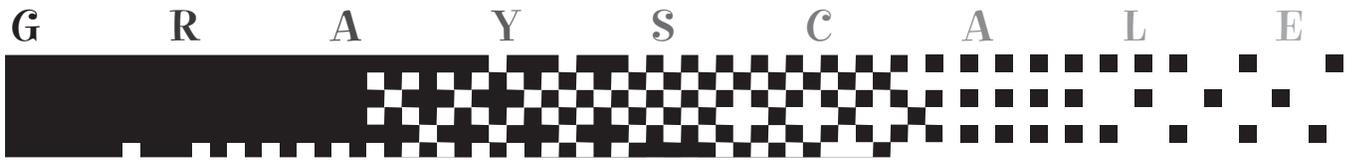


The illusion of gray created  
by an arrangement of  
alternating black and white dots



This is Grayscale #33, a zine for *Intercourse*, and an Obsessive Press Publication #283, from Jeanne Gomoll, 2825 Union Street, Madison Wisconsin 53704-5136. 608-246-8857.

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20 February 2004

Pat and I have been friends for 15 years or maybe longer. I can't remember very well when I actually met her in person the first time, but I got to know her in the local apa, Turbo-Charged Party Animal (title courtesy of its first OE, Andy Hooper, if you didn't guess immediately). Getting to know her in an apa was a bit ironic because Pat actually lives in Madison and I could perhaps more easily have gotten to know her in person. But, at the time I was coming out of one of my low-involvement-with-local-fandom phases, and was aware of a sudden influx of new faces at the regular Wednesday evening meetings. Andy Hooper had colated several issues of his new apa, so I thought it might be interesting to join it and get to know some of the new folks in our group.

I'm glad I did. One of the people I eventually got to know through the apa was Pat, and one of the first zines of hers that I remember reading contained a trip report describing a long trip she had taken several years prior on a working sailing ship. (In other words, it was a working vacation, not the kind with brunches served to you every couple hours. She scrubbed decks, learned about sails and knots, and slept with a bunch of other "vacationers" in the crew's berth.) You could read between the lines of Pat's description of her adventures to understand that she considered this experience to be one of the high-points of her life. Ever since then, she has talked occasionally about wanting to take another similar adventure on a sailing ship. The first time she mentioned it to me I sighed, smiled and agreed that it sounded like a wonderful idea. Nevertheless, we were all stunned when she announced several years ago that she had decided to quit her job and sell her house in order to take a year-long cruise around the world, and I think her decision prompted some of us re-examine our own dreams and think about whether we might actually ever do what was necessary to accomplish some of them. Pat decided she needed to shake up her life, do something entirely different, gain a new perspective on herself and the world.... She worked for the city and has never been very happy with what she did. It was a job, you know? She has an obviously loving family, and lots of good friends, but.... She wanted to feel again, the daily sensation of doing something she loved. So, she found a second job and began making all the practical preparations necessary to join the crew of the tall ship, the Picton Castle, within two years. Pat's a very organized, very practical person. She applied for a berth and began to made extensive arrangements for her cats, her money, her belongings, her house, and her health. She prepared a will, and made arrangements in case she was injured during her year at sea. It turned out that she was able to rent her house for the year she was gone rather than sell it; and was able to convince her employers to put her on unpaid leave of absence while she was gone, so she didn't have to quit her job. But it was a good thing she started organizing things so long in advance, because she was a nervous whirl of energy for the last couple months as she scrambled to get things done. She left Madison a couple weeks before WisCon 27, in 2003, and she's been sending back regular emails from her ports of call—Panama, the Galapagos Islands, Pitcairn Island, Figi, and Bali, telling us all about the glorious adventures she is having, full of sailing terms that remind me a bit of reading Patrick O'Brian's books (without the cannon fire). She's in route

now to Madagascar. Occasionally she sends me photos and I scan them and send out electronic images to her friends and family on her email list. The images all show her glowing with amazing, vibrant joy. I've never seen her happier. Everyone comments on it. They look at the photos and smile. You can't help but smile. And then they say, she looks so happy!

When we said goodbye to Pat at her going-away party last May, I remember thinking that I expected her to turn into a different person when I see her again (July 2004). She is making momentous changes in her life, leaving herself open for new perspectives and realignments of her priorities. After such a long time away in a situation in which she's able to redefine herself as she introduces herself and interacts with new people, and gets used to feeling joyful on a continuing basis, I thought, she'll easily be able to sweep away undesirable commitments and habits when she returns. She'll know what she wants and find it possible to go for it. I was and am incredibly happy for her, but also wondered if I needed such a re-awakening, shaking-up sort of experience myself.

