

“*The Ring, The Shining*, the end of the universe, and some other things”

A letter to a friend, by J. S. Bernstein

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As for THE RING remake, I thought the psychospookadelic Video was interesting but the story behind it was pedestrian. The explanation wasn't suitably weird enough to explain authentically the abyssal mysteries of the Video. Someone is wrongfully murdered and therefore will rest unquiet until justice is served? That's one of the oldest stories of all! Yawn. This explanation is not at all what *The Ring* needs. *The Ring* requires something weird and absurd and visionary and Void, the Video has to be a conduit to another universe of understanding. We have to think about space and time and the mystery of Being when we watch *The Ring*, not zone out to a traditional ghost story. The Video CANNOT be some loony little girl's nonsense. The *girl* is behind it?—that's bogus and a thunderous letdown. Moreover *The Ring* is a tired compendium of so many creepy elements from other movies. This movie rips off everybody from *The Shining* on down. You got the kid from *The Sixth Sense* and the girl from *The Exorcist*, the phone from *Scream*, etc. As it is, the Ominous Video is just a gimmick. All in all, a failure. Wretched screenplay. Missed opportunity. For kids. As usual, making the movie as a commercial business venture ends up generating an entirely forgettable movie.

Maybe the Video can be an exhalation from our Culture of Absurdity and Evil rather than an expression and outcome of a single consciousness? The Video emerges into being in the manner of an evolutionary species. It just happens. As a result of a constellation of variables, it happens. A spontaneous generation. The Video is conceived in the manner of an immaculate conception, it is as if the mechanic assemblage of visible matter becomes itself “alive” and “conscious” and gives birth to the Video. The flux of Natural Forces tintured and skewed by human consciousness intervention ‘emits’ the Video in the manner of a freak accident. It happens as a lightning strike on dry stubble ignites a conflagration. (As if when Seth Brundle goes through the teleporter in *The Fly* he ends up turning not into a fly-thing but a *hole* into a parallel dimension where visible matter adheres to different physical and conceptual laws.) The Video is a by-product of Being. It is a material hallucination produced by the interplay of forces conscious and non-conscious that interrelate as the Whole.

(Or the Video is a link between Us and Them, ‘them’ being Spirits from some other planetary world in our galaxy, or Aliens from another galaxy, or Beings from another universal perspective altogether. These Ominous Others communicate with us using certain of our shapes and symbols to hypnotize us and draw us closer, for motives of their own. They designed the Video and introduced it into circulation. Who are these Moviemakers? (I suppose they could have designed a music CD or Playstation game or book of poems or prose to effect the same consequences.) If they wanted to snatch us into their Realm, why employ as the gathering process the mechanism of the Video? Why not just pluck us from where we stand without us the wiser for it until it happens? (Am I stupid to suppose that if these Others can devise such a magnitudinous phenomenon as the Video then they probably enjoy the power to invent other exotic tools and equipment? They must embody all sorts of Powers far beyond our own.) That the conduit between Us and Them is ‘installed’ in a Video that can be copied repeatedly and passed from person to person introduces the interplay of the Random and the By Accident as well as the free will of personal choice. The Ominous Others will make do with *whoever* happens to watch the Video, they’re not choosy. They’re patient as well; the Video might get lost and no-one might see it for ages. If they needed humans for a Science Experiment of some sort I suppose they wouldn’t go about gathering test subjects using the Video as the agent.

Maybe the Video is a diabolical practical joke on humanity by Mischievous Beings Far Greater and Wiser. Yes, we watch it and then promptly we die. Ha ha, what suckers we are. The Video is like a roving predator which eats up its victims like Jaws the shark. The Ominous Others put the Video into circulation just as a Hacker introduces a Virus into a Network. Just because.)

The Video is like a hole torn in Spacetime. It is like a hole in air you can jump through and end up Somewhere Else. It is like a möbius strip: it is spacetime folding in on itself. Like James Woods putting his hand into his torso in *Videodrome*: what if he could contort his whole body in through that gash? Where might he be then? The Video (as a conduit, a corridor) is linked to a “Space” that is “Opened Up” in the Void. 2-D becomes 3-D. Picture a tableau of a Lost Highway painted on a sheer brick wall, and then picture yourself walking down *that* highway . . . for real . . . The Video confirms the phenomena of multi-dimensions beyond the venerable institution of the Cartesian schema. The Video is synched up to the

