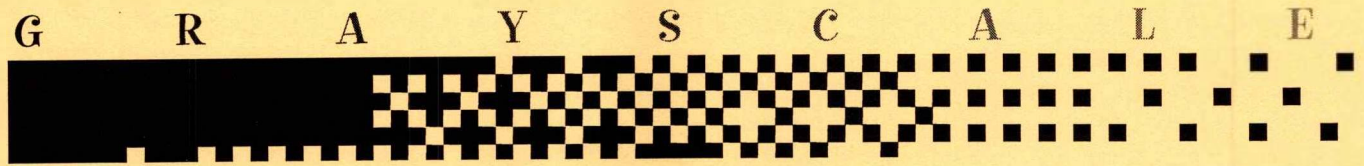


The illusion of gray created
by an arrangement of
alternating black and white dots



This is Grayscale #1, a zine for *Intercourse*, and an Obsessive Press Publication #181, from Jeanne Gomoll, 2825 Union Street, Madison Wisconsin 53704-5136. 608-246-8857. ArtBrau@aol.com

September 27, 1996

Reading *Intercourse* 66 elicited a mixture of strangeness and familiarity in my mind. There are lots of conversations going on here that feel to me like those one overhears in snatches walking down a crowded street. (“...so we had to duct tape his tie to the fencepost...”) The conversations may be intriguing, but their lack of context suggests many interpretations to the creative mind. On the other hand, I already know most of you, and can easily fit some of those conversations into context with recent face-to-face discussions. Many of your zines, in fact, make me feel quite at home.

...We bought a 1¹/₈ ton boulder..

Donya’s zine provided one of those strange, out-of-context, conversations. (“...we bought a 1¹/₈ ton boulder for placement near the porch...”) That stopped my eyes in their tracks.

My thoughts drifted to the photograph I bought at WisCon 19 from Lisa Freitag, Minneapolis photographer and fan. The image she caught was of a misty field somewhere in Scotland upon which monstrous boulders were scattered randomly. The picture, with its carefully fenced space, makes it look almost as if a farmer was *growing* boulders. The reason I bought that photograph — besides the fact that it is beautiful and mysterious and not quite earthly — is that it reminded me (well, in slightly exaggerated form) of my family’s backyard in New Berlin, Wisconsin (a suburb of Milwaukee). Like most of Wisconsin, except for the southeast corner of the state, our neighborhood’s topmost geological features were laid down by a passing glacier about 10,000 years ago. Huge, mile-high walls of ice bulldozed over the land, plowing sand, gravel and rock ahead of it. Where the glaciers stopped, we now have hilly moraines, pocked with kettle lakes and kames. Where the glacier passed over, there are more kettle lakes, drumlins, and eskers. But mostly there is a thick frosting of rich soil, sand, gravel, and rocks released by the ice as it melted, all arranged in gentle swells and swales over the landscape. The process is similar to the one that produced the rocky soil of New England, except that southern Wisconsin supported prairies for many thousands of years after the glaciers left, and developed a rich, black topsoil on top of the rocks.

My parents bought several acres of land in “Greenfield Acres” in the early 1960’s, and my dad and a handful of male relatives and friends built a house upon it. Dad undertook the landscaping of the 1¹/₂ acres himself, thereby discovering the true meaning of glacial geology. After many days of backbreaking labor, dad decided to build a wall with all the boulders he found poking up above ground level which needed to be excavated in order to level the yard. It turned out he dug up enough rocks and boulders to build two walls, with which he terraced half the length of the lot.

I was 9 years old. Dad promised my younger brothers and me a reward if we would help him carry what poetic geologists call, “gifts of the glacier” (or “more damn *rocks*,” as dad named them), to the wall site. When we rounded up some friends from the neighborhood, dad extended the promise to all the kids, about a dozen of us. Help him, he said, and he would take us all to a local drive-in custard

stand and we could order anything we wanted from the menu. Well, we filled up the wheel barrow repeatedly and rolled and dragged rocks for the whole day and still didn't manage to finish, but dad took us to the custard stand anyway and each of us ordered the most exotic thing on the menu. Twelve little kids, twelve banana splits. Dad didn't bother ordering anything for himself, just grinned and settled back and waited for the inevitable moment when we admitted that we couldn't finish a whole dessert all by ourselves.