It's not like I have secretly cherished some kind of long unfulfilled dream like Pat's sailing adventure. With little disappointment I gave up the idea of becoming an astronaut the first time I became sick on an amusement park ride and realized I preferred an earth-bound existence. In fact, I think I've accomplished many of my most cherished dreams already. In grade school I dreamed of two sorts of futures for myself—to become a confident independent woman, and to become an artist, both of which surprised me a bit when they came true. But as I watched Pat rid herself of belongings and making plans to jump off the edge of the world, I wondered if I had become complacent and too set in routine, and whether I would know it if I was. I fell in love with Scott in 1984, and we now laugh at how we resemble the old, married couple stereotype—sometimes finishing each others sentences, cooperating in life so smoothly that the process sometimes seems automatic. I love him madly and would not leave him for a year's exploration of other possibilities. I originally conceived of my job at the DNR as something to do for only a few years. When I was hired in 1979, I expected to become quickly bored with this job, and to eventually strike out on my own, maybe after 5 years. But here I was, 23 years later, making plans in not too many years, to retire from that job, firmly convinced that freelancing was not the life for me. After all, I'd worked for my entrepreneur sister, Julie's design company for a month, and felt enlightened about what it would be

like to run my own business. I saw her spending much of her time dealing with her employees and the business of doing business, and not much time designing. That wasn't for me, I told myself. I would never want to give up actually creating art, doing design. Furthermore, I liked the fact that I could leave my work at the office and devote myself to Scott, or my own projects at home, not to mention WisCon and other volunteer commitments. So, I had given up the idea of freelancing. It didn't seem to me like I'd buried a dream. It felt like I had chosen another, better path. Speaking of those other commitments, I've worked on WisCon for almost 28 years. When we started the convention, I had just graduated from college; now most of us in the group are quite settled down. We own houses, we have long-term relationships, we deal with the health problems of middle aged folks, we are thinking of investing in long-term care plans for ourselves. \*sigh\* I really didn't expect WisCon to have become a central pillar in my life, but it has. I feel proud of what we've done with WisCon and what we might continue to do in the future. And the Tiptree Award has turned from an amazing event to an institution that I have committed myself to long term. In so many ways, I have made choices that essentially tie me down to a more and more clear path. So as we waved goodbye to Pat, I wondered if this clear, familiar path was an altogether good thing, and if I shouldn't be thinking of taking some side-trips.

Well, that was certainly taken out of my hands just a few weeks later. No sooner had we closed the books on WisCon 28 than I was handed my "at risk" letter at the DNR. Ready or not, my path suddenly took a sharp jog and my future was no longer so easily map-able. Pat pulled anchor from North America, and I lifted anchor from a fairly secure, no risk lifestyle, and started my own business.

In the first few months, I was obsessed with the details: how to set up my financial books, getting the equipment I needed, keeping track of jobs, creating a plan to find new clients, designing new day-to-day patterns, doing the work. I discovered that I did not have to create a business like my sister's, that I could spend most of my time doing art and design. And—this came as a big surprise to me—I discovered that I really enjoyed the necessary business of doing business. Julie and I are different people, no surprise there. Her email sign-off line is frequently "Jump and a net will appear." That's not me. I'm more the "Weave a strong net, and then jump. Maybe" type. So it should have come as no surprise that the business I made was different than

Julie's. It's still a risky thing what I am doing, but I tend to prefer to do the work required to reduce the surprises as much as possible.

[By the way, Julie's working on two completely new projects these days – and I mean different from anything she's ever done before. One of them is producing a reality TV pilot based on slam poetry (<<http://slamchannel.com>>). Norman Lear is interested.]

Anyway, it's interesting to me, now that it seems I have more time to breathe, time to read a few novels, and time to look up from the still fascinating day-to-day details of my business, to think about how these changes mesh with those thoughts last May of shaking up my life. I realize that for me, there is no cherished, buried dream waiting to be un-earthed, but that I can find more joy in life despite and perhaps because of unexpected change. I must admit, this is not a new lesson for me. I have learned it several times already. Taking unexpected turns in my path has frequently led to good things. Going with, rather than fighting against, the unfamiliar, more often than not has led to growth and interesting things. More life, more ideas, more energy, more happiness. I think it was a good thing to have shaken loose from the notion that I knew pretty much what my life was going to be like for a longish time into the future. It's better for me, perhaps, to stay on my toes a bit, ready and needing to learn new things for new challenges.

