

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

G R A Y S C A L E

This is Grayscale #8, a zine for *Intercourse*, and an Obsessive Press Publication #204 (a milestone!), from Jeanne Gomoll, 2825 Union Street, Madison Wisconsin 53704-5136.

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2 April 1998

It's been hard to sit down and write for *Intercourse* these past couple months. Late winter, early Spring is always the busy time of the year for me at work, since we are racing toward the fiscal year printing deadline on May 1, after which date, nothing can be printed until the beginning of the next fiscal year on July 1. I do a huge amount of work for the Bureau of Parks and Recreation, which has its greatest need for printed materials starting in May and June when the parks open. So my workload doubles or triples from its usual volume and all my clients subtly or overtly ask or demand that I make their project my number one priority. This year, it's a little worse, because one of my fellow artists (there are four of us) has been out for six weeks recovering from surgery. In spite of that, I think that we're going to make our deadlines. But the stress level sure has crept up a few notches.

So there's not much time in the normal day to work on some of my other projects, like WisCon programming. Nevertheless we are getting it done. Scott volunteered to help me this year. He and I will be putting in a lot of hours this month, scheduling programs. But I did most of the preliminary work myself, November through March, collecting program ideas, sending out a program list to potential program participants, and communicating with folks about their choices. Luckily, the database I built for WisCon 21 is working like a charm this year, and the fact that I did programming for WisCon last year makes it less difficult this year. Debbie's again doing some work with us on the final stages—selecting the final programs, scheduling, etc.—which is a good thing, and makes me feel much more confident about the final product. (Thanks Debbie!)

Dropped in the middle of those ongoing do-list generators, is my Dad, who took an ambulance ride to the hospital last month for what we thought was a heart attack, but which turned out to be an attack of severe angina. The cardiologist performed angioplasty on Dad the next day. He has been experiencing some alarmingly serious health problems these past couple years — hip surgery in both his legs which has greatly reduced his mobility, glaucoma, several unexplained fainting spells, breathing problems related to mysterious scarring in his lungs (possibly from years ago when he used to smoke cigarettes), and now a heart problem. My sister Julie traveled up to Milwaukee from Austin when Dad was hospitalized and I drove in from Madison. My brother Steve and Dan live in Milwaukee. So we were all there with Dad, and talked with one another about how suddenly his health has deteriorated. Frankly, we had all assumed that Mom would experience worse health problems earlier than Dad ever did. In general Dad has always seemed the more vigorous of the two of them, and it seemed that he took care of himself better than Mom cares for herself. But the statistics are kicking in on schedule. Dad is 72 and Mom is 70 and Mom's chances of outliving Dad suddenly seem very good. Today, I got a call that Dad is in the hospital again. His EKG looks good; his stress test turned out fine, but he's been experiencing some extreme and worrisome cold sweats for no discernible reason. So they're doing more tests.

It suddenly occurs to me that the last time I published an issue of *Grayscale* was more than a couple months ago, more like four. . . . It turns out that my last issue was written in early December, and that I have two zines worth of mailing comments to catch up on, but probably won't if I expect to make the April deadline for *Intercourse*. So, a quick catch-up. . . .