Three big boulders remain where dad dug them up because they are too big to move without heavy equipment. Dad finally got rid of one huge boulder a few years ago, when the repeated winter freezes and thaws caused it to crack apart into several moveable pieces. But that same seasonal temperature variation also tends to slowly push *more* rocks up from the depths, and every once in a while a new rock has to be excavated to save lawnmower blades. When you start digging, you never know just how big the rock is going to be uncovered; it might be small enough for one person to carry. It might turn out to be a granite iceberg that has to be broken apart by pick ax.

So you can see why I was bemused at the idea that someone might actually *buy* a boulder. That someone might actually *pay* to have a boulder deposited on one's lawn....

WisCon 20

It seems I joined *Intercourse* a month too late to read the WisCon reports that several of you apparently included in your zines. I would love to read them if any of you have extra copies.

Lisa Hirsch mentioned the WisCon videotape. We sent flyers to all WisCon 20 members about that, but if you didn't see a copy, I can tell you that we are selling videotapes for \$9 each (plus \$2.50 postage for

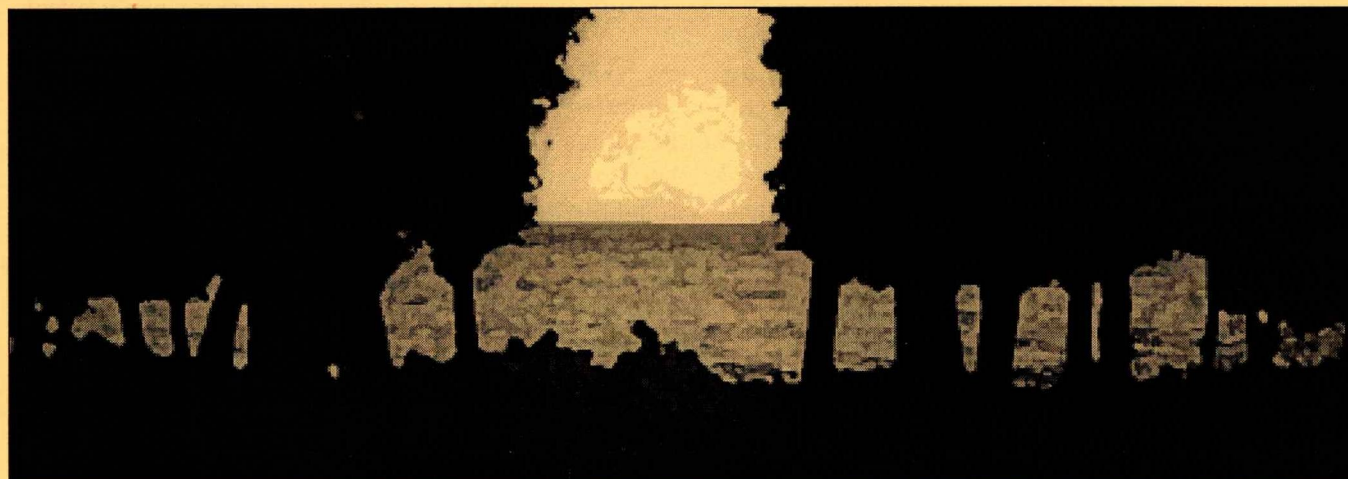
those who can't pick them up in person). Each tape includes Le Guin's speech, Merrill's speech, the Tip-tree ceremonies, and the *Always Coming Home* performance. According to our agreement with Le Guin and Merrill, the tapes are for private use only, and cannot be shown at conventions, etc., or transcribed for publication. We will be counting up orders on October 15, and making that number of copies of the videotape. If you'd like to get one, make sure you get a check to SF3 before October 15, 1996. (Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701-1624)

Helen Merrick and Tess Williams, by the way, have gotten permission from Le Guin to print her speech in their upcoming anthology, *Women of Other Worlds*.

