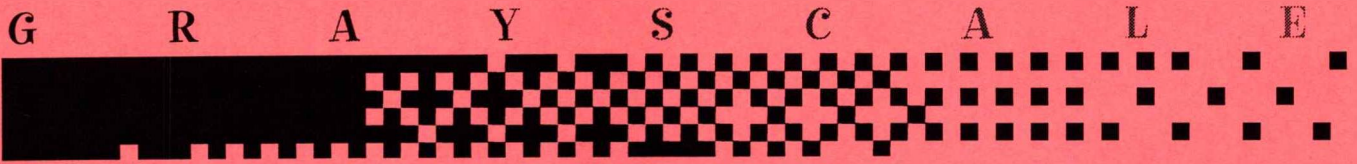


The illusion of gray created
by an arrangement of
alternating black and white dots



This is Grayscale #3, a zine for *Intercourse*, and an Obsessive Press Publication #189, from Jeanne Gomoll, 2825 Union Street, Madison Wisconsin 53704-5136. 608-246-8857. ArtBrau@aol.com

31 March 1997

I want to apologize to you all for having missed the last mailing and for not catching up with comments this issue. My favorite format for writing apazines is to write within a structure of mailing comments (rather than separate essays)—connecting stories about my life and ideas to an ongoing conversation within the apa. It's the way I've usually done apazines in the past, and I expect I will eventually get into a rhythm of doing so here. But that's not going to happen this issue. I think I will be able to do a big mailing comment issue next time, with WisCon behind me, and briefly will feel virtuous. Virtuousness is always a fleeting sensation for us ex-Catholics.



In December and January I explored my home's lack of handicap accessibility and experimented with new drugs. It's been a weird thing.

Scott and I went out gift-shopping on a Saturday early in December 1996. I came home feeling a bit stiff in my right ankle, as if I'd tied my hiking boots a little too tight. Well, the holiday shopping crowds had been thick and I tend to plow through the malls as quickly as possible because I dislike shopping, so it didn't seem surprising that I was tired. We had dinner plans and so I pulled my boots off when we got back home and put on some sneakers and a sweatshirt. I was cold. (Hey, it was December. It is Wisconsin. I was tired. All respectable reasons to be cold.) Then we went off to Laura's house for dinner. Several hours later I was ensconced in an easy chair in Laura's living room, shivering. I'd pulled my sweatshirt sleeves over my hands and two afghans over my shoulders and still couldn't get warm. When it became impossible to conceal the sound of my chattering teeth from my friends, Scott and I left. I felt really silly. I'd been enjoying the conversation, and though I was obviously coming down with something, it felt ridiculous that I should have to go home because I couldn't get *warm*. Oh, and my right ankle continued to ache. In fact, it was worse.

The next morning I couldn't put any weight on my right foot. In fact, it was almost unbearably painful to lower my foot over the edge of the bed. Something was definitely wrong and I started to suspect some kind of infection. So we called the clinic, and the doctor demanded that I come down to Urgent Care immediately . . . which was harder to do than I could imagine. I've got a rather high threshold of pain, but during the next few weeks, I went way over it. Scott helped me all he could, but there wasn't much he could do about the barbed metal collar that seemed to be slicing off my ankle.

I had had recurrent athlete's foot for many years, during which time I'd frequently visited the clinic and had many creams and salves prescribed for it. The creams and salves basically stopped working during the previous year, and apparently an infection gained entrance to my body through a lesion in the area of my foot affected by the fungus. It turned out to be a very fast-moving infection. Between the onset that Saturday afternoon and the next morning when I woke up unable to stand on my own two feet, the infection, proclaiming itself as a red tide, had spread halfway up my leg. Massive antibiotics were prescribed. The next day the tide had progressed further toward my knee, and stronger antibiotics were prescribed and injected. The tide began to ebb. I asked for pain medication. (Oh, are you in pain? No, I just hobble in here on crutches, gasping

with every step to create a dramatic effect.) For a week I made daily visits to the clinic and each of those visits took every last bit of my energy.