The holiday season was a fine one for Scott and I, climaxing as usual with our annual New Year's Eve Party. We made fortune cookies and stuffed them with custom-written New Year's predictions for our guests. We set up a champagne-tasting and were relieved to discover that the favorite kind of champagne of the evening was *not* the most expensive variety. We stayed up till dawn partying with the last dozen guests and went out to breakfast with them as the sun rose. ♣ In January, Scott and I flew out to Potlatch and had a wonderful time. I was toasted as some kind of hero for designing the pubs and working at a pace that is considered normal at my workplace. (What a nice thing it is to be praised for doing something that is taken for granted by others!) It was good to see so many of you in Oakland, and in some cases to meet you for the first time! ♣ We survived the Green Bay Packers' loss of the Superbowl. ♣ We saw several excellent plays produced by Madison's repertory theater, *Sylvia* and *Long Day's Journey Into the Night*. ♣ In February, we met my new niece — Rachel, newborn daughter of my brother Dan and his wife Kelly. In the process of looking for a gift, Scott and I dabbled in the very strange, complex and sort of scary world of "Infant Transport Units," otherwise known as baby strollers. And I have been enjoying getting to know Rachel's half-sister and Kelley's daughter, Amanda, who is far more interested in SF&F than are my other niece and nephew, Sara and Eric (my brother Steve's kids). I am starting to funnel books to Amanda and am looking forward to conversations with her about them. ♣ The freakishly warm Midwest winter (which apparently was part of the warmest worldwide February temps ever recorded) lasted all the way until March 8, when a blizzard dumped about a foot of extremely wet, heavy snow on us. (That, of course, was the very same night our snowblower refused to work and Dad went into the hospital. All of winter seemed compressed into one week.) The snow melted the next week and we slid into mid-70° temps, feeling like we had teleported into June. I think I saw a mosquito the other day; tulips are weeks early. Unfortunately, the early blooming means that the lilacs will probably have finished blooming by WisCon. . . . ♣ In March, we participated in a re-enactment of the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention, in honor of Women's History Month. There were a lot of women volunteer readers, and so I only got to read a few very short speeches (2 or 3 lines each) but it was great fun listening to the others. Scott had come with me, intending to play the role of an appreciative audience, but since there were so few male volunteer readers, he was drafted to read quite a

few speeches originally given by male delegates. They were, for the most part, hilariously sexist and he was roundly hissed and booed for his efforts (and later, applauded, for being such a good sport). ♣ Unaccountably, I still managed to fit reading into my schedule. I finally got around to reading Geoff Ryman's *Was* and was bowled over by it, though I was less impressed by the book I read as a companion to that one, Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: the Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. But I loved Mary Doria Russell's sequel to *The Sparrow* — *Children of God*. And I was very happy to have won a copy of Vonda McIntyre's *The Moon and the Sun* at Potlatch, for her tale of what it might have been like if a Renaissance Man in the late 1600s had turned out to be a woman. I also read Karen Joy Fowler's *Black Glass: Short Fictions* which I highly recommend, and Geoff Ryman's *The Child Garden*, which disappointed me a little with my expectations built up by *Was*. I read a couple Sheri Tepper books in preparation for WisCon—*Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *The Family Tree*, both of which have at least one severe, major plot problem, but which I found compelling nonetheless. Their plots certainly wandered far less than those of her previous novels. *GD&F* explored territory she began with *A Gate to Women's Country*, only in a contemporary setting, and *The Family Tree* is especially interesting for the fact that it has this hugely shocking "surprise" in the middle of it, which prevents me from saying much about it, except to say I enjoyed how thoroughly she fooled me. Also in preparation for WisCon, I read Ellen Kushner's *Swordspoint* and decided I wouldn't want to live in a society where dueling was considered an ethical and reasonable way to deal with conflict. I finally got around to Fay Weldon's *Letters to Alice on First Reading Jane Austen*, which was really fun, especially the letters about Austen's economic situation. I read only one book I really wish I hadn't and that was Naomi Mitchison's *Solution Three*. It may have been revolutionary in its time (the early 1970s), but it is badly written and much, much too obvious in our time.