Rock Island

One of my favorite places to vacation is a little island in the middle of Lake Michigan and the eastern fringe of Wisconsin. I've been visiting the place since the early 70s. Scott and I have spent a few days or a week up there most summers since we met one another in 1984.

Rock Island is located just past the larger Washington Island, which dots the "i" of Door County peninsula, which resembles a boney thumb pointing across Lake Michigan toward the northern part of the state of Michigan. To reach Rock Island, you must travel northeast through Door County. The most interesting route is along the northwest shore, because the road skims along a series of scenic bluffs that overlook Green Bay, and dips into and out from six towns that crowd into the space between bluffs and fjords (another "gift of the glacier"). Door County's major industries are cherry orchards, freshwater seafood, and tourists; its economy supports a thriving community of artists; picturesque views wait around



every turn. But we usually hurry through the more heavily populated Door County, sometimes stopping only for a fish boil or Swedish pancakes. Franchises are outlawed, (so no MacDonalds, no Walmart, nor any other chain stores), but the high density of Scandinavian “kitch” tends to overwhelm. We drive onto one of the big ferry boats leaving Northport Pier at the northernmost tip of Door County and cross *Porte des Morts Strait* to the more rural atmosphere of Washington Island, where the permanent population usually outnumbers visitors and the island still seems sparsely populated. We’ve bicycled around the island a few times, and can imagine owning a summer home there, or even retiring to the island sometime. It’s a wonderful place, in spite of which, we usually take the shortest route to Jackson Harbor on the other side. You can’t drive onto the ferry anchored there; it’s a foot ferry named the *Kharfi*. So we leave our car in the parking lot by the dock, and sling our heavily loaded backpacks onto our shoulders, grab one handle each of a cooler and cross the last strait to Rock Island aboard the *Kharfi*.

The state of Wisconsin owns the whole island, which is about 4 square miles in size, and administers it as a State Park. There are about 28 miles of hiking trails, but no roads. With the exception of the Park Ranger’s pickup truck, no cars are allowed on the island. There are 35 widely scattered campsites located as close as a mile from the dock and only water pump, most of them between two beaches, one rock and one sand that embroider a wide tongue of land that extends from the southeast corner of the island. Four sets of pit toilets service the area. In addition, there are five wilderness campsites a couple miles further along the path from the dock. Scott and I usually reserve a campsite along the furthest sand beach and seldom see more than a quarter of the other campsites filled. In a week’s time we only see only a very few other people on our hikes or on the beach. It’s not one of the more popular campgrounds, I’m told, because it’s too much of a hassle to most folks to carry stuff in (and out, there being no garbage pickups).

But I love it. One of the most amazing things about the place is the ever-present and peculiarly restful sound that the surf makes as it advances and withdraws through the millions of smooth rocks on the beaches and shallows, rattling the rocks against one another with its passage. The sparkling clean water in that part of Lake Michigan is another wonderful thing. It’s crystal clear; you can see the rippling pattern of sunlight upon ridges of white sand per-

fectly through water 12 feet deep. And then there’s the mature, dense forest which covers most of the island and borders the long sandy beach adjacent to our campsite with a whispering fir wall, not to mention the cliffs and the wildflowers....

We had perfect weather for our trip this summer at the end of August — no rain and warm weather in the 70s and 80s all week. The moon was full and we enjoyed spectacular moon rises most evenings. Each night, the moon rose in the midst of a grand sunset that painted the sea’s horizon a lovely pinkish orange and was reflected upon Michigan’s surface. Scott and I walked out onto our private beach, just beyond our campsite, and watched the sunset and moonrise each evening after dinner. Other years, we have enjoyed completely moonless nights, and more stars than one ever sees in urban skies. But this year, for the first time, the bright moonlight prevented the nights from ever getting completely dark.

One evening, I decided I wanted to take a quick swim and left Scott tending our roaring campfire. The water was warmer than it had been in the day, almost bath water warm, and I dived in without hesitation and swam away from shore for a long distance and then returned. As I stood on the shore, getting my breath back and letting the breeze dry me, a sudden stillness seemed to breath around me. The glowing sky, the long silver beach and the dark, bordering forest, the gently lapping waves, the great sea in front of me, and the glowing moon — suddenly felt almost painfully beautiful. There was no other person in sight, absolutely no sound, no reminder of human existence. I could, for a moment, believe that I was the only person alive on an uninhabited, alien planet. I raised my arms and felt, for a moment, completely *alive*, completely aware of the moment, completely a part of this world.