At home, I took possession of the couch in the living room around which Scott piled books and bottles of mineral water, the WisCon programming mailing, a telephone, and lots of catalogs. (This was the year I did almost all my holiday shopping via telephone. In January we threw all our catalogs away, knowing that the many orders I'd placed in December would result in a tenfold return of new catalogs. We underestimated.) Scott took off work for a few days during the worst of it, and we both discovered what a really bad house we owned for anyone that had problems getting around. I've always known we have an inaccessible house with the stairway at both back and front doors, but I had never considered the fact that because our house is an older one, and was built "in installments," that the little ledges at the thresholds of most rooms make an obstacle course out of the first floor. Let's not even talk about the stairway up to our bedroom. It was a rough few weeks until I was able to use crutches without wanting to scream, and then finally graduated to a cane.

After they eliminated the possibility of diabetes, the doctors finally took my athlete's foot seriously. They prescribed a stronger salve plus a new antifungal medication, terbinafine, which is taken internally. The new meds seemed to have a positive effect initially, but then my ankle began to swell outrageously. I couldn't even tie my shoe. It didn't hurt, but obviously something was still very wrong. At that point my GP referred me to a specialist, a dermatologist. Diane Thaylor took one look at my foot and laughed. "Those idiots!" she said, referring to my other doctors. It turns out I am allergic to all those creams and salves I'd been applying all those years. She told me to stop applying the creams and salves. Then she tested the infected area and it turned out that although I'd completed the course of antibiotics, the infection hadn't been cured yet. And in fact, the kind of infection they'd assumed I had, turned out to be a different kind of infection all together, requiring a different kind of antibiotic. I began another course of antibiotics. The terbinafine, the absence of creams and salves, and the new antibiotic did the trick. The athlete's foot disappeared, even from under my toenails, the swelling in my ankle went way down, and I started walking home from work (a four-mile walk) which strengthened my ankle considerably. I feel fine now.

I'm still taking another drug that Diane prescribed for me, Pentoxifylline, which is apparently some kind of blood thinner, which is supposed to repair the damage that the initial infection did to some tissues in my ankle, but I finish that up (finally!) next week.

December is a bad time to have health problems that confine one to a couch or a bed. But it resulted in probably one of the most relaxing holiday seasons we've had in many years. There was just lots of stuff that we couldn't possibly do, and it was necessary to apply fairly ruthless triage to our to-do lists. Certainly those three weeks or so are the longest time I ever went without using my computer. I got behind on WisCon stuff, but I would probably have gotten behind anyway if I'd done the holiday stuff I would have wanted to do if my ankle hadn't become infected.

I was in a lot of pain, but Scott was really great, and at times, it really got to be pretty funny. Like every night when I climbed upstairs, one step at a time, on my ass, with my right leg and foot extended out in front of me. (If I could keep my ankle elevated, the pain was less severe.) Sometimes I'd get halfway up the stairs and would pause to give my arms a rest and see a worried Scott standing below and we'd catch one another's eyes and start laughing uncontrollably. But I'm glad it's over.



Things are improving all over. Things have even improved at work. The other artists and I convinced upper management to set up several mediation sessions for our section and our supervisor. Actually the sessions were called "Communication and Conflict Transformation Skills," and I think several volumes of Dilbert could have been inspired by some of the stuff that happened. But, on balance, I'm glad we went through the process. I decided to put everything on the line, to be as honest as I could, and ended up being one of the most vocal persons in our group, which was probably no surprise to my coworkers. I figured that Jill would either hate me even more than she had before, in which case she'd eventually do something stupid and would lose big on the grievance I would file. Or she would learn that she could not intimidate us and would be forced to deal with us as adults. It seems, right now, that Jill has chosen to interact with us as adults.