I have started to notice that the products of our aging boomer-dominated culture are vigorously putting down youth. There was an HBO commercial last year that I found quite funny and would still laugh at if I saw again. (It featured several vignettes, each highlighting a young person saying something really dumb, which of course was intended to make the viewer feel very superior.) But it's starting to pile up, you know, and I'm beginning to feel uneasy. I remember my revelation as a teenager when I suddenly realized that in most of the SF I was reading

there were few women and those female characters that existed were incompetent. I am wondering what it might be like to be a 20-something and see so many stupid and incompetent images of oneself in popular culture. Last week, Scott and I saw the movie, *Twilight*, whose main characters are all seniors. Paul Neuman is in his 70s (and his two lovers are both over 50, which is still rather young for him, but was probably viewed as a revolutionary concept to the moviemakers). Susan Sarandon, Gene Hackman and James Garner all play roles of varying morality, but they are all smart and complex and interesting characters in spite of their un-Hollywoodish wrinkles. The minor roles, played by beautiful 20-somethings — the dumb daughter who has bad taste in lovers and accidentally shoots Neuman in the thigh; and the even dumber lover who fails to listen to his (older) other lover, and makes so many mistakes he dies of it — all contrast markedly against their far more glamorous elders. It's strange. I am glad to see life after 50 being portrayed as being full of complex possibilities, but find it oddly ironic that the generation that used to chant "trust no one over 30," is now so condescending to young people. I am beginning to wonder if the term and characterization "Gen X" originated more as a put-down than any kind of accurate reflection. And I am even *more* amused that the generation following Gen X seems to be getting raves from boomer commentators. I was thinking the other day how frequently one sees parent and their child not able to get along, but parent and grandchild get along splendidly, often in spite of radical political differences. The grandchild can do no wrong. The child can do no right. And this seems to be repeating in the macrocultural level. The generation that followed the boomers can do no right: they are politically apathetic (whereas *we* were involved), they are slackers, they have no respect, etc.... The Boomer Echo (which is how I've heard Boomers' grandkids described by one columnist) are great: they are committed to the community; they care; they work hard

First, of all, before I go onto mailing comments, I apologize to those of you I missed with comments from *Intercourse* 74. Thank you for all the meaty comments you gave Scott and I for our trip report. They were much appreciated and all read aloud along with Arthur's extraordinary encyclopedia entry on the sexual revolution. I may try to go back to comments from #74 in the next issue, as I have already marked places which I wanted to respond.

Comments on I-75

© Kimberly Cline

What a scary thing it would be to lose capability in one's arms and hands! It's hard to imagine what I would do if I was unable to draw, write or use a computer. So much of my sense of identity and worth comes from what I can do with my hands. You have my sympathy and a great deal of curiosity, as I watch how you make changes in your life to deal with your body's temporary (I hope!) limitations.

I know what you mean about how difficult it is to translate kinesthetic knowledge to verbal instruction. I am a poor teacher of things relating to graphics because so often — about tasks I've learned by doing — I feel reduced to saying, "I have to show you this. I can't tell you." About a lot of things — about ideas, for example — I am comfortably verbal. But not about how I do art on a computer.

I hope you are right about freelancing being less stressful than working for a single boss. I tend to think that the reverse is true, given of course, a halfway decent boss. My work habits would make a complete dependency on freelance income extremely stressful for me. I tend to want to finish a project or group of projects before I give much energy to what comes next. And, of course, in order to pay the mortgage, it's usually advisable for a freelancer to fill their calendar well ahead of the current job to reduce those pesky non-paid interludes. In a way, I like the fact that I am capable of immersing myself totally into a project but the same work habits that make me very productive at the Department of Natural Resources would get me into trouble if I had my own business. This is something I came to understand about myself while I was working a stint for my sister, Julie, at her graphic design firm, during which time I was able to view, first-hand, the day-to-day requirements of a business owner. I realized for the first time that my sometime-aspiration to support myself with freelance income, were founded on an assumption that customers would *find me* (in a timely manner) and that the paperwork of doing business would get done with no reduction in the time I spend as an artist.

I'm sorry to hear that your relationship with Zed ended so abruptly. It sounds to me like you've identified the big problem. Different styles of conflict resolution are a huge problem in any relationship, personal or work. But I admire your determination to stay friends with Zed in spite of the romantic failure. I wish

you the best of luck with both that friendship and the one with your new housemate.