Well, it was a very restful week.

Reorganization, Dilbert Style

It turned out to be a good thing we had such a lovely, relaxing vacation, because I returned to chaos at work.

I have been employed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources 17 years as a graphic artist. The position supposedly is the same one I started with in 1979, but the work itself has changed drastically over the years. In 1979, I worked on a drafting table with technical pens and rub-on letters. A few years later the DNR purchased a typesetter and a little later, the growth of the tourism industry in Wisconsin led to

greater budgets for slick publications, and I learned how to do high-end color work. In the late 80s, I convinced my bureau to invest in Macintosh computers and now we do almost all our work electronically. I've always enjoyed the work, and still feel pretty good about the fact that I work for one of the most progressive departments of natural resources in the nation.

I expect the Wisconsin DNR ranking will change as a result of the current political administration's hostility to our mission, but I will probably continue to feel good about the work I do here, both in terms hands-on day-to-day projects, and the fact that its for an environmental organization, hamstrung though it may be. But right now, it's hard to focus on the reasons I like my job. Since January, we've been dealing with the Supervisor from Hell.

Last year, Governor Tommy Thompson (not my supervisor, but I'll get around to that later) initiated massive cutbacks in state government. (You may have heard of him ... the Newt wannabe who was mentioned for a while as a possible vice-presidential candidate for Dole? Tommy has just about eliminated welfare as anyone but rich guys know it in Wisconsin. In fact, Clinton just signed off on our W-2 law this week, which will make ours one of the nation's first experiments in income-tested welfare: if you're too poor, you don't qualify.) Anyway, last year he set the wheels in motion to gut state government. For example, he started out by eliminating the Department of Public Instruction, and though he was rebuked by the courts who reminded him that the DPI is protected by the state constitution, he'd already laid off most of the staff, so it'll take quite a while to build up the organization again. Tommy's always hated the DPI folks because they keep coming up with studies that refute his pronouncements. (He says, take welfare checks away from parents of truants. That will keep kids in school. And the DPI does a study and says, well, no, in fact...) Well, you get the idea. The DNR, my agency, gets Tommy riled too, with requirements for environmental impact statements and the obstinate tendency to enforce pollution laws.

Taking note of the carnage Tommy inflicted on an agency that fought him, my agency took the initiative and is inflicting carnage upon itself. Tommy ordered the DNR to eliminate 450 positions, and to decentralize most agency functions to "centers" scattered around the state, and for the past year we've been working on that plan. Most of the 450 eliminated positions will be accounted for by retirements, positions already empty, and future vacancies; but a huge number of people are now having to make personal

decisions about whether they want to relocate themselves and their partners and families to small towns far away from Madison or accept a layoff. Entire programs are being eliminated: recycling education and market development, for instance, and most of the Endangered Wildlife and the Research Bureaus are gone. Moral drops lower every day. Last weekend, a DNR employee committed suicide because of the reorganization; several other mysterious deaths are suspected to be related.

In the midst of that, I should be relieved, I suppose, that they decided not to eliminate the publications section and "out-source," as they say, design and production functions. My job and the jobs of my fellow graphic artists have not been threatened, though more cutbacks are predicted for next year. (And taking an even longer view, I think we're all fairly employable outside the DNR, if worse comes to worse.) Not to say that we have been untouched by the reorg, however....

We artists were involved in the early stages of our transformation which involved moving us from a bureau whose only real connection to our work was that the staff included some of our major customers. Our being a part of the Information and Education Bureau (I&E) always confused people who weren't really sure, in the first place, how to get a publication done. Should they go down to the old word processing unit, renamed "Document Design"? Should they go to the Bureau of Information Management? Should they go to us, the graphic artists? We recommended that all positions that are concerned with publication production (plus web site development, slides, video, etc.) be consolidated into one section, and that we advertize a simple, one-stop shopping method for getting this stuff done. The higher-ups were deliriously happy with our suggestion because it fell in line with the kind of reorganization they were planning in the first place. And so, in January, we artists moved downstairs and began the work of setting up a new section with Document Design workers. We changed our name and call ourselves "Publications and Design" (PD). All very well.

