
MARK GREIF

Mark Greif holds a Ph. D. in American Studies from Yale University. He is an essayist, an assistant professor at the Eugene Lang College of the New School of Liberal Arts, and the founding editor of *n+1* magazine. He sat down with Sandra Allen and Will Guzzardi at an empty Mexican restaurant in Tribeca to discuss the little magazine and the internet.

Sandra Allen, Wag's Revue: In 2005 A.O. Scott wrote a story about n+1 and The Believer, which more or less said, 'Look! There are two magazines that are printed even though the internet exists!' In it, he says, "A magazine is created as a bunch of ambitious like-minded friends get together to assemble pictures and words into a sensibility, a voice, an attitude, that they hope will resonate beyond their immediate circle." I wonder if you find that to be, in your own experience, true, or a little bit simplistic? And if you wouldn't mind, for our readers, delving a little bit into the n+1 creation myth, however briefly you want to.

MARK GREIF: I was thinking before I came to see you what advice I was given before we started *n+1*. One of the key pieces of advice is there's no reasonable way to start a magazine except by publishing people you're friends with. I was told by a poet I had grown up admiring in Boston, a guy named Bill Corbett, that it was folly to believe you could become editors and that magic would happen, people would arrive with things you wanted to read, and they would have things they needed to say and all the rest. That really you have to be thwarted and stifled and frustrated already and that you probably have to do a lot of the writing yourself. And I believe that that's true. We wrote most of the first issue ourselves. We wrote most of the second issue ourselves. We continue to write most of the magazine ourselves. And we've never regretted it. As for there being vibrations from

that material that somehow go out into the larger environment, it's hard to know. The degree to which people have imagined that *n+1* was a serious magazine when we had no phone, no office, no staff, no salary was always shocking. It turns out if you put out writing that's good, and if the design standards are minimally decent—I mean, no one has ever denied that *n+1* is, to many aesthetically-minded people, ugly—people will treat it like any other magazine.

‘We wrote most of the first issue ourselves. We continue to write most of the magazine ourselves. And we’ve never regretted it.’

Will Guzzardi, Wag's Revue: One of the pieces that really put n+1 on the map, in Issue One, was "The Regressive Avant-Garde," a vicious critique of what you call the Eggersard, the writing-circle whose nucleus is McSweeney's. It describes the editorial writing of that magazine as "wide-eyed, juvenile, faux-naïf," and the writers as "thoroughgoing, even prissy, moralists." It ends up with a biting critique of The Believer, wraps up with the line, "its overt criterion for inclusion is not expertise, but enthusiasm." The Believer itself, as you mention in the article, was started as a response to criticism, or "snarkiness," to criticism. So I wonder where you see the line between criticism and snark? And is there value in wide-eyed, unrepentant creation, this unmitigated belief?

MG: I see no value whatsoever in wide-eyed unrepentant belief, simply because it's so much on offer everywhere. I think that the idea that reading is in danger, reading is jeopardized—eh, I'm suspicious of this. The idea that it could be countered or helped by cheerleading for books could be misplaced. I do think *The Believer* has changed a lot since that early critique, partly because they've just published so many issues.

I do like *The Believer* a lot. I liked the fact that it exists and is so prolific. It's no longer a particularly well-focused magazine. And insofar as there were characteristic slots in the early issues where they would do a profile of a philosopher, a child and a tool, those things seem to be gone. It certainly owned-up to its status as a book review and that they now include these very short book reviews, which are nice. And then they sort of run middling pieces that would go into *The Atlantic* or *The New Yorker*. Precisely what it is that defines the current *Believer* would be interesting to say, and you'd have to be a much more devoted reader of it than I am to know.

I still do think that the snark business was somewhat misunderstood. What people took away from that early Heidi Julavitz essay, which was the programmatic essay of the first issue [of *The Believer*], was that she was against snark. Snark was something like cruelty in criticism, and that it would be the brief of *The Believer* to be the opposite of cruel—kind, I suppose. Even kindly, amicable.

If you actually read through the essay to the end it seemed that Julavitz was not, for good intellectual reasons, able to keep up the conceit that there was this thing snark, which is cruelty in criticism, and it could be healed by mere kindness. In fact, once she gets into actual historical cases of critics whom she believed were significant, great, role-models, worth reading in the present day, etc., she lands on people like Edmond Wilson, Mary McCarthy—people who were and are in fact famous for being unbelievably cruel critics.