content and rhythms of an Alterity. After we watch the Video we start to see the world around us differently. After we watch the Video we see the ordinary world coming in and out of focus in the manner of bad TV reception in a rainstorm. We see abysses where once was solid matter. I will be able to plunge my hand into the top of my wooden writing desk as if immersing myself into a tub of colorful crushed ice. The solid becomes permeable. When I lie down on my bed I am soaked up by my mattress as if by a sponge. The Video is the snag that unravels our consciousness. The fabric of reality comes apart. I become an interface between matter and Void. I inhabit the Beyond. I see hitherto unimaginable pathways cutting through the ordinary layout of things, in the manner of openings in a rockface or tree trunk, except that these apertures are somehow superimposing themselves onto solid matter—that is to say, an *emptiness* is superimposing itself on, say, a solid wall, and I am able to walk through this emptiness as through a doorway into a Weird Place. Solid rock absorbs me, I walk through mountains. Eventually my consciousness will evaporate into the Nothing like wisps of smoke and I will Be no longer.

Exposed to the Video, I end up intermeshing with a hallucination born not of *a* consciousness—the Video is born ‘naturally’ out of the coalescence of Abstract Machines of our Conscious Reality. The Video is a multi-dimensional spontaneous breath of the Plane of Consistency that is the macroview of our physical universe. It is a glitch in things, a glitch that is a portal to discovery, just as our human linguistic consciousness is a wound that keeps itself open for as long as it does, allowing us to discover what we behold of the Void. The Video is a passageway to the completely Other.

This leads me to wonder how we are to compute the information generated by an encounter with the completely Other? When we are transformed into a different dimensional realm, our brains will have had no practice in interpreting the organisation of the layout. What if the scales are completely different? What if we enter a world which is on a scale million of times our own? What would we see of this world? I think of Phil Lesh generating overpowering Sounds from his Bass Guitar during Grateful Dead concerts: the audience *feels* rather than hears these Sounds . . . Sounds so Thick and Powerful your whole body vibrates as if bombarded by tactile neutrinos passing through . . . These are Sounds too loud to be heard by the ear . . . This is why there are Deaf Deadheads . . . “feeling the music” . . . I also think of the Stargate sequence of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the moment—in the second part of the four part sequence—the moment when it looks like the pod travels *through* an organic

alien body on its way from Jupiter to the Alien Planet . . . If we are transported to a Different Realm, the sense data we accumulate may be garbled and ambiguous, we might see smells as if beholding vortices of fog; we might feel others' eyesight on our bodies as if we were standing in a stream of hot sunlight; and suchlike absurdities. Visible matter might look magnetism-fuzzy and come in and out of focus like reflections cast across the surface of a roiling river: this might be the outcome of our brains wrestling with the Strange Input. All might be as desaturated shadows cast across a desaturated ambience. We might be lost in a palatial ambience of mists where shapes fail to resolve, a world without the stability of edge and line and surface. Maybe it's a world in which even inert matter has DNA. A world where we feel our fundamental particles functioning, a tingling feeling. A world where electrochemical thought flows through our brains slow as thick molasses and we communicate with the low undersea tone of an audio track slowed to a hundredth of its original speed. (An MRI of my brain in this world would reveal the character of a lava lamp.) A world where we feel ourselves dislocated from the confines of our self-enclosure of flesh, a world where we move like a wide river or luminous cloud, our consciousness dispersed, amorphous, like an atmosphere congruent with the whole, at one with sparkling fields of energy. A world where we encounter visible matter as a symphony of harmonious tones, a world in which we *hear* the visible, our bodies embedded in a universal symphony of an infinite number of musical notes sliding from one enormous chord cluster to the next in a Perpetual Cosmic Progression experienced with our nerve endings. A world illuminated by different spectra.

Maybe if we're brought into a Different Realm through a Star Gate or Video portal we'll implode like deep-sea creatures brought up into air. We'll physically decay from our present age to our hoary death in a matter of seconds. Or we'll exist for a succession of epochs but we'll think and move at a faster speed than our ordinary rate, existing as if in a speeded-up movie. Maybe if we're brought into a Different Realm we'll automatically become embedded in a magnetic field, a force field in the shape of an egg, which somehow allows us to stay intact no matter what altered physical space we encounter. Our magnetic field will repel inimical forces. In this manner we'll be able to exist coherent in the Void, perhaps to witness the 'end' of our universe and the beginning of a new dispensation? Maybe we'll see everything past, present and to come in a nano-moment and exist for eternity (whatever eternity is) in that visionary time. Maybe our brains will indeed contain the capacity to comprehend the most Fundamental and when we're shunted into the Different Realm we'll

behold the Secret behind the All in the manner of hacking into the computer language that runs the software program. We'll read the BASIC of our uni-omni-multi-pluriverse and then what? Maybe the weirdest experience of all could be that the Different Realm is only *slightly* different from our Ordinary?

