, some kind of natural slowing down of the idealistic fervor that many are infused with in their youth. Rather, it has taken the form of a radical shattering of a whole structure of belief, a jerking out of the rug which has left a bleak landscape of essentially meaningless debris. I can see on reflection that a hefty measure of my disillusionment was forged in the crucible I found myself in by working for the Associated Press during the 1960s. I found myself thinking that the AP was really not too different from TASS, especially in regard to the assassination and Vietnam. Then bits and pieces of other bedrock beliefs began to be chipped away: the good intentions of the unions (I had never expected good faith from the corporations), the possibility of the morally justified war, the basic decency of the police; and the fact that the Western Allies really didn't give a damn about the Holocaust. I kept backing up into an ever-shrinking corner to the point that now I find myself clinging rather desperately to Beethoven, Sartre and Beckett: fragile beacons in a very mean storm. This deterioration of Western Humanism seems to be tied in with the advance of technology somehow; maybe the dulling effect of television and the supremacy of the automobile are dragging all standards down to the very lowest common denominator. I can be sure about hardly anything anymore; but I sure don't like it.

Well, S, sorry to bore you with this juvenile diatribe. Carol Anne and I have been talking about all this and we thought we'd toss some of it your way. Again, thanks for inviting us out. Take care and keep in touch.

Beck,  
Tom