The point which she winds up having to make in that essay, somewhat against her initial conceit, is that the great mistake is to be critical and unexpert. Critical and know-nothing. That is to say, the mistake is to be cruel without knowing what you're

talking about, or to pretend to be superior, when in fact you're not superior to the people you're dealing with.

And there's something to this. I mean, you know, to have a reviewer in *The New York Times* writing on the history of India, history of modern India, on the basis that they've once visited India on vacation, and then to attack or criticize the scholarly author of such a thing, this does make you mad, about *The New York Times*.

As I read [the Julavitz] essay, I thought 'Great. She's calling for a more knowledgeable and more intelligent criticism that won't pull its punches when it has something genuine to say in denunciation or attack. But also that I hope won't go around making nicey-nice for the sake of niceness.' And I actually don't think *The Believer* has done this as it moved on. It has problems. But probably the major problem has turned out to be just a kind of watery niceness.

WG: Magazines seem to undergo tremendous changes from what they promise to be at first to what they end up actually being. So given that we've just kind of made our promise, I wonder what you think influences those changes. Where is it acceptable to make changes and where are you violating your credo?

MG: Yeah, I think they do change and they don't change. This is just on the basis of reading various magazines against their original manifestos. There are major changes in magazines when the editorial staff changes, right? Commentary when Norman Podhoretz edits it is a different magazine from when Eliot R. Cohen edited it. I do think if you go back and read the opening essays that editors proffer when they take over a magazine, no matter how much the magazine changes—I mean even after very dramatic changes—you know, if it started out as a Catholic

magazine and becomes like an S&M magazine by the end of its run—nevertheless if you read that basic Catholic manifesto, you will find that basic DNA of whatever else that editor does, or that editorial team does.

Now your manifesto is pretty short, so in a sense you've left yourself lots of room. The longer your manifesto is, the more you're going to reveal yourselves. People don't really change that much in their core approach to things. It tends to be more of the case that the thematic concerns of the journal alter. I don't know that the basic approach really does. And a lot of the journals, historically, that you wind up liking the best, if you read a lot of these things, are the ones that when they no longer do what they originally did, stop or die.

There's a separate category of these kinds of general interest magazines—*The Atlantic*—that survive for a hundred and fifty years. You say, 'What is *The Atlantic*?' and you say, 'I really have no idea.' Right? It's a little package of a certain length that has had interesting thing in it over time. But not that interesting, right? Whereas even *The New Yorker* seems always in peril whenever they switch editors.

SA: *The young magazine has a potential to do something like you did when you came on the scene and denounced 'Eggers, Boy Wonder'. Was that ability—to be fiery or to be really critical and even cruel—something that necessarily has to wane? Has this been true with $n+1$, that things get less impassioned with time?*

MG: I think the great enemy of honesty, even when honesty sometimes wears the clothes of cruelty, is getting to know people. In a way my greatest regret about $n+1$ was that we got to know people who were writers and editors and critics and

so forth. And the more you get to know people the less you can be honest about them. It was very exciting in the early days and then it came to creep me out how it was possible for people who seemed distant and famous, like stars in the sky, suddenly to be emailing you. So suddenly someone whose work you didn't really like, like Michael Chabon, would be in your email inbox. And you'd be like 'Oh my god Michael Chabon emails the likes of us. And he's, gosh, I guess he's probably a really nice person. And really, he's very thoughtful.' Right? That doesn't mean that you don't still hate his work. And I think that we've been compromised by that over time.

I would encourage anyone starting a magazine who really had the, I don't know, the balls to do so, not to get to know anybody. The ideal magazine would be one that stayed far, far away, somewhere in the center of the country or Latin America. And never spoke to anybody and didn't try to get blurbs and didn't email and all the rest. Because it is compromising to engage in the system of publicity.

I think the paradigm of generational overthrow turns out to be very fruitful in all kinds of writing. And one thing I really appreciated about your short manifesto as I read it was that by paragraph two I really felt quite obsolete. Like a dinosaur. And every time I read manifestos from people who are two, three, four, five, sometimes even ten years younger than I am, I think my god, what an advantage they have to be a few years younger. We live in an era of micro-generations. It seems that if just the length of any MTV series defines a distinction, an important distinction between generations—like Daria? Are you familiar with this person Daria?

WG: *Yeah, this is when we were very young.*

MG: I had never heard of this person. And it became clear that I had never seen Daria and in fact, you know, I'm irrevocably divided as if by a giant fissure in the earth from all the people who saw Daria. You know what I mean? And it's precisely the people who have Daria and whatever else goes along with Daria as a set of common cultural compass points who now have the opportunity to say 'We must destroy the old. Anyone over thirty is not to be trusted.'