The Other is terrifying because we can never be sure what it is capable of.

If we are dislocated into a Different Realm maybe our brains will be tirelessly attempting to push the triangular piece into the square slot, as it were; our brains will fall back upon established patternations of physical matter as a method of 'making do' with the inconceivable visionscape of the Beyond. A strange otherworldly form looming in our sights will suddenly resolve into the structure of a skyscraper, or rocking chair, or whatever, just as sometimes we see faces in the grille of an automobile or animal shapes in the clouds. Shapes will keep bleeding into other shapes and we will have no idea where we are. Maybe the amount of data perceivable in this Different Realm is far greater than in our world, so that our brains are compelled to rev up to faster and faster speeds until they blow out like overheated engines. Smoking brain tissue generating such heat it melts itself! We'd probably pass out as soon as our brains began accelerating, all of our body energy would be instantly sapped by our head.

Above, when I wrote that 'maybe we'll behold the BASIC of our Cosmos' I was thinking something along the lines of a ritual in a sacred setting. We will experience ourselves standing in a high-ceilinged room with four high rectangular windows opening up onto four different landscapes. A springtime scene is revealed through one window, summer the next, then autumn, then winter. On a low circular plinth rests a mutable entity. One wide staring eye melting into a triangle melting into a circle melting into a square . . . Somehow I will be able to cognize the communication. Beholding simple symbols, the elementary shapes we learn in kindergarten, I will ascertain the Authentic Fundamental Understanding of the All. I will hear the most complicated expressed by the most simple. The 'mutable entity' might be solid and self-contained in its native dimension of being, it might be living and speaking before me, but for whatever reasons, that of the entity's scale or form for example, my *eyes* are unable to compute the perceptual data except via ready-made symbols from my old world, yet in my *mind* I will hear the essential teaching. I will absorb the clarity of the message as if breathing in pure air.

That the spookadelic Video in *The Ring* is found in a pile of videos in a hotel at the back end of nowhere is interesting. It's good dramatic sense to introduce the Incredible in a quotidian way. There's also the creepy sense that evil can lurk anywhere and everywhere and can turn up when and where you least expect it. A hotel is a good place to find the Video. A hotel is an interchange, a place of coming and going, a place of public transit like a bus station or airport, a place where the *foreign* plays an intrinsic part, a conduit for a constant stream of strangers who leave no mark behind; a hotel is a place of strangeness: you arrive, you vanish, no one remembers you were there: the hotel reveals itself as a visual metaphor for Time—the mystery of Time (Temporality) that averages all events down to nothing. The Establishment sees you as no more than a fleeting detail indistinguishable from the next. When I walk into a hotel I feel the press of all those who came and went before me in this place and are now lost in the abyss of the Unknown. I too will be lost into that abyss.—That abyss of the forgotten faceless organic multitude. Inside the hotel I am contained in the security of the rectilinear building which is at the same time synchronous with the shapeless abyss. A Hotel is a metaphor for the enigma of evanescent existence. A Hotel is a good cinematic metaphor for such Grand Mechanic Assemblages as Reason and Logic and Natural Law. Yes, a Hotel is a good symbol for phenomenological Being; for Humanness which we are caught in, but only for a lifetime. There's more than a whiff of mortality and the Void in a hotel.

Hotels are places of mystery. Places of closed doors. (Places of secret unions. Places of loneliness.) Places where strangers are repeating other strangers' movements: for example, I sit on the bed in the same manner as the previous occupant of the room: occupants playing out like trained animals a repertory of ready-made gestures and rhythms and behavior: caught in the patterns that determine us as human. Caught up in the repetition of similar cubicles I feel more and more like an ant in an ant farm. Imprisoned in comfort. (Keep changing the metaphor, that's all we can do as we skirt around the rim of the abyss.) We inhabit our hotel rooms like ghosts who will leave no trace behind. Hotels are dry runs for the crypt and the graveyard.

Hotels are insecure: anyone might fall asleep with a cigarette burning between two fingers. Behind every closed door is a potential Room 237. You tear the lid off of any stranger and

who knows what poisonous fumes might emanate? Insanity might lurk on the other side of the wall. Something entirely *other* lurks on the other side of the hotel wall.