Jill may still end up leaving the bureau all together. Her job was redefined in the reorganization (which is governmentese for "downsizing"), and she filed a protest about the fact that she was asked to

compete for her own job. She lost that protest, but in the interim her job was taken off the transfer list, and was only recently listed again. The fliers publicizing this listing mysteriously disappeared from most of the bulletin boards in the building and we almost didn't hear about it until the very last day available for anyone who wanted to apply. A fellow artist, Georgine, and I called up a couple people we knew who were qualified for the job and who work in the graphics field, and we're crossing our fingers. What a fantasy that would be—to have a boss that understood the work we do! Currently, the DNR goes along with the theory that supervisors do not need and in fact should not come from the same field as the workers they supervise. A manager does not, according to this school of management theory, need to know anything about what the workers do or how they do it. I've worked, once before, under a supervisor who came from the printing industry, and I liked it a lot. We'll see what happens here.

I only know I'm glad we did something and put the issues onto the table and dealt with them as a group. That alone has improved the atmosphere at work. We artists seem to have made quite a few friends among the word processors, too. They may have been surprised that we didn't back down on these issues and are more willing to trust us now.



And then there's WisCon.

It's a complicated thing to design programming for a multi-tracked convention. (Big surprise, hey Steve?) I've got a great committee here in Madison, and a wonderful and dedicated co-chair of planning in Debbie, but it's all taking a whole lot of time. And for the most part, it is time well spent—both in terms of friendships and work done. My only feelings of frustration come from the fact that I am putting off for yet another year the active pursuit of freelance work. (My goal is to get back to doing or increase the amount of freelance work that I did when Ellen Franklin lived here in Madison and was funneling me design jobs from her various clients. My current clients found me purely through word-of-mouth and jobs have been erratic.) I postponed the project of actively promoting my services for two years while we produced WisCon 20, and now I am postponing it again for WisCon 21. I don't feel I can take on new clients if I have such a major commitment taking up so much of my free time. At least not unless I jettison time with Scott to do so and that's simply not an option. As a result, I've decided not to volunteer for a major role in next year's WisCon. However, in the meantime, I feel

exceedingly good about what the programming committee is accomplishing this year.

Actually, the committee is turning out to be a good thing for me personally in terms of the people involved—beyond the work we've been doing, I mean. Most of the in-town committee comes from a book discussion group at Borders which has been meeting on the first Tuesday of every month for the last couple years. It's a great discussion group; the leader Gerald Schoenherr chooses good books. The discussions have been getting more and more interesting as we've gotten to know one another better. They've also been getting rowdier; our laughter echos throughout the whole store. We're known as the most boisterous book discussion group at Borders. The amazing thing to me is that none of the members, other than myself and Scott (and Steve Swartz, before he left town) come from the local Madison SF group. As we build this new network of friendships and activities, I'm sometimes filled with a strange feeling of *déjà vu* The joint forging of friendships and accomplishments reminds me in a lot of ways of my feelings during the beginnings of the Madison SF group, when we were all getting to know one another, publishing *Janus* together, and beginning to plan WisCon. I really enjoy the feeling of building friendships and building accomplishments at the same time. This is something that's very strong in me—the impulse to *do* something within a relationship. I can see that this aspect is ebbing within the Madison SF group as individual members chose diverging paths. I've gradually realized that I need a certain mixture of activism and friendship within a community of friends. Temporarily, the feeling was very strong as we worked on WisCon 20 together, but in many ways, that experience was tinged from the beginning with an awareness of its ending. Many of us were returning to work on the convention only because of the anniversary aspect of WisCon 20. Many of us were expending huge amounts of energy on a project that we knew we could not repeat in future years. I think that I may have turned to this new group because it offers the possibility of the sort of activity that I need in a community of friends committed to some common goal.

Selfishly, I'm also hoping that the "new blood" being brought into WisCon will infuse the planning committee with fresh energy and will keep the only feminist SF convention in the world alive for a long time. As yet, I don't know if there's enough momentum built up among these new people and the out-of-town people who are beginning to see WisCon as the property of the feminist SF community rather than of

the Madison SF group. I think that WisCon's survival depends on those two things, but we probably won't know till after WisCon 21 if the seeds have taken root.