SA: Do you really feel gutted by this sense of impending youth about to overthrow some establishment? Or do you think that's just the course of things? I mean, the magazine always needs to feel undercut somehow...

MG: Yes, well, what has become very difficult for us, especially in writing those Intellectual Scene pieces at the beginning of the magazine is that to really denounce a subject properly requires more and more and more research now. I do think in the first however many years it was—we're closing in on five years?—we burned out many of the things which most annoyed us, which we knew annoyed and knew like the back of our hands or the inside of our minds—the things that we talked about and argued about and were furious about day in and day out. And many of them had to do with the popular culture. And those are the things unfortunately about which we all have encyclopedic knowledge.

In the past couple of issues I've been working on this piece about evolutionary psychology. It takes a lot more reading. That is to say, in my off-time I can't turn on VH1 and get my material. Some people would call this a process of maturation. Ideally, yeah, I imagine our subjects for denunciation would be slightly different. But certainly in a world like this one there's no reason to not continue to be angry about many, many things and to try to articulate precisely what it is about them that's detestable.

SA: *You're a sometime scholar of the little magazine. I wondered if you could briefly articulate a general theory of the little magazine, as you understand it.*

'I imagined you would just sit above me in long back robes like a scary, scary bunch of inquisitors. And you would simply say the two words: "Why print?"'

MG: Well, we believe that as long as intellectual life and artistic life has been organized by little groupings and schools, which seek to make something new and to overthrow their immediate predecessors insofar as intellectual and artistic life have a belief in progress, this is a modernist story. They've often tried to accomplish that progress by creating some little organ, a journal, belonging to them, which would allow them to say who their enemies are, and those to be overthrown, describe their new program, and offer examples of it, right? And if you believe that this modern story starts in the 1850s or the 1860s then you see it from there forward and you care about things like the transcendentalist journal *The Dial* that Emerson and Fuller ran for only about three years. Or you care about the surrealist magazines of the twenties, so forth and so on.

The theory is that you don't actually need very many issues. And you don't need much money. And you don't need a lot of personnel or even a very wide initial readership, really, to force some kind of decisive change in terms of how people think of some progressive story of art or intellect, painting or dance or theatre or politics or writing etc. That's it.

SA: *In A.O. Scott's article he's basically presenting yourself, n+1,*

and The Believer, to the readership of The New York Times Magazine. And he juxtaposes the blog with the little magazine, saying that with the little magazine you have this team of editors that have such faith in the perfect publication that they're going to put together, these bound pages and they're going to put some money on the printing press. What I mean is, his definition of the little magazine is inextricably tied to the printed form.

MG: Yes.

SA: *And in our case, what we're thinking about is how to take the stricture, the scruples of printed publishing and bring it to the internet, and you know it's a lot cheaper there, a lot easier to disseminate. I wondered if you could speak to why n+1 is printed, what is your philosophy behind that, why your website has such a, you know, little cousin relationship with the real publication?*

MG: Yes. This was the question I expected you to ask me. I imagined you would just sit above me in long back robes like a scary, scary bunch of inquisitors. And you would simply say the two words: 'Why print?'

Well, I've become much less dogmatic about the necessity of print because I find that I feel more able to read books and pdfs online than I had anticipated. And the more blogs I read, and the more I see truly magnificent blogs. Blogs that seem to have some kind of naturalness within the form. Blogs written by the people who are correctly called digital natives, that is to say, people who have grown up online.

What I find is that I still don't read things that are formatted like web pages at any length—that online literature is not long

literature. That's the fundamental difference. Ask yourself what can be accomplished in a thousand words or two thousand words. I think mcsweeneys.net is just a humor website because there exists forms of a thousand words, two thousand words, that people are used to and deal well with, right? People are not really used to writing works of fiction that have any kind of emotional outcome at a thousand words or two thousand words. It's not believed that you can make someone cry in two thousand words. It is believed that you can make someone laugh in two thousand words. Actually a lot less. And insofar as *n+1* has this strong distinction between the print and the web components, the distinction is really just one of length. The reason we started *n+1* was to be able to publish long essays and very long articles. It wasn't for purposes of vanity. It was because there are certain kinds of effects you can get, and certain kinds of arguments that can only be run at great length.

SA: Then one question I have in discussing the issue of print versus internet is size of audience versus impact. Considering how small they are, what constitutes a successful little magazine? How do you know when there has been an impact made?