The arrangement of the furnishings in my hotel room (bed, pillows, blanket, phone, TV, rug, toilet, sink . . .) reveal themselves as equipment outlaid as for an exhibit in a museum. These ordinary furnishings feel as distant and impassive as such cosmic phenomena as nebulae or meteors. The comfort feels tense. While our furnishings at home come to feel as familiar as good friends, the hotel furnishings surround me like a crowd of strangers. Artworks hanging isolated on the walls are there to be ignored. Weird, these homey furnishings *not* invested with homey (personal) value. The totality of entities in a home expresses the personality of the inhabitants of that home; the totality of entities arranged in the hotel room (TV, phone, rug . . .) expresses no personal consciousness whatsoever. The hotel room is kin to the private space of a bedroom and yet is a public space designed to be tenanted by many in succession and not just one exclusively. This room is not ours, we are not supposed to belong here. Everything here is designed to service a hypothetical person. It feels like I'm caught in a human zoo.

Hotels are well known sites of amatory encounters. Carnal errands, infidelities, illicit sex acts. Sounds of sticky parts joined in panting gymnastics. A libidinal pressure thickens the quietude of the hallways. The sadness of sexuality is identifiable in the air of the hotel room. Past lust, past overflow of emotion, past eroticism: no longer, that feeling we thought we couldn't live without. (All that chasing after what makes us feel good year in year out—and where do we end up?) The air of the hotel room is seedy with the memory of strange genital fluids. Unknown histories of odors of moistening pubis, rank male genitalia, wind from alien buttocks. Seedy with the memory of the scents of the bodies that came and went. The Hotel is related to the brothel. There is ever the secret undercurrent of violence buzzing through the hallways.

The Hotel is related also to the hospital. All these interchangeable rooms, places where private dreams were born and promptly died. In one room, orgasms; in the room adjacent, bereavement. The air of a hotel room is a metaphor for Time which effaces all things to zero. Think of the sanitary bathroom, clean of all trace of previous exudations. (“When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.”) The bathroom is mysterious with the lost aroma of years of urine and faecal matter. How many alien asses have sat on this throne?

The mirror carries no sign of the multitude of folk who one after another temporarily occupied its frame. How many hundreds of lives combed their hair in this mirror? How many applied lipstick there? I too am only a fleeting image in this place. I pass through this apathetic landscape like a weather pattern.

The atmosphere of a hotel room magnifies our futility.

In the dead of night a hotel is as quiet as a morgue. This environment that is crowded with bodies—feels deserted. It is an uncanny feeling. A subtle paranoia broods. Sleep is ever the most insecure time for any living thing. (Elihu instructs Job, “Do not long for the night, when people are cut off in their place.”) Conspicuous is a feeling of *banishment*.

A Hotel is a symbol of the SECRET hidden in the recognizable.

Maybe the Video is stashed under a mattress in a hotel room in a city. The present occupant of the room shouldn't be there, the character ran out on a responsibility and ended up in the hotel room, at any rate there was a skew in the character's life which eventuated in the present occupation of the hotel room; which sounds too much like *Psycho*. I guess the character will want to hide something under the mattress and thereby discover the Video. (*When* the Video was hidden under the mattress would be a pertinent question. The character would have to ask the management when the last time the mattress had been turned over. If more than a few occupants had come and gone without the Video being detected, it might prove difficult to trace its history.) How about a man is driving cross-country and gets a flat tire in the middle of the Arizona desert. The road stretches east-west for miles. There are no oncoming cars. Nothing catches the eye in the flat landscape except for here and there a cactus or patches of lank grass or bird movement. When the driver rises from the exertion of changing the tire he sees the Videotape resting on the driver's seat. He looks this way and that and sees a desolated landscape. No one or nothing had passed him . . . Or the Video appears in a teenager's gym locker one day at school, much to the surprise of the teenager. Or it comes through the post similar to the appearance of those spectral videotapes of *Lost Highway*. Or a guy buys a series of photographs of his hometown in an antique shop and discovers that the photographs coincide as a visual map leading, photo by photo, to a secret spot where the Video is found? Someone I know came up with the gist of this last idea; he told it to me a couple years ago and I just thought of it. Or someone buys a