Don't worry, I didn't think you were being rude in our conversation with John Berry. Hey, he deserved to be treated like a "star" that weekend. I hope you and I get to talk some other time.

© Lise Eisenberg

I don't know Lise. I think I'd still be using a rather worried voice and asking you how you were doing if I ran into you after reading this last apazine of yours. It seems you're less able to ignore the unpleasant aspects of your work situation when you write about it than when you talk about it. I hope you get out of that situation soon!

© Elise Matthesen

I'm sorry to hear that you've got insurance problems now, on top of health problems. This is one of the things that gets me really angry with the "new," "improved" HMO system of medical care: The more health problems one has, the less capable we are of dealing with the obstruction course the HMOs set up to take advantage of those most in need of their services. HMO supposedly stands for Health Maintenance Organization, but in my opinion they should change their name to PMO, Profit Maintenance Organizations. . . .

© Tom Whitmore

Your description of Smofcon's meeting meeting made me wish I'd been able to attend, even though I usually try to avoid as many meetings, meta or otherwise, as I can. Leadership for me, too often, means that I do too much of the work. I'm bad at delegation, but true to my early Catholic upbringing — big on responsibility and guilt. I don't have much trouble relinquishing the leadership position, and in fact I've done it fairly often with specific roles at work and within the local SF group. But I definitely have a problem with delegation.

(Digression: My eye snagged at your use of the phrase "alpha males," which made me wonder if there were any women in the room or if you had forgotten them, and then I read the part where you say you meant that term to include women, too. Any term would have been better, because there's no way I can even imagine that phrase conveying a generic meaning.)

What do I want in terms of involvement of people in WisCon? You suggest that I simply ask for help. You're definitely right that I need to work on that technique (Asking Debbie to help with programming certainly worked out well!), but it isn't as if there are a lot of people here in the group that are waiting to be asked, even by people better at asking than I am.

Let me describe my view of how programming has evolved in the Madison group. In early WisCon concons — the first 10 or 12 years — one of the "problems" of most concom meetings was the fact that we'd so often go off-track during a meeting with conversations about programming. Many concom meeting tended to turn into program meetings because everyone was so interested in the panels and the ideas WisCon revolved around. We learned the mechanics of convention running only because it was necessary in order to convince all these neat people to come to our con and talk to us at the panels about ideas and issues we felt passionate about. Everyone on the committee had ideas and were sparked by the ideas that others brought to the meetings. Everyone wanted to be on panels.

This year, there is only one other person, Jim Hudson, on the current WisCon 22 committee besides me who has expressed interest in being on programming! I joined the current concom a few months after it had begun meeting because no one had volunteered to run programming. No one asks any questions about programming at the concom meetings — I mean questions about panel subject matter. Two people on the concom responded to my encouragement that they sign up for programming by email, saying, "I'm not qualified," which is a direct quote from one of them, and totally untrue in my opinion for both of them.

The interest in programming has dwindled gradually over the year as the interests of group members became more diverse, less focused on feminist SF. But ironically, I think it took a nose-dive at WisCon 20, when we had a super-abundance of well known, brilliant women authors attending, and filled an enormous number of panels mostly with out-of-towners. Steve Swartz did an extraordinary job making that year's programming the best we'd ever had at WisCon, but the number of local group members on panels decreased precipitously and since then, I get the feeling that most of the concom thinks of its role as that of stage crew, and that on-stage, program slots are more properly held for visiting luminaries and guests.