So, things are good. Practically speaking, I've got a lot of work. Not too much, in fact I need to find a few big clients and that's one of my goals for the year. But I love working at home and I'm very optimistic that "Union Street Design" is going to be successful.



Scott and I are doing well. We've seen some good plays by the Madison Rep—The Credeaux Canvas, and Mercy of a Storm. We've seen some great movies—The Return of the King, of course (and looking forward to the 5-hour extended version), Master and Commander, Cold Mountain, Mona Lisa Smile, Peter Pan, 21 Grams, and Monster. The last movie wasn't a movie we intended to go see at the time. It was Valentine's Day and we thought we'd take in a romantic movie; the plan was to go see *Girl with the Pearl Earring*. We went to the 3-plex theater which shows most of Madison's smallish art films, bought our tickets and went, as directed to the theater on the left. We'd seen films there a thousand times, we knew where we were going; why check the sign over the door? There were only three theaters after all. One on the left and two on the right. We sat down, endured the commercials

and watched the trailers, chatting a bit about art in the Renaissance. We'd recently seen the first part of a PBS documentary called, "The Medicis: Godfathers of the Renaissance," and were eager to see this movie about the period set in northern Europe. Instead, the movie *Monster* began to play. We looked around. Why is nobody agitated about this error? What is going on? Well, we DID intend to see *Monster* eventually. The film about Aileen Carol Wuornos, a highway prostitute who was executed for killing seven men in the state of Florida during the 1980s is being talked about for its Oscar-nominated performance by Charlize Theron, but it just didn't seem like the movie to go see on Valentine's day. But we weren't sure what was going on and we didn't want to walk out and not get to see any film that night so we stayed. And it was a good movie, amazing acting as we expected. And when we explored the theater afterwards, it turned out that in the time since we'd last visited the place (not more than an month or two ago), they'd added a new theater. And of course it was *also* on the left, just a little further down the hall.... Well, we laughed about it, and are still intending to go back to see *Girl with the Pearl Earring*.

I've been reading far fewer novels than usual. This is something that I've been working on—giving myself more time to do non-work related stuff at home, reading for instance. But I'm way behind on things I'd hoped to have read by now. Nevertheless I blew through Neal Stephenson's *Quicksilver* quickly enough because I liked it so much, and am eagerly awaiting the next two books of his Baroque Cycle, which are due out later this year. I'm so glad this is not another series that will stretch over years and years, like another series of which I just read the newest volume: Gwyneth Jones' *Midnight Lamp*. Also, in preparation for WisCon, I read my first novel by Patricia McKillip—*Ombria in Shadow*, and I liked it in spite of it's being a bit too much high fantasy for my taste. The woman can write, that's for sure; it's gorgeous. So I may try another one of her books before May. I'm also planning to try to get through the Potlatch book, *The Shockwave Rider*. But I bet I'll be reading the last pages on a plane on the way to Seattle.

There is snow to shovel for a change this year, which is kind of nice. I actually wish it would just stay cold rather than warming up and melting in between times. It's easier to deal with snow than ice. Our snow-blower wasn't working at the beginning of the season, so I spent a few hours shoveling by hand, but it felt good, and we did get the snow-blower fixed last week. I exercise daily on a recumbent stationary bike, and I think I'll go

back to swimming this Spring, since I should be able to arrange my schedule and go to the YMCA during the less busy daytime hours. Scott and I have started on the Atkins diet and it seems easy to do and showed immediate results for both of us. So I'm feeling pretty good. Sometimes even exuberant.

My folks are spending the first three months of the year in Arizona as they have for the past seven or eight years. My dad is increasingly frail. He's 75 years old, and has had some serious health problems in the last few years. But I so admire his attitude these days! He is obviously focused on the fact that he will not live much longer. But the way he chooses to deal with that is to make the very most of whatever time he has left. I've never seen him enjoy life more than he does now. He's very proactive about making time to do what he wants to do, to see and enjoy new things, to let us know that he loves us. About a year ago, he and mom came to Madison to visit and he asked me if I could arrange for us all to go see the Frank Lloyd Wright Convention Center. It's quite beautiful, and Dad takes quite an interest in architecture and was eager to see the place. At the last moment, my aunt and uncle from Seattle dropped into see mom and dad, and they all came to Madison for a visit. But my aunt and uncle weren't really interested in seeing the convention center. But dad just laughed and invited them to wait at my house while he and I went, along with whoever else wanted to go with us. So, grumbling, they went along with the plan. Dad just ignored their bored reactions and bubbled over with enjoyment once we got there. He had to rest a few times, because the tour involved a lot of walking, but he had dozens of questions for our guide and got her laughing and telling more stories than I think she normally shared with her tours. We had a wonderful time. I love the fact that dad has learned to focus on the good stuff. It's not that he's being rude, but he's just not willing to waste energy on anyone who is angry or bored. As long as we avoid talking about politics, I've never felt so close to him. He's been publicly and sincerely appreciative of my mom too, praising her for being there for him after medical procedures, and during times of ill health. They seem to be getting closer, in fact, and it's good to see them loving one another so openly these days.

