

7 January 1971

Mr Harold Weisberg
Route 8
Frederick, Md 21701

Dear Harold,

Thank you for your letter of the 3rd. I did receive from Paul Hoch a copy of his circular letter about the newly-declassified CD's. While I have not yet decided one way or the other about acquiring these CD's, I am extremely reluctant to do so via Paul Hoch. In the aftermath of his "melon experiments" and my lengthy correspondence with him on that whole disgusting affair, I feel that none of us should permit a drifting back to "business as usual" with Hoch, even for the sake of a financial saving on the cost of the CD's, so that he will be encouraged to believe that the "melon" episode has blown over and he is still a critic in good standing among the authentic and uncompromising critics.

The exchange of letters with Hoch, most of which were circulated to you and several other critics, has convinced me that he is deeply dishonest with himself and therefore with everyone. However much he disclaims it, he is clearly engaged in pandering to Alvarez, while seeking at the same time to remain "in" with the critics. So far as I am concerned, I will do everything in my power to make sure he does not succeed in his attempt to play the "critic" and to gain access to advance information from any of us that can be put to a perverted use.

So far as the declassified CD's are concerned, I naturally will exercise my own judgment on whether to acquire them at all and what use, if any, to make of them. In principle, I have always been and remain in favor of the fullest and earliest possible disclosure, in the most effective form available; as a general rule; of course, there are occasions when there are legitimate reasons for delay, for the sake of a more comprehensive and conclusive presentation of the evidence. I can assure you that I will never subordinate the cause to which many of us (correction, a few of us, more accurately) have long been committed to the satisfaction of personal ego or vanity or any other selfish aim. Of course, we each have individual criteria and judgment and we have all

(over)

experienced the chagrin of error—since we are not omniscient nor infallible—but, I believe, error committed in good faith and without underlying elements of self-interest or opportunism.

You refer to my "reluctance to maintain confidence" but this is not, in my view, an entirely accurate phrase. More exactly, I am unwilling to commit myself in advance, categorically, to any explicit course of action or inaction with regard to a completely unknown quantity and dimension of information. I arrived at that position as a result of experience, in my UN work and various other aspects of personal relationships or professional activities, which convinced me that I must always retain some freedom of action and not box myself into a corner from which there is no exit, on the basis of yielding to the judgment of any other person—whether a parent, a husband, a boss, or a colleague.

You will perhaps agree that such a position is more honest and more honorable than to accept information with a prior promise of confidentiality which may prove impossible to keep, in some later and unforeseeable combination of circumstances. The chances are that if I received the information, I would fully agree with your reasons for keeping it confidential—but if I did not agree, my hands would be tied, and my position extremely uncomfortable.

So long as my independence and freedom remain intact, I am always ready to co-operate, to provide and to receive information, and cherish a friendship or a collaboration founded on mutual respect. I am grateful for advice and suggestions from my peers about any work I do as a critic, whether solicited or not, so long as it is offered in such a context. I was therefore offended by your letter just after Labor Day and your conversations with Mary Ferrell, which was couched in rather intemperate terms and tended to be denunciatory and intimidative. I do not wish to set into motion now a chain of mutual recriminations as to the substance or the wording of that letter but only to emphasize that our long association must continue to accommodate honest differences of opinion and genuine conflicts of view without generating resentment or insult—unless or until one of us, like Hoch, goes over to the side of the Warren Commission and becomes an apologist for its despicable falsifications. Whatever my human failings, that is something that I shall never do, and I know with absolute certainty that you will never do.

With all good wishes for 1971,