Ironically, WisCon 21 and 22 has put more people on programming than ever before, with the

exception of WisCon 20, of course. It seems to me that the impression among attendees from out of town is that programming is open to whoever wants to be part of it. And indeed we've got more people involved as panelists than we ever have before — over 110 at last count — which makes programming lively, controversial, varied and dynamic. I think this is great, but it worries me a great deal that the very people who are putting in the most work on the con have so little invested in what I think of as its heart and soul. My hope, when I chaired WisCon 20 was that more people would get passionate about the things that makes WisCon different from other conventions, that I would be able to re-energize people and the result would be that WisCon continued for a long time. As Jim Hudson says in his zine, the group *was* energized to the extent that we've had two viable committees since WisCon 20 and the individuals on these committees have worked well with one another. I think he's right that WisCon *will* continue to do so for a few more years at least. But I do worry that programming — the heart and soul of WisCon, to me — seems to have gotten to be the thing people on the committee feel least interested or qualified to do.

It seems to me that we're going to have to rely more and more on out-of-town folks to run WisCon. This could either be a good or bad path, but it's the way we're going, I think.

© Jane Hawkins

Thanks for reminding me about Bertina Bryar. I don't know if WisCon has received a membership from her. (I wouldn't know unless she also signed up for programming.) I hope we see her at WisCon.

Well, as a result of your writing about your experiences with menopause, I've started asking my doctor some questions and expect that I will start doing some research soon on the subject. One interesting thing my doctor told me was that women 40 to 50 years old are frequently being offered prescriptions for the pill during this time in their lives if they plan on doing hormone therapy after menopause. She says there is more evidence accumulating that this eases the sudden withdrawal from estrogen and prevents some of the worst symptoms of menopause. It's something to think about.

I'll be interested to hear about how your work with the kinesthiologist turns out. I wonder if you might also be interested in a theory I just found out about though a training session at work? It's called Perceptual Learning Theory and is based on the fact

that we all apparently operate in different "modes" (Audio, Visual, or Kinesthetic) while our brain is operating on each of three levels of consciousness. Beta waves are produced by our brain when it is most active and most conscious (and a brain scan shows spiky, fast movement). Alpha waves are produced by deeper thought and a brain scan shows slower, wavier movement in the subconscious level. Theta waves are produced by the deepest, almost trance-like state and the brain scan in theta shows the slowest and most shallow waves, all below the level of consciousness. Remarkably, everyone seems to have different modes (audio, visual and kinesthetic) associated with each of these levels.

My first reaction to a stressful situation is to talk about it. As I think about it more carefully, my mind constructs visual images and metaphors to understand it. Only much later and after much deeper retrospection will I think about how it *feels* to me. My pattern, it turns out, is AVK. It explains a lot to me about how I so often and easily ignore my body's messages. The techniques suggested by this theory are most useful, it seems to me, in dealing with the fact that when I talk to someone who has audio "in the back" as this theory likes to describe it, and if I insist that we TALK about it, I will tend to get frustrated by how my insistence will cause the other person to retreat from that conversation.

I just bought a book that goes into the theory with more depth (*The Open Mind*, by Dawna Markova, Conari Press), but I haven't gotten through it yet. And I'm sure I've botched some of the explanation up there, especially some of the stuff about brain waves. (And there's a LOT more information than I've included here.) But even the one-day workshop I went to made a lot of sense, and we've already used some of the techniques at work to deal with our different learning styles which sometimes clash at meetings. ("Hey, I'm an A in back. Give me a little time to think about this before I respond, OK?") It's funny sometimes, but it reminds all of us that we each have different learning styles.

One of my co-workers, Rob, worked through the exercises at this workshop and discovered that his pattern was VKA, which surprised all of us since he talks so much and so easily. But the instructor pointed out (and we all agreed, Rob included) that much of what he says is seldom "on point." Rob is an impressive digressor; he seems to talk to hear himself sometimes, or to avoid the question at hand. The instructor said that since our society so values the ability to talk and see (more than kinesthetic abilities), some of us train ourselves to overcome our natural tendencies,

but that in spite of that training, our perceptual ability “in front” and “in back” remains the same. I wonder if you and Steve are in fact quite opposite in your patterns. It wouldn’t surprise me if Steve was a KVA and that you have A in front, and that although you have done an impressive lot of talking with one another, the actual learning takes place at different times. For you it takes place in the process of the conversation. For Steve, it might take place afterward as he processes what he feels about what was said.