We left a supervisor had never really understood what we did, and had no idea how to supervise us and basically left us alone, but who was happy to take the credit for our excellent production reputation and income derived from charge-backs for our time by other bureaus. When we metamorphosed into the PD section, we were assigned to the supervisor who was already in charge of the Document Design folks. Jill doesn't understand what we do any more than our

previous supervisor did and she is much less interested in learning. We were, in fact, defined as a "problem" the moment we moved down here: slackers until proven worthwhile. She has accused us all individually and as a group of being liars, cheats, and incompetent. It's pretty obvious from the cowed behavior of the former Document Design team, that her methods of intimidation and divide-and-conquer have worked fairly well with them. None of them stands up for one another against her, and so Jill is greatly frustrated at the fact that we artists are confronting her tactics as a group.

It turns out that Jill has had union grievances filed against her in the past. We are now preparing to file our own harassment grievance against her. Coincidentally her position has been eliminated by the reorg plan and she may or may not be eligible to compete for the new, higher level position which replaces it. (This process is happening all over the agency and is very complicated, but is succinctly summarized by the Dilbert cartoon in which the boss tells Wally, "We don't do layoffs in this company. But you *have* been selected to participate in our mobility pool! As the name implies, you get to scurry around trying to find a nonexistent internal job before the ax falls." "How's this different from a layoff?" asks Wally. "With layoffs you get to keep you dignity," answers the boss.) Anyway, we have received some support from higher-ups, and suspect that the reclassification of Jill's job may be their attempt to get rid of the problem

I got back from vacation to horrific tales of confrontive meetings between the artists and Jill. In one meeting, Jill apparently screamed at Linda (the least assertive member of our team) and accused her of lying, and causing her to sob uncontrollably at her desk for an hour afterwards. (The offense? Linda had asked a co-worker who had spoken at a previous meeting to proofread the minutes before she distributed them. Jill felt she should have seen them first.) I am one of the most assertive members of our group, and it felt very much as if Jill to took advantage of my absence try to wear down the others. We have done everything we can to work out our differences in meetings, with memos, mediators, and appeals to upper management. Enough was enough. I called our union steward and encouraged the other artists to do so as well. When I told her I was setting up a meeting, Jill attempted to convince us that she would be required to attend; I said no. The union steward said no. Jill steamed. We've set up a meeting this week, and it's been unusually quiet since then. Jill pretends not to see us if we pass her in the hall. She does not

respond to voice mail or email. She has just announced she's going on vacation for a week, beginning the day of our meeting with the union steward.

So every once in a while I close my eyes and imagine that I am back on that beach on Rock Island and can only hear the surf and the wind in the trees.

I managed to survive for more than a year running WisCon, a most stressful experience — exciting and wonderful though it was — without once getting sick. For six months before the con, I slept an average of 4 hours per night. I never caught a cold; my energy level felt inexhaustible. But I come home from one of the most relaxing vacations I've ever had, dive enthusiastically back into my work, and what happens? I come down with a monster cold that I am still struggling to recover from. Figures.

But I am glad we're taking action. It feels to me that things will be resolved very soon, one way or another. And that is a good thing.



I'll have to read a bit more of the conversations here before I feel comfortable diving in, but I'd like to fill up this last page with a few comments....

Art Widner

In my circle of acquaintances, few people smoke. I don't know if that translates to a Midwestern generalization, but it certainly is true for most of Madison, which enforces antismoking laws similar to California's. ■ We also noticed the omnipresence of churches in Nashville. As we drove into town, Scott noted that there seemed to be a requirement for a church on every corner, which reminded us both of the unwritten Milwaukee ordinance requiring a tavern on every corner.