MG: Yeah. I think successful little magazines go into libraries. And I think the ability of little magazines to change people's minds, to change the way people write, etc., requires a long extension in time. What's striking about the web is that it's possible to have immediate, vast, kind of spatial extension, it feels, over an audience. Something can be read by many people in a short space of time. I think probably you would have to weigh these two phenomena against each other. You have a kind of instantaneous expansion in time potentially over a wide audience, reading quickly and reading many things, and with the small magazine, this long slow process of, in the ideal case, getting the writing into libraries, where it will be discovered

slowly, successively, by generations of people. At the moment, I still feel like people don't return to things on the web in the way that they do return to things in the library. But it may again be that the things on the web are not yet things you return to.

WG: I wanted to ask you a couple of questions about your essay "On Food" in the Fall 2008 issue. In this essay, you talk about, among other things, Michael Pollan's books. You describe Pollan as "anti-progressive", as "little-c conservative." I wonder, what does a progressive food community look like? You mention in that article this idea of the non-dogmatic vegetarian. I wonder, is that the progressive foodster? Is vegetarianism—does it have to be vegetarianism? Is that progressive eating, or are there other ways to be progressive that don't go that route?

MG: Let me just say first what was meant by "little-c conservatism" with Pollan. I actually admire Pollan a lot. Little-c conservatism certainly takes up a large part of the left politically, and a large part of the democratic party. Little-c conservatism just means to place value upon whatever has already existed or existed for a long time, regardless of its particular consequences, etc., etc. Little-c conservatism believes that things which evolved are superior to things which are invented. It believes that practices longstanding in any community involving many people are superior to practices put together by a few, etc.

Progressive food practice, as described in that essay, "On Food," is meant to be one that would not particularly mind invention, not mind technology, and might put together a very ugly hybrid of things that are familiar with things that are unfamiliar in order to produce certain consequences, to get some kind of outcomes. And presumably those outcomes would be most of the same ones that Pollan would like, right? A less polluting

food culture, a less grotesque food culture, a less expensive food culture, a more egalitarian food supply. Now the vegetarian issue is tough, because I am not a vegetarian, and feel very strongly that I should be. And I suppose the non-dogmatic vegetarian, as I imagine him or her, would be the person who figured, well, it would really be best to stop eating animals, and whatever will make that easy, and widespread, is the best thing to pursue.

If it's gonna help for me to have weird-shaped tofu snacks, I like weird-shaped tofu snacks. Not everything has to be the same thing that was eaten by my forbears on the African savannah tens of thousands of years ago.

WG: *I guess that brings me to my other question about this same article, which is this question of health. There's this really kind of wonderful moment at the end of this essay, this kind of meditation about health. Yes, in the last paragraph of this essay, you write that "Health is our model of all things invisible and unfelt." And reading that, I wondered if it was a coincidence that now kind of when someone is on his deathbed, we don't bring in a priest, you know, more often we bring in this kind of like end-of-life specialist.*

MG: Sinister phrase.

WG: *So has health, I wonder, snuck in as kind of the new transcendental model of our time? Is health replacing religion? And isn't this kind of the ultimate telos of the enlightenment project of putting man in the place of God, and that human life is really kind of the transcendental goal? I don't know, this is disturbing, and this question comes up in the end of your essay, it's a disturbing question. I wonder what you think about it.*

MG: In a word, yes. What you've just described is basically what I

believe. I think the complicated feature is that if you think of the telos of the enlightenment project, right, and what it has to do with the human, or the kind of project of humanism which we associate with enlightenment, it had seemed likely that that sort of end point and goal was something like reason—the right application of human reason, and the transformation of the world through reason. Obviously the 20th century brought about all sorts of suspicion about what the real consequence of enlightened reason, instrumental reason of that kind, would be. What seems funny now is that I believe utopians of the past, looking forward to our present, with all the benefits that we have, all the technologies that we have, all the luxuries that we have, would have imagined that we would be living in a world where reason would have led us to philosophy, a different and better kind of political organization, leisure, music, thought—we would be sitting around playing our lyres on floating clouds, right?

And instead, it seems that a possible best use of reason for us, at this moment of total luxury, an end of necessity, etc., is grooming. Grooming not so far different from what monkeys do when they pick nits out of each other's fur and eat them. Care of our individual bodies, maximization of the possibilities of our individual bodies which we will never use, maximization of potential, which is not potential *for* anything particular, and a goal of immortality not as a single thing to be won by the discovery of some fountain of youth, but immortality just by a creeping pushing back of the term of life.