Thanks for your response to my question about Sam. You’ve convinced me.

© D Potter

As for whether there are more believers (in god) in the Midwest than either of the coasts, I now wonder if the question is irrelevant given the poll I read about the other day which suggests that a huge majority of Americans believe in angels. Sheesh.

© Debbie Notkin

Iwonder if the reasons you feel you behave badly when a partner is sick is that you give more than you get when you are sick.

I’ve never heard that menopause is easier for larger women. My doctor said she knew of no predictor of easier menopause. Is your information anecdotal? Not that that would make it less convincing, however, since medical practitioners might be expected to ignore anything that seems to suggest benefits to being fat. But I’m certainly curious.

Once again, I’ve worked myself into a time crunch so that I don’t even have to think about how much detail I can/should/want to go into regarding my relationship with Scott. Thanks for saying what you did about the fact that I’m not the only one in the apa who feels they have to be considerate of their partner’s privacy issues. I promise, though, I will try to get back to this topic.

I’ve got a lot of apa to comment on and too little time. This thing needs to go out to Debbie this afternoon. So I apologize to those I am slighting with mailing comments. Happy new house to Kerry Ellis! ☘ And thank-you Karen Summerly for a great list of ideas for alleviating depression. They sound like good things to do in general, and not just in times of crisis. ☘ I’m surprised at the number of people who were surprised to learn of nun and priest recruitment films. I guess I thought everyone who went to Catholic parochial school got exposed to these; now I

wonder. But if there were actual films, surely they were widely distributed. Maybe it was an experiment by the Milwaukee archdiocese? I’m thinking now that it would be fun to get a hold of some of these films. I remember them as being a lot like the films we saw in high school advertising various colleges, but I bet they’d be pretty funny to see now, especially considering how much has changed since I was in grade school. (nuns dress codes, scandals, etc.) ☘ And thanks to all of you who clued me into the correct spelling of my diagnosis, “fibroadenoma.” ☘ Karen Summerly asked me if I actually used hypnosis to calm myself in the week before my surgery. No, I didn’t actually hypnotize myself, not as I understand it. It felt as though I simply put the worry aside. See my note to Jane about this. ☘ Bernie Phillips described a comic book character called Duo Damsel. I’ll have to look this one up since she sounds remarkably similar to a short story character I once tried to write. ☘ I liked what Doug Barbour had to say about Clinton, that we should be more focused on our president’s failure to deliver on his ideals. That’s the reason I liked the recent film *Primary Colors* so much. It was one of the most moving treatments of the idea of lost ideals in politics I’ve ever seen, made all the more compelling because of its reflection of real events. I don’t understand why more people aren’t raving about Kathy Bates’ performance in that film. It was her story, of a strong, disillusioned idealist, that was the center of the story for me. ☘ I winced at Donya’s quick reference of her rough time in India, dealing with “the constant approach of people wanting something from us.” Donya, whose image is forming in my mind as someone who cares for others to such an extraordinary degree, would obviously feel tremendous pain in a situation where even a minimal response to obvious, desperate need is impractical. ☘ And I laughed when Arthur Hlavaty wrote that “one necessary sign of evolution to a civilized society will be looking back in horror at a benighted time when people spent an average of two hours a day going back and forth to work.” I felt so *civilized!* I look with horror at the idea that anyone would spend more than 40 minutes or an hour commuting. ☘ Let me know what you think of FrameMaker, Lisa. I used it for a month-long project back in 1995 before it went through some major upgrades, but even then it was an incredibly powerful program for big publications. I wouldn’t have wanted to use it for smaller pubs, thought, since it was a bit too straightlaced and didn’t allow for much creative layout. Also (to Lisa Hirsch) — I’m glad your own experience with fibroadenoma was complication-free.

—Jeanne Gomoll, April 2, 1998