second-hand Hollywood movie video in a department store and the video just happens to be the Ominous Video and no one knows how or when the switch occurred. (The manager watches the archive of videotapes of the closed circuit monitors trained on the video display but discovers nothing of note; the archive only extends back a week or so anyway, because the tapes are reused.) Or the Video, contained in a black box, washes up onto a beach. Or the Video is found resting on a table in a rustic cabin on the first day of hunting season. Or the Video is discovered in a hospital utility cabinet. Maybe it is discovered in the back of a cab. Or left in the magazine holder on the seat in front of you in an airplane? Perhaps when you unpack after a holiday you find the Video in your luggage. The Video could be found stuck inside a video recorder you buy second-hand from a junk shop. Maybe it's left in a public toilet somewhere, maybe the men's room at a minor league baseball game. Maybe the rumor is that the Ice Cream Man sold it to a kid. Maybe another rumor is that the White Lightning Man left it in a hollow log in the woods near the Summer Camp. Maybe someone wraps up a book as a Christmas present but when the gift is opened the Video is found inside. It could have been left in the trunk of a junked car. Maybe it was found in the jacket pocket of a dead man sprawled in the alley of a Las Vegas casino? Maybe the coast guard finds the Video in the galley of an abandoned boat adrift on the ocean? Maybe it's not a videotape but a Streaming Video which travels the net from here to there without a traceable origin and suddenly appears on monitors now and then throughout the world. Maybe the content of the Ominous Video is encoded on every videotape extant and is discovered when the heads of the video recorder go awry or are calibrated to translate the data. Maybe the Video is found in a mailbag. Maybe it's found hidden inside a soccer ball (I thought of Gogol's nose discovered inside a bread roll). Maybe the Video is discovered catalogued on the records of a university library but no one knows who entered the data or when this happened; the records convey that the Video should be on the shelves but the Video is not where it is supposed to be; it is mis-shelved, hidden somewhere inside the vast archives of the library. In that instance it would be easy to determine its borrowing history at least.

Kubrick is spot-on when he points out that the belief in a ghost is automatically a belief in an Afterlife. The existence of a ghost advertises the availability of an existence beyond death. Ghost stories, which concern the threat of the monstrous, the tenuousness of mortality, the mystery beyond death, and the existence of the absurd, automatically set resonating our personal Spirituality and knowledge of death. Ghost stories circuit into our secret, unspoken Understanding (in whatever degree) of death which ever awaits us. In that same movement

ghost stories link up to our Spirituality (religious, or whatever), our understanding, our acceptance, of the ‘meaning of things’. Ghost stories are closely related to the dread character of sacred texts. Both bring us directly back to the wellsprings of the mind. Both strip us down to the fear fundamental to Being. Ghost stories can spark the SPEECHLESS TERROR that on other occasions and in other circumstances initiate life-changing Spiritual or Philosophic Awe.

A ghost story is a curious playtime for the audience. The audience enjoys the dread thrill of facing a terrible Void: enjoys the vicarious thrill of watching characters experiencing life-endangering situations: enjoys acknowledging the presence of vengeful demons and lunatic killers and bloodthirsty aliens and suchlike adversaries: enjoys facing the awareness that Hell might rain down upon all of our heads at any moment: This is considered ‘entertainment’ in the same way as riders on a rollercoaster thrill at the velocity. It is fear and disorder transacted in a safe, ordered arrangement. Ghost stories toy with the audience shamelessly, they yank to the surface the expression of terrible insecurity that exists as a Fundamental of Being that is ordinarily buried, a festering terror concealed by the banality of ordinary circumstances. Reacting to symbols that the narrative surprises them with, the audience is mainlined into their *elemental fear* (something secret, specific to each individual), even if the audience is covering from a specific literary ghost or movie monster; and mainlined into their *elemental terror* (at beholding themselves in an absurd world always facing death). (Does this relate in some way to the fear or terror an animal feels in the moment it decides to flee an encroaching predator?—this fear or terror that motivates the sprint for more life?) A ghost story is a myth that activates certain prehistoric encodings in our mind. That the ghost story is a product of our society of folk, the society that contains us and keeps us safe, the ghost story is therefore not entirely threatening. (It might even be a ghost story brought to you by Kellogg’s or Nabisco.) Ghost stories reinforce stability even as they play at trembling the same. When “The End” arrives the audience can put the experience to one side as if discarding an empty food basket. That the ghost story comes to an end proves the rule that all things move on, it’s no good to dwell on the creepy, new experiences with Light mean new diversions from the fundamental fear of Darkness, Life goes on. When a ghost story ends the audience eases back into their secure lives. The feelings of fear and terror experienced while beholding the ghost story do not have to resound beyond the “The End”. Just as someone might exercise to let off steam, so might ghost stories function as a similar alleviator of stored force. When we are returned to the matrix of our ordinary lives after the

experience of a ghost story, we are thankful for the order and regularity and the non-threatening familiarity of the arrangement. Horror works on us as a moral force to focus our gaze on the Good. Having visited the realm of Horror, we welcome the return to security with a new appreciation. Ghost stories reinforce our faith. We play with the capacity for TERROR in order to feel that we have mastery over it and ourselves. To play with something is to subject it to the comfort of our established rules. A ghost story *plays with* a reckoning with the Beyond.

