FIRST NIGHT OF THE TAPES
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Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady

FIRST NIGHT OF THE TAPES

A Conversation Tape Recorded San Francisco 1952 Typed up by Jack Kerouac.

JACK And during the night he said “I’m an artist!”

NEAL Oh no—He he he ha ha ha—He did huh?

JACK Yah

NEAL Well, you know, ah, Bill*—All Bill does is sit there and read all day—and so I just happened to pick up this Really the Blues and I read the whole thing thru in a day or two, you know, just sittin there high, and readin, I’d sit opposite him—See I wouldnt do any work either—Hunkey** and Joan*** doin all the work and there’s Bill and me sittin there readin all day—You know this Inside U.S.A. of 1200 pages—And I read every word of that, of that sonumbitch thing

JACK Just facing Bill?

NEAL Yeah—Just as well read a book—I read that book and I read Really the Blues—and a few others—And that’s all we’re doing we’re just sittin there all day readin—high—see, him and me—And so what I’m saying is, he’s, after I was all done =

JACK Oh you’d read to each other?

NEAL No no no silence

JACK Silence?

NEAL Yeah silence, yeah, he’d be reading and I’d be reading—The rest them in there workin, that’s right, and so then he said “What do you think of that Really the Blues?”—“Oh it’s alright I guess”—He said “That guy’s nowhere,” he says, “I read that goddamn thing”—You know how Bill viciously, you’ll see him attack something, doesnt mean anything one way or another but he’s always saying “Well I dont know,

* William S. Burroughs, author of Naked Lunch et al.
** Herbert Huncke, author of short stories.
*** Mrs. William S. Burroughs.
that's no good”—You know how he'd always do—think of him—Lots of
times I've been amazed and looked sharp, when I was younger I used to
look at him as tho to take him seriously—You're not supposed to take
him seriously—You don't know what he's saying about—And he'll say
these horrible things “Ah Jack that's no good that fuckin shit's no good,
I'm gonna build a house last thousands of years”—Cause he don't know—
He's sayin “Well, well, well man what I'm sayin is, that poor sonumbitch”
he says “I read that fuckin book,” he says, “the goddam thing was”...you
know...he says—“Jesus I can't think of it the guy's just nowhere,” you
know what he's saying, “this Mezrow character—Oh no!” Then he said:
“Sure a niggerlover aint he?” You know, he he he, just like that—You
know how he acts with that Charley Elisor, that Louisiana????—Have you
heard that story of his that he'd come and he'd say, O man it's frantic,
you'd get high man, and he'd say “And so we got in the schoolbus with
the bunch of them young girls,” he says. “Old Charley he went w-i-l-d,
completely wild, he raped all the young women and the 13 year old
g-i-r-l-s,” he was the schoolbus driver, see, trying to get himself—Man the
whole thing, it goes on for an hour like that, Jesus, that sonumbitch

JACK Is that what his job was?

NEAL Yeah Charley Elisor

JACK His job was driving the schoolbus

NEAL No...no, he just invented that, you know—Old Bill, he just gets high
and invents that story...No Charley Elisor was the guy that=

JACK Farmer huh?

NEAL =yah, that owned that store down the road, the country store,
yeah, Bill would go down there to this country store and dig this Charley
Elisor

JACK And Charley Elisor was supposed to have these little Orphan
Annie eyes, like buttons?

NEAL Is that what he said, that? I never heard that one

JACK That's what Allen* says

NEAL Oh yeah, yeah, yeah...Yeah I remember Allen, he was there too
—when (mumble)

* Allen Ginsberg, poet, author of Howl, et al.
JACK He says that one day you were all high in the livingroom, and all high goofing off real high and in the door suddenly Charley Elisor was standing...with his Little Orphan Annie eyes fixed on space

NEAL Gee

JACK He's just comin in to say hello—that's what he's doin in the door—He's such a country farmer

NEAL Yeah (laughing)

JACK Well, he's a real Voodoo...Joan said

NEAL Yeah, I guess he is, man

JACK Bill goes up to him and he says, "Say, ah, how does that divining rod work?" And Charley Elisor says, "It aint exactly a divining rod, it's a divining twig that I balance on my fingertips." Bill says "How does that work?" "Well, all depends on instinct."

NEAL On instinct

JACK To find water, see

NEAL Hee hee hee hee all depends on instinct

JACK You find water there, it'll balance off your fingertip when there's water

NEAL Yeah, by instinct he does it

JACK He actually DOES find water

NEAL Yah, that thing works, yeah

JACK So, ah, and one day somebody came up to—somebody was sittin there—and it's started rainin...that's what it is! When he came in the room, and everybody was high, and he's staring into space? It started to rain and thunder

NEAL Oh y-e-s, phew

JACK Thunder crashed outdoors?

NEAL Man, instinct

JACK He said "Wal, I guess I brought the rain with me"

NEAL Oh man, like that guy in Lil Abner Gloom goes around, with the rain comin down on him? Allen told you about that? about an actual
happening?

JACK And I remembered the other story about a horse? And old Bill was practising with a shotgun?

NEAL Yeah, I was there

JACK Hey, the redcoats are comin...and he sticks his gun out the window and shoots

NEAL Yeah, I was there, yeah

JACK Why did he shoot?