So you say, “I know I'm mortal, I know I have to die, but I certainly don't have to die now. Maybe I could just get one more year.” And somehow this oddity of never having to die at any particular time, I think has led us into a form of life in which all we really do is think about grooming. What we eat, and what

we're going to eat later. How much we should exercise, and how our muscles are. And then these very chancy, recondite, invisible facts about what sorts of substances might be in our body, whether our calcium will go better into our bones if we're having Vitamin C at the same time, but whether the Vitamin C will inhibit our iron, right? None of which have any very direct consequence, I think, in how long we actually do or don't live.

WG: *The utopia you were just describing in some ways isn't that far from the world we inhabit now. I think it's interesting that at least the material circumstances of the things that you were just talking about—I mean, you know, plucking our lyres on floating clouds isn't all that different from sitting on a 767 with our iPod in. I mean, that in some ways, we have achieved the material objectives of these utopias. And you talk about this in the article too, that the idea was an end of need, in terms of food, that scarcity would be over. And scarcity, at least in our culture, is over. We've gotten there in a lot of ways. But somehow it's no longer meaningful or desirable to be there.*

MG: Yes. In actually experiencing it, if that's right, if being on the 747 with your iPod is in fact like riding the clouds of heaven with your lyre, which I think may well be true. And if in fact this very basic grooming turns out really to be the real logical consequence of the end of necessity. It's very odd, because we would then be experiencing the end state of man, and none of it feels particularly transcendent.

WG: *It's kind of miserable at times actually.*

MG: You've picked out the two sides of my project, and why they link up. Because there's this one large project about the consequences of the end of necessity, and how health comes back in as this process of creating norms and requirements and

anxiety etc., when in fact we could just let go. We're done!

And on the other side, the problem of aestheticism. What do you do when all the time that you don't spend in grooming yourself is devoted to this world in which all things—all things real, all things behavioral, all tables and streets and the sky and everything—have become like art objects, somehow rendered up for our pleasure, framed and taken care of. What does that feel like? So yes. These are the two tracks I hope to pursue in the future.

SA: *After you write a piece like “On Exercise” or “On Food,” what do you do? Do you stop exercising?*

MG: What are the consequences? What are the personal consequences? I don't know. I really don't know. Since writing that essay [“On Exercise”], there have been periods in which I tried to exercise again. I didn't really succeed. I can't argue in favor of the life lived entirely in accord with your principles or the things you believe you've discovered through the movements of critique. I don't know what you would do! You'd just lock yourself in your room under such conditions. You wouldn't be able to function or deal with anyone.

Nor do I believe, however, in a strong distinction between what you think or write about and what you actually do every day. I can't imagine how you would separate that. So I suppose the consequence of writing these things, when they really work, I have the feeling that I've figured something out. Usually I'm able to put into words something that really bothered me anyway, made life very unpleasant. And somehow the unpleasant feeling is managed better. But it doesn't really solve practical issues of daily living.

SA: *You have two recent articles, one that came out right after Obama was elected, and another written after his inauguration, online in Dissent. In terms of Mark Greif writing, they're totally happy. They're kind of exultant. And it was really funny to read them and be like, "Wow, Mark's stoked about something!"*

MG: I am. Truly stoked.

SA: *I wanted to ask about the availability of criticism in this "Obamanation" moment, you know? If, perhaps, n+1 for example, was started in 2003. That's the real, you know, 'Oh crap what did we do?' moment with Bush —*

MG: Very true.

SA: *And right now, if you turn on The Daily Show, they're—a lot of the satirists are losing some of their footing, without having such a wonderful thing to throw shoes at. Do you think the political situation affects the amount of rabble-raising that something like n+1 or yourself as an intellectual can do?*

MG: I'm laughing first of all because I'm so happy that shoe-throwing has become the preferred figure for all forms of criticism. It used to be rock, or brick-throwing at one point. Iraqi culture has at last penetrated American culture.

WG: *Well it's sabotage finally come back to its literal roots.*

MG: Yeah—is that what sabotage is? It's actually like a sabot?