Still and all, ghost stories, like Sacred Texts, leave us with this suspicion: things are weirder than they seem.

(Of course, images of Horror might reinforce those who already nurture a fit-to-bursting idea-bank of twisted elaborations of Being. Horror might send unstable entities into erratic freefall. Horror inspires the Good—and Horror may inspire more Horror.)

Ghost stories usually contain threats to mortality which terrify, even as the presence of the ghost itself confirms that mortal death might not be the end of Being. Even if death is not the end, that Other Place we will eventually travel to is unknowable in this world, and thus is something to be feared. We uphold beliefs of an Afterlife but we will still do our best not to die before our time. We will run from the ghost because the threat of death might include Pain and Suffering which are repellent to the living. Though we might believe in the beneficence of an Afterlife, and though we might believe in the promise of eternal life, still we fear pain and suffering and the Unknown, and will resist our inclusion in that alien realm after death for as long as possible. Life in *this* world takes precedence over all else.

Ghost stories involve a Character who is up to the task of surviving, of fighting for Life which is the ultimate good, of being heroic in the face of death. Ghost stories enter into a reckoning with death and always come out the other side. A narrative must end, even if it means the author breaking off in mid-sentence, and the ending is attached to Life, to the life of the audience which immediately goes on to experience other things. When the work ends, the dreamers awaken back into their lives. (I think of the last words of *Gravity's Rainbow*: “Now everybody—”) Life is heroic because for as long as it lasts it conquers death in favor of more life. That the Character in the ghost story is up to the task of reckoning with death and coming out the other side should act on the audience as a model of righteous behavior.

Persevere in face of adversity! Never give up!—that sort of thing. No matter what there's always a survivor: this is the (quasi-spiritual?) promise that all ghost stories express.

A ghost story is a type of religious ceremony, a ritual during which we brood on the terror and mystery of Evil and Death, of order and disorder, of the presence of the Unknown, of the potential abolition of the meaning of things. We come to realise that we can overcome the gravity of the awareness of these vile encroachments by sheer power of the mind to assimilate the Horror into a manageable understanding. Thereby we displace the terror and mystery from our state-of-mind in favor of order and security and the Light. The elemental fear and the elemental terror recede back into the unacknowledged reservoirs . . .

We take the snarling lion out of the cage and toy with it awhile then we look away, we return the beast to confinement and forgetfulness.

An unfortunate law of ghost stories: As soon as we accept an explanation of the Ominous Video, the Ominous Video ceases to be interesting. If we can understand it, that means we've probably heard it all before. There are no words to express the Cataclysm because when it surprises us words won't exist from that moment on. The portrait of the Cataclysm will never be painted. No one will hear the sound of the Cataclysm. The Cataclysm will occur but will not be felt. Beyond the Cataclysm, will anything like Time exist? Might cataclysm jism fertilize new Voids? What if the Cataclysm is the time of the cessation of the incidence of any physical matter in the Open Space? Does ETERNITY lie in that direction? Is this subject thinkable? Or is 'the end of the universe' a subject better left for pub conversations? What if the Cataclysm is the contraction of the spatial coordinates of the Open Space? Contraction down to a . . . no-place? An everyplace at once? A contraction that can never arrive at the smallest space? A condensing of whatever energy is left to generate new energy to initiate a new expansion? Or might any residue coinciding in that infinitely small place come to naught and finally evaporate? Might other Spaces be revealed in the event of the contraction of our universe? Other universes, other dispensations of Being, revealed as it were in the manner of a curtain removed? The Time after our Time is barely thinkable. Wrestling with this subject the Scientific (astronomical/quantum physical) and the Philosophic verge into the Imaginary. The Cataclysm is a mystery that thuds like a stone upon the ground. What if following the contraction of our universe NOTHING occurs? Can Nothing 'occur'? In what manner are we to understand that Nothing can 'exist'? What if

no other spaces are revealed in the event of the end of our universe? What if what is left of our universe fails to reignite and expand anew for another fifteen billion years? What if with the demise of our universe comes the demise of every dimension there is? The Cataclysm is the death of Possibility. Can we express the After-time of the contraction of our universe as a Nothingness? A Nothingness that somehow exists? A Nothing that is a something in its nothingness? We have reached an outer limit of human inquiry. Human thought fails at the onset of this bourn. We are revealed to be stranded in a provisional understanding of existence for the entire lifetime of the species. What might matter most is that which we will never come to know.