Jane Hawkins

You commented to Annette about the absence of a term "for people who are extremely important, but aren't lovers or relatives." I've been reading Jane Austen's novels and noticed that she uses the phrase "particular friend." Not a very good term, really, but it's interesting that the need for this term has been with us a long time, while our culture doesn't seem comfortable with the term or the concept. ■ Oh dear, am I *not* supposed to call her Deb!?! ■ Ironic, isn't it, that you "can't see as beautiful ... those who look angry," considering that stupid old cliché, "You look beautiful when you're angry."

Steve Swartz

You grumble (in the “Who am I” intro-zine stuff section) at people who speak in an uninformed manner about economics. And certainly I have been known to grumble about people who suggest by their opinions that my experience and training are superfluous. I’ve even enjoyed watching you harpoon the Limbaugh-inspired sentiments my dad unluckily spouted in your hearing about the workings of the Fed. But I think I disagree with you on a deeper level about whether it is a bad thing that so many people feel comfortable expressing opinions on fields which affect their lives without the expertise to back their opinions. I very much like what Suzette Haden Elgin says on the matter of de-mystifying areas of expertise (like her own, linguistics). She believes and I agree with her, that much of the jargon in any field is invented and protected for the purpose of *preventing* the uninitiated from expressing opinions or venturing to contradict the “experts.” We are all experts in our own language, says Suzette. And we are all, to that extent, experts in the way economic forces affect our lives. A great deal of dissent being expressed currently is from the point of view of folks whose lives are being affected disastrously by the economic decisions being made by so-called experts. I think they have a right to be heard and heard with respect. And furthermore, getting back to Suzette’s thesis, the process of clarifying information in any field, so that a specialized knowledge of jargon is not required for fluency can only help everyone.

Steve, I really admire the clear way you are seeing and explaining to yourself your experiences of the past few years. It represents a lot of work and you should feel proud of yourself for persevering through the struggle. I wish you much happiness in the future, though I sure wish there’d been a way for you not to have had to have moved so damned far away! Scott and I both miss you. ■ Your comments about alchemy’s bad rep reminded me of Theodore Roszak’s *Memoirs of Elizabeth Frankenstein*. I know you said you didn’t like it much, but your views on the change from alchemical philosophy to science, seems to have struck Roszak in a very similar manner to your own. What did you think of that part of the book? ■ And here, when I saw your zine title, *Sublimatio and Coagulatio*, I thought the first part referred to Wisconsin winters, when frozen lakes sublime to vapor....

Karen Summerly

If you haven’t heard already, Ellen Klages’ doctor has decided she did *not* suffer from an attack of diverticulitis at WisCon. It’s still not clear what she did have, but she’s recovered now. And last time I heard, had a great time at Clown College.

Douglas Barbour

Hello! It’s been a long time. (*CRapa?*) ■ What a horrendous health care horror story. I’ve got two groups of friends immersed in similar stories, both of them hinging on the fact that we must be most alert and ready to do battle with the health bureaucracies when we have the least energy for it, when we are sick. A brain tumor was discovered in the daughter of a friend of mine. Luckily, Evelyn (the mother) is a very strong and determined person. If she had not been, her daughter Anita might well be dead right now. Besides having missed this tumor, a very slow-growing one, in a catscan done several years ago, the HMO doctor who saw Anita got angry at Evelyn for taking Anita to another (non-HMO) doctor who diagnosed the tumor. But after diagnosis, he expected to take charge, and told Evelyn that the operation would have to be done immediately, within two weeks. Evelyn again went out for another opinion and ended up taking Anita to Johns Hopkins, whose doctors told her that in fact there was no rush. It turned out that the HMO doctor was leaving for a vacation in Europe in two weeks.... The story gets even more complicated and more outrageous, but I’ll leave it there. Health care is a scary issue these days.

More, later

I hope to contribute more to the on-going conversation here next time. I was intrigued by Lisa’s comments about modes of interactions on a day-to-day basis with a housemate, and since I’m currently in the midst of reading Jane Austen’s novels and—until very recently—had the same reactions to Austen’s writing, I also look forward to more on that topic. Art made me think about the different ways people travel, what they want to get out of trips or how they structure their vacations. I’d like to get around that discussion, too. I’m very glad to finally join you all and look forward to some great talks. See you soon.

—Jeanne Gomoll