

## **Spoken Word & Story**

By Lee Foust

### **What If Words**

But what if words fall short?  
what if, unaffected, the world  
and our terse faces  
                         keep on falling

through days, down streets  
of insidious intent, the road  
and "bent to it"  
                         as the prosist says?

Americans: on the way  
to all our metaphysical nowheres—

the film plays at six, eight, and ten  
                         (two and four on Saturdays and Sundays)  
we'll sit through it w/out speaking

the abyss doesn't bother me  
                         anymore

i can use it  
                         to understand.

## **LIBERATION**

There is nothing so liberating. Nothing. There's nothing. There is nothing so frustrating as that. There isn't even that. No, nothing's so liberating as the frustration of waiting. There's nothing so frustrating as waiting for liberation. There isn't. Because we forge chains. We forge chains because we're afraid of nothing. Except frustration. Except liberation.

So? So what.

Because alone is not alone, because nothing is just so. Because there's nothing so liberating, or there wasn't once, as a chain. And chains are real. Rings are real links and there's nothing so, no, nothing so real as our own forged link in a chain. Anglo-Saxon tradition even here—and there's nothing as frustrating as that.

When nothing is so, or as it seems. When there's nothing as it should be because of rings and links, because of chains and time—time takes shape in rings, time takes shape in chains. And then there's nothing, nothing but time's image 'round our fingers. Well, there's nothing so frustrating as that. No, nothing. There's no nothing as frustrating as the forced nothing of a liberation, of losing a ring. Because chains and rings are real. Because real rings go 'round and 'round.

Chains and rings are real because chains and rings are forged in time. We forge them in time in time's image—and there's nothing as frustrating as breaking a link, as breaking the round ring of a chain that we ourselves have forged in time. No, nothing's so frustrating as that.

So? So what.

Nothing's so, just so, so liberating as that frustration, as waiting to break a vow, because it breaks up the rings of your time of day.

1/22/1997  
Florence

### **Seventh Street**

Oh yeah, this one time we were all sitting in the Jack in the Box on Market Street in the heart of the Tenderloin at a little after midnight on a Sunday, after we'd drunk and talked ourselves hungry from an afternoon hangin' around 86. We were crowded into a booth, the four of us: Devin, Eric, Adrian, and I (this was when we'd first formed the band, before Lee had joined, and Eric had come by to hear what we were doing). We got our food and spread a lot of different burgers and a couple of orders of fries and some drinks out on the table. Each one of us started grabbing whichever burgers we thought sounded good and I spread a bag out flat on the table and poured all of the little bags of fries together onto it. Then I pushed the mound of fries into the center of the table and took some drink lids and filled one with ketchup and one with mustard and ketchup, which is what I like with my fries.

“Who wants one with everything?” Adrian asked, and I was about to say, “Send it down here,” when this old guy sitting all alone in a booth over next to the windows on the Seventh Street side fell down dead right out of his seat.

I mean, there he was, huddled in his booth looking through the window suspiciously, watching the people walk by when, quietly, and without any fuss or anything, he just let go of himself and let it all fly out of him. He tilted first to one side, which is when I noticed him—and I thought it was only a drunk passing out—and his eyes were still open, gleaming under all the bright fast-food orange as he started going down, his body tumbling over out of his seat and into the aisle. He was limp and drifting for a second and then gained speed as he fell, coming down face first onto those cold and dirty tiles, his head rolling back and forth a couple of times after he'd hit the tiled floor.

But the weird part was how absolutely absurd the whole thing seemed. I mean, nobody did anything about it for a while; everybody expected the guy to get up and stagger out into the street, or at least to climb back up onto his chair. But he was dead. He lay there, dead, and nobody knew what to do with him. Finally somebody went up and shook him, tried to feel for a pulse, and a kid from behind the counter came over and there was a lot of whispering and shit and oh, it was a big fucking deal now—like a war, or a movie or something, and everybody wanted to be in on it no matter how grisly and fucked-up it got.

So the manager appears, pushing his way through the civilians and ordering his teenage help around very seriously—of course by now they'd all come out from behind the counter to see. Obviously this guy thought he was taking things firmly in hand, you know, showing grace under pressure and all that. An ambulance eventually comes: no

lights on or sirens or anything. They cover the old guy up, put him in a body bag, on a stretcher, and then wheel him away—too fucking late.

We sat there in our booth eating our crappy food and watched the whole stupid scene unfold. We got pretty restless, finally, to get moving again, but Devin had to stay and see everything through to the end. Adrian and I started making jokes about it after a while, but Devin was still staring at the mob gathered around the corpse, and at the table where the old guy had been sitting, kinda stunned. “I’ve never seen anyone actually dead before,” he said. I guess it kind of amazed the guy.

After they got the body taken away we went back over to 86 ‘cause it was late and we couldn’t think of anywhere else to go and had no money to go there anyway. Devin grabbed his pastels and a huge pad and started drawing the old man stretched out on the orange floor tiles with the looming windows of Seventh Street, and the Jack in the Box sign grinning over the whole scene, looking a little like Ronald Reagan. Devin usually stayed up on speed longer than the rest of us and he kept on drawing—not drinking anymore—while we split what was left of the bottle of gin we’d bought before practice and found spots around the room to more or less pass out.

When we woke up there was this huge pastel drawing on the wall of the three of us sleeping splayed out all over the place, as seen from Devin’s loft bed above. We all felt like hell and, in the picture, we pretty much looked like corpses.

“You gotta get it together, Devin,” I told him, but he didn’t crash until late the next afternoon, sleeping all through the day after that.