With regards to *The Ring*, I am still unaware of the mechanics of *how* the consciousness of the vengeful girl who suffered a violent untimely death fused with a Videotape of all things. I mean, the girl supposedly fell into a deep well where she lingered for seven dismal days before dying her natural death. Are we to believe that there was a cassette-making facility down there with her? Of course not. So are we to assume that her spirit escaped the confines of the well and soared through the air until coming to rest in a Videotape? (If this last line of reasoning is taken, then we must wonder (1) if the spirit of the girl, after it is launched into the open air, decides *consciously* on the choice of a videotape, planning its strategy of haunting on the wing then successfully finding a suitable innocuous videotape to invade, thereby fulfilling its demonic plan. That is to say, the Spirit knew what it was doing when it interfaced with a Videotape. In this case the Spirit is a hip, technically-savvy ghost, a suitable ghost for the technological twenty-first century. The Spirit decides to haunt a Videotape rather than a house or a forest or a museum! There's something 'cool' about this ghost that feels at home among our electrical appliances and which uses our recording media against us. A problem with this line of reasoning is that the little murdered country girl in *The Ring* looks anything but hip and technically-savvy. She looks like a country bumpkin! Still, I concede that the spirit of this country girl might have an inspiration to haunt a videotape; the family home after all does have a clunky old video recorder, so if we suppose that the girl might have handled videotapes before then it's obviously in the realm of possibility that the vengeful spirit of this country bumpkin kid might have its videotape brainstorm. Oh yes I remember that the girl, before she is murdered by her mother, is sent to a mental hospital, and she has an interview with a doctor which is videotaped. It is plausible that she got the idea to haunt a videotape from this unpleasant experience; in her mind the video technology came to represent Monolithic Institution; thus by invading a videotape she was 'getting back'

at the institution of human reality by striking at its heart. Copy by copy, she would burrow through the technoscape of our culture like a tapeworm. That's one clever ghost, hip to the up-to-the-minute techno-gesture. No longer drafty castles!—this ghost prefers master control rooms, dials and wires and electrical currents! Or (2) might it happen that her Spirit ends up in a videotape by accident, like a genie caught in a bottle, a circumstance the Spirit readily reworks to its own advantage? This last idea doesn't sound very plausible. In fact, the concept of the Spirit fleeing the murder scene to integrate itself with a Videotape any which way sounds daft, even though it is (obviously) not an inconceivable dramatic scenario in our technoscape culture. (The Spirit doesn't have much pride if it chooses to exist in a measly videotape! Why not haunt a palace, a cathedral, where there's more room to move?!) As I just remembered above, we know that the girl was the subject of at least one other Videotape, the one that was archived in the Mental Hospital. Perhaps when she died in the well, the molecules of her shape which were imprinted onto an extant videotape somehow became imbued with her Animate Spirit and the content of the tape transmogrified until it arrived at its present condition? (Kind of like a chia pet growing hair?) As if, since she was already captured on tape, at bodily death her spirit molecules traveled an already-forged passageway back to that recorded image, as if an invisible link (in the manner of a monorail, or radar, or magnetism?) joins the molecules of her live body to the molecules of her recorded image all the time, no matter where she might be? (This refers to what Einstein called, with respect to the quantum physical realm, "spooky action at a distance.") Can we rule out that the Ominous Video was produced in an art appreciation class in the mental hospital? Some of its imagery seems psychological and supernatural and otherworldly and the whole package just does not feel like the product of a child's self-help exercise. Anyhow the Ominous Video is not strictly speaking a recorded communication, it is a link with another realm. It is a corridor that is opened up in spacetime linking Here with Who-the-Hell-Knows-Where. *If* the Video began as some sort of exercise on the part of the young patient, using her drawings and whatnot, the content came to be enhanced and transformed when the Spirit took possession of the Video. I guess.