My brother Steve seems to be flourishing in his new marriage. My other brother Dan has turned into an amazingly loving, marvelous dad for his three kids; and he loves his job as a programmer and computer trouble-shooter at the women's college in Milwaukee, Alverno College. And my sister Julie is doing great. Scott's

family too, are all doing well. We visit Iowa every couple months and have a fairly good time. I've designed some invitations and photo manipulation for his brother and sister as little gifts, which has been fun. Friends here in Madison all seem to be doing well too.

It's a good time—

...unless I look outwards and contemplate the wider world, of course. But even there, I'm finding myself feeling surprisingly hopeful about the upcoming election and the chance that we will get rid of Bush. I was one of the Wisconsin electorate who voted for John Edwards—not so much because he is the candidate of my dreams, but because I think the contested primary season has been a good thing for the country. The Democrats did not, as expected, spend most of their time trying to wound one another (except in Iowa), and their united focus on anti-Bush messages has had a lovely negative effect on Bush's popularity. So I voted for Edwards as a way to keep a few more issues in the debate (like NAFTA and the issues of class and race that Edwards seems to be raising in a very genuine way), and to keep the focus on good questions rather than on the Bush administration's "talking points." I wish Dean hadn't been ambushed (not that he was my dream candidate either). He was less beholden to big money interests than the other candidates were, and I wouldn't be surprised if it turns out that he was targeted by others than just his official rivals. That scream of his that the media dwelled on after the Iowa primary was a weird thing. Apparently, the footage aired over and over again on TV was miked with one of those directional microphones that can isolate a voice amid a lot of loud ambient noise. If you were there, or heard Dean's speech without the benefit of the directional microphone, you wouldn't have been able to have heard the scream. Dean was yelling along with the crowd. It's kind of like hearing someone singing along to music they're listening to on their earphones: they don't sound too good, often off-key and weirdly out of context. He may still have fallen behind even without that incident, but I wish he were still in the race and still voicing his anti-war message.

I envy those of you in the San Francisco area. I wish I could have seen some of the same-sex weddings take place and had been able to volunteer to help out in the municipal building. I think for years to come, this is going to be one of those events about which people are going to proudly say, "I was there." And though I am happy to see and enthusiastically support the right of everyone to marry the person of their choice, my opinions jelled a few days ago on what I would ideally

prefer to happen around this issue. It seems to me that most of the people who object to anything but heterosexual marriage all express their opinions in terms of religion. The phrases, "sacred" and "God's plan" are batted about frequently. And as has been pointed out by many others, the marriage ceremony that most people are familiar with is probably more about religion than legalities anyway. So I wish that government would just get entirely out of the business of marrying people. Judges and court officials should be prohibited from performing ceremonies as a violation of the separation between church and state. If you want to get married, you have to go to a church or to a group that performs such a ceremony. And if you want legal protections for your partnership, you have to get a civil partnership license from the state. If you want both, you have to get both separately; there would be no two-for-one package. Lots of people seem to be in favor of a civil partnership license, but they seem to talk about it most often as an alternate form of license to marriage, with the state still offering the traditional marriage license. I think we should completely sever governmental involvement from the marriage ceremony. Each religious group or whatever other kinds of group wants

to perform marriages could include whatever requirements that seemed appropriate to their beliefs or goals. And whoever felt affiliated with those beliefs or goals could take those vows. Or not. One married person might make very different promises to their spouse than another who married under different auspices. And if they wanted to write up a legal agreement to enforce those promises that would be fine too. But the only national partnership rules enforced by the government would be those embedded in the civil partnership license which would essentially be the same rights and responsibilities heretofore given to those who received marriage licenses with no restrictions on who could apply. That's what I'd prefer.



I lost track of the apa deadline unfortunately, and didn't realize that Intercourse would be collated today, until just a couple hours ago. So I apologize for the lack of mailing comments. I plan to start them tomorrow and to publish a big mailing-comment issue next time.

I hope to see some of you at Potlatch!

Best, Jeanne