WG: *Sabots, like the wooden shoes, yeah. People would throw their sabots in protest.*

MG: I didn't know that. I laughed again because I do think this is

a great moment for writing because at least potentially, at last, there's the opportunity to write all of the defenses and encomia and paeans, however you say that word, which you had always wanted to, but which would have just seemed too preposterous. For example, an Ode to the Progressive Income Tax. I've always felt that, you know, really, if I would just get down to what mattered, I would just write a long piece in n+1 about how great the income tax is. One of the great achievements of American democracy, the progressive income tax. And you know, the other day, apparently Chris Dodd managed to get this thing into the stimulus bill that will limit bonuses from financiers to, what, like a percentage of their already several-million dollars

'Writing is a lot like breathing or walking. People just do it, and if necessary, they'll nail these to doors.'

a year salaries? What a great day this is! But there actually still would be great value, considering the way discourse goes at like the Wall Street Journal and even most major newspapers, to

really cheering for the capping of bonuses. Because if you read the newspapers there are these ludicrous ideas, like the possibility that it would somehow be a bad thing if there were a brain-drain from finance, of very bright people so insanely greedy that they would no longer work in finance if they could no longer have their billions of dollars. But in fact that would be the best possible thing that could happen for society, right? We really should be, as much as possible, draining the brightest people away from finance and into things like teaching, and sewage allocation, or whatever one does.

WG: *Whatever one does.*

MG: *Whatever one does.*

SA: *I teach, and the rest, I don't know, you move around poop?*

MG: How are you going to allocate your sewage? Will it go to this community or that community? *[Laughs.]* I see no reason that we shouldn't be sitting down and writing those articles. And there are all forms of, longstanding literary forms, which are not satire, which come, you know, spring from the same sorts of roots, which have great value. And I think this may be a time for the ode.

And I'm also very glad that America has not forgotten about black people. Because it really seemed for a while as if the country had, as if we had genuinely adopted this preposterous ethnic model in which everybody would get a hyphenated last name, and it was no more significant to be black in America than to be Korean-American or Jewish-American or anything else, right? And I always thought there was great value, in, like the middle of the 20th century, to the story that there was something essential about being a black American as being the one true creator and inheritor of America. These weird Europeans showed up, they murdered a lot Indians and so forth, they had imported these slaves who had created most of the only unique and great American cultures. In entertainment and the arts, in the building of cities and all the rest, and somehow that story had been lost. And I feel like Obama, once again, we are back to a properly black-and-white world, and I feel grateful for that.

SA: *When is print gonna die?*

MG: I think the New York Times may no longer print paper except for luxury readers or on weekends pretty soon, that's what I'm hearing. I don't see the book going anywhere in print.

SA: *And what does that mean for the writer? You have a fairly astute historical understating of writers in America and where they can go. Do you think it changes the situation of the writer, or this is kind of always the deal, the writer always doesn't really have a place to properly be heard, now that the mega-giants of newspapers are losing their grasp?*

MG: I would not be worried about people not being heard, or not having a place to publish writing, a place to present writing. Writing is a lot like breathing or walking. People just do it, and if necessary, they'll nail theses to doors, right? The worry is about how people will get paid, in that the structure of payment for your writing has always varied in all sorts of different ways. At certain times the issue has not been being paid for your writing but being paid to do something else, like educate the children of noblemen, while you do your writing for free. We seem to be at another moment where the ways in which people can try to make a living while writing, for writing, are becoming radically unsettled—happens to coincide at the moment with a seeming depression in which all sorts of people's wages will be temporarily unsettled. So I think it's very hard to predict.

WG: *Puns on your name: do you get "grief" puns a lot?*

MG: Always.

WG: *Yeah? How so? Give a couple of examples.*

MG: Well, grief was always the standard mispronunciation and misspelling, more common than Greif obviously. I was called by a grade-school teacher "Charlie Brown" by some long associative track that involved "Greif—grief—good

grief, Charlie Brown—Charlie Brown.” I never liked this.

The most interesting thing that used to happen was that when I would order Chinese food, the only place I felt really happy and at ease with mispronunciation, because the last name was always taken to be Rice over the telephone.

WG: *Your last name was Rice?*

MG: No it was Greif, but to them—I would be like, “For Greif.” And they would be like, “Rice?” I would say “No, Greif.” “Rice?”

WG: *Who is your favorite wag? Wag—I’m sure you’re familiar with the word—it’s a lively joker, a jestful figure.*

MG: This is an answer I never could have or would have given before, and will never give again. I saw *Pineapple Express* last night, and I was very taken with the character of Red. Un-fucking-believable. I mean, that is one of the great comic performances I’ve ever seen. And a way of talking which I—it was odd. I knew it, but I still can’t say what it is or where it’s from. Just amazing.