WisCon 21 is going to have a good program. There won't be the amazingly huge array of authors and editors and artists that attended last year's anniversary celebration and we will probably not have quite as many people attending, which is a good thing as far as I am concerned. But there's going to be a lot of good stuff happening. We will have slightly longer programs than WisCon 20 had, and we've scheduled lunch and dinner breaks, so I hope the relief from the stress of too many events and too little breathing space makes it more comfortable to people. But I am also hoping that the we're able to maintain the intensity of conversation that WisCon 20 achieved. Certainly if the program listing is any indication, there will be lots to talk about. By the way, we will be posting a list of WisCon 21 programs on the WisCon web page very soon (mid April, I think) if any of you would like to check it out.

Mary Doria Russell, author of *The Sparrow* and winner of the Tiptree Award this year (with Ursula Le Guin for "The Mountain Ways") will attend. I learned that she'd won the Tiptree a few days before our main questionnaire went out, and I hurriedly edited some program descriptions to include mention of her, and added a book discussion about *The Sparrow*. Apparently Russell has never attended an SF convention (or at least she hadn't before she attended the Florida Conference of the Fantastic, where she received the Tiptree Award a couple weeks ago), and when she got our questionnaire, she sent an email message to Karen Fowler expressing amazement that her book was "all over" the program material she'd received. "Is this a convention I should go to?" she asked Karen. "Do you want to handle this?" asked Karen, when she forwarded Mary's note to me. Well, of course I wrote enthusiastically about WisCon, and urged her to attend. It worked. She will be here, and will in fact be *reenacting* the Tiptree ceremony with Karen Fowler, Pat Murphy, and Delia Sherman, including their rendition of Tom Leher's *The Vatican Rag* in honor of the Roman Catholic elements in *The Sparrow*. We're hoping that the chair of the 1996 panel of Tiptree judges, Janet Lafler, will join the crew up on stage for the reenactment, since she missed the actual award ceremony.

By the way, I recommend that any of you planning to attend WisCon 21, try to read *The Sparrow* before the convention. It will be talked about quite a bit, and believe me, you Do Not want to hear anyone

talking about it until you have finished it. You Do Not want to have the ending spoiled for yourself. And if your reaction to this book is anything like mine, you will Want to Talk about it. I liked it very much, but that's all I'll say about it for now.



Scott and I went to Seattle for Potlatch. We travel well together. We both like wandering around a new city and trying to imagine what it would be like to live there. How would it would feel like to commute on these buses into work; what would it be like to have access to these streets, this downtown, this landscape? What are the local politics like? How active would we be likely to get in them? And, since we've been together now for 12 years, we have more and more friends in common. So visiting with them was both fun and less stressful for Scott than it was in the early years when I was introducing him to what must have seemed like crowds of new people every time we traveled. We were able to spend some time with Jane and Steve. We had dinner with Nicola Griffith and Kelley Eskridge at their home. I had a wonderful long conversation about type and publication design with John Berry. In fact, I (very) briefly got involved trying to help him with some production problems having to do with a book he's currently designing and found it really difficult to tear myself away from that conversation. Many of our friends—knowing that I haven't been altogether happy with my situation at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources—gave us the hard sell and tried to convince us to move (now!) to Seattle. Well, obviously we're still in Madison, but Scott and I had to agree that if we decide to move—if I get laid off or decide to quit, for instance—that we would not limit our job search to the Madison area. Seattle would be right on the top of our list.

Tom Whitmore did something I've never seen done before at a convention. He published notes, taken by volunteers, for all 6 Potlatch programs. I was walking down the hall with Jae Adams, who hadn't heard about this innovation yet. Jae is the mistress of the SF³ mimeo. I pretended to get very excited about Tom's idea. I said, wouldn't it be a fine thing if we did the same thing for WisCon 21? Notes could be taken at each of the 130+ panels. "And *you* could print them all before the end of the convention!" Luckily, Jae recognized the joke. If not, she might have killed me.

Well, that's all until next time, when I promise there will be nothing but mailing comments. See many of you, I hope, at WisCon!

—Jeanne Gomoll