Shall I recap? 1. The Spirit, soaring disembodied through the atmosphere, consciously intends to fuse with a Videotape and fulfils its plan, and the content on the Ominous Video is a peek into the Mind of the Spirit. Or 2. The disembodied Spirit ends up trapped in a videotape by accident and makes the best of it. (This is stupid, if the Spirit can soar free of its organic host then how could it get trapped anywhere?) Or 3. The Spirit of the girl

switches from her organic body to her recorded image on a video tape, the switch occurring automatically via quantum physical connections at the moment of bodily death. Or 4. Similar to 3, the Spirit, at the girl's bodily death, reverts to a video artwork the girl had made when alive. (Maybe the fundamental particles in her body 'remember' in some physical way the location of the fundamental particles of her recorded image or recorded thoughts?!) The girl's spirit was already in the artwork in a manner of speaking—(don't people speak of the artist's 'spirit' in an artwork, his or her personality 'shining through'?)—the girl's spirit suddenly 'comes alive' there amidst the magnetic videotape 'for real' when the organic body in the well expires. Instantaneously the Spirit shuttles from its 3D bodily form to its 2D recognizable counterpart or artistic creation. (It is like Steven Wright flipping a switch up and down in his house to no visible effect and then someone from Beijing phoning him, pleading, "Stop playing with the lights!")

I apologize that this transmission has turned preposterous with the advent of the investigation into the mechanics of the Spirit's installation into the Videotape. I suppose a collection of other explanations might result from a protracted thinking on the theme. Let's put this investigation to one side, shall we?

You spoke of a couple of creepy moments in *The Ring* and I saw what these were: the few smash cuts of corpses contorted in their death skews. I mean specifically the young girl who is dispatched in the opening sequence and Naomi's ex-husband who expires near the end. (I think the granddaddy of such monstrous revelations is, at least for now, Bungalow 17 in *Mulholland Drive*.) The faces of the victims are disturbed and wretched-looking, as if in beholding the magnitude of the Spirit these victims were stricken with a terror powerful enough to warp their features permanently. (So when the mind/body beholds hitherto unimaginable horror, other hitherto unimaginable behavior results, such as spontaneous physical self-deformation.) The victims are a horrible sight. Their eyes have rolled up to expose an always creepy field of white. The schoolgirl turned immediately corpse-grey. In the guy's case his lips are wide open in an unnatural way, his mouth looks like a wound, as if a small bomb exploded on his tongue and his mouth blew outward: perhaps the force of his screams managed such a distortion. The expressions of both are of tortured terrified strangulated unimaginable shock. Their faces have lost definition, as if the breath of the Spirit, as it was breathed into their faces, was caustic enough to smooth away some facial characteristics. Moreover the altered faces have smudges of fuzz growing across them. The

faces don't look entirely human anymore, they look *somewhat human*. They look like ghouls. Okay, these faces were chilling. Chilling, because the victims looked like they had witnessed the inconceivable. They witnessed the inconceivable and didn't live to tell the tale.

I suppose there is one other chilling moment in *The Ring*, the moment when the Woman on the Videotape looks directly into the eyes of the viewer of the Videotape. The Woman and the Viewer share an experience that joins them from across transdimensional distances, as if the videotape has become a videophone. We are to believe that the Video is a conduit opened up in spacetime that joins the present of the viewer with an Alternate Realm where the Woman exists in whatever her present happens to be. When the video is played the Woman peers through the conduit that is opened up and her gaze arrives at the eyes of the viewer. We see that the Woman gives the viewer conscious recognition. The viewer is seen and a thought is sparked in the mind of the Woman. We behold ourselves caught in the Gaze of the Other. The Other that will make us suffer the cost of entering into its proximity. (I think of the cool sound effect when Mickey turns in slo-mo away from his key lime pie to Mallory dancing in the café at the beginning of NBK. Then I think of a Stuart Gordon movie in which when the Bad Guy takes your Polaroid you suddenly have no other destiny but a quick and certain death.) The Gaze of the Other is always monstrous: it nails us to the wall.

When you feel the Eyeball of God on you, it's too late for thinking, you got to know what's what then and there or that's that. That's why we have to be always on our toes, we have to keep our mind severe-clear, our reflexes clean and incisive, in order to be up to the task when the unthinkable eventuates. *Grace* is intuition conditioned by experience. We will be tested and we will be up to the task or we won't. When the Eyeball of God is on us, when there is no longer any time for *thinking though*, only action, immediate behavior, grace alone can defuse the situation. ("You've had your whole life to think things over. What good's a few more minutes going to do you now?")