NEAL He didnt stick it out the window, we was all sittin on the porch, Hunkey is playin his Billie Holliday, see, right here—And Bill’s sittin there on the porch with his rifle ’cross his knees, see, sittin there like this—And we’re, I’m sittin there, and that’s so when he says, somethin like that, he didnt say that at all, what he does, I dont remember that, he might have said somethin, but, the horses, I’m sittin there stoned, and I look up, and here’s Bill, crowsh, at a dead tree trunk, which he thought see, for kicks, he’d shoot the treetrunk, see, there was a big treetrunk, it was about a hunnerd yards away, fifty yards, sebenty, about fifty yards, yeah, seventy, sixty yards, and, ah, it was rotten, see the treetrunk was rotten, you know the rest of the story, you know, the ball went through the treetrunk, it was rotten like paper *(Neal’s baby cries*)

JACK Yeah

NEAL See, it hit the treetrunk alright, but the horse passed right behind it at that time—Of course, Bill can’t see—What really happened the horses were fifty yards away, you know by now, when the report sounded, but Bill can’t see and so he thought he hit the horse, or he knew he came damn close you see with this aimin at this trunk, so he cries “Hey I hit the horse” and he jumps up, you know, says “Oaiy” and he jumps off the porch, hee hee, the horses are trottin right along, he hasn’t touched nothin see—Here’s this Bill, he’s so high, he’s just sittin there with his bad order eyes, see he can’t see a hundred yards, y’know, that sonumbitch, no wonder he missed that shotglass last year, imagine, no shit—He can’t see with them eyeglasses—Why we drove to New York, it was so awful, a truck or any thing would be anywhere near him, within fifty feet of him

* Neal’s baby is John Allen Cassady, b. 1951
see, and he'd put on the brakes like this see and pull over to the right hand side of the road, just like an old woman—Not because he can't drive or nothing—but he can't see—No kidding! I dug that! So we made an agreement that I'd drive all night and everything and if he ever wanted to drive or anything why sometimes he'd drive in the afternoon an hour or two—So that's what he did—But, he's, ah, crazy, man, that Bill hee hee hee.................phew, naw but man, what I'd wanted to you is, I didn't know that I'd appreciate remembering these things more—So therefore when I was there I didn't pay much attention to any of this, I was hung up on something else, you know, so I can't remember, say, like for example, I can remember now for example, but now that I can remember it doesn't do any good—Because...Man...I can't get it down. You know, I just remember it, I can remember it well, what happened 'cause I'M not doing nothin, see?

JACK  You don't have to get it down

NEAL  (demurely downward look)  But I can't remember what happened there, man, except now I remember certain things—But I'm sayin like Hunkey me and Allen goin out in the middle of the Louisiana bayou on a particular New York kick—now this is one time, now I'm really—Hunkey, you remember how he is—so Hunkey's sayin "Come on, man, I want to show you something."—He'd, and Allen—he and Allen were that way a great deal, Allen would say "You've got to see this piece of cloth," and Hunkey's sayin "Man you've got to see something, ever since you been down here I been telling you about it, now you've got to see it." Because, what had happened, Hunkey had gotten high one day and we were cuttin thru this forest vine place, it's only about Oh a halfmile behind the house, really, about a mile, no one ever goes over there you see. And it was an impassable bayou...that he'd dug the flowers and the gone colors and he was so high, see, jungle stream, and everythin comin down, and crocodiles and everything in this goddam swamp that's right beside—So he's going to take Allen over there, so we go on over there, and we lit up, you know, to make it just like we'd do, we'd be sittin there, "Come on, I'm gonna show you this now," you know, "Well alright," and so we all blasted and we went there and we sat there, so what happened, you know, as far as happenings go, but I remember that, Old Hunkey wanted to see those...he wanted Allen to get hung up on those bayous!!! Whereas, really it was about fifty yards from where we'd bathed every day—And we did see a corner of the thing, whatever he was talking about, anyhow, every day, we'd go down and bathe—One day Joan said "Well come on
if you'll take me down to bathe’” and with the car, we're to bathe Julie* too, Bill sittin there and he looks up over his glasses, you know, the way Bill looks up to Joan. Man, relationship completely a stone wall between me and Joan, as far as that goes, see, altho I don't want to be that way, naturally, but I mean I'm not ah—So like a young school kid I say “Well now, I'll leave you down there, then I'll come back, say, then I'll go down and pick you up say in twenty minutes or something,” like a stoop see but man there's nothing I can do, and Joan didn't say yes, or no, or anything. Then we got there, why we sat and talked for a few minutes, and I say “Well I guess I’d better get back” why, ’cause she's startin to go down and get undressed there, in the pond, you know, and the pond is right there every day, you lay up there in the pond with the fishes hittin you in the ass, y'know Man they're a terrible feelin when you're high, you gotta get in this muddy old swamp water, see, and you got that little embankment there, see, but there that mud on the bottom in some places there, it's pretty bad you know, and so you're trying to relax, you know, set yourself down a little bit, and you just about get halfway settled, you know how sensitive you are, and here these fishes start biting at you, little fishes, man, just little things, you can see em, sometimes you cant 'cause you kick up the mud, see, but man, it's a son of a bitch, we've all got bites all over

JACK Who's goin in there with you?

NEAL Oh me and Allen, everyday we'd goof off.

JACK He doesn't notice those things—

JACK Jesus, Bill's wonderful, huh?

NEAL About 10:30 AM man, he'd show up out of his room, see, he'd retire early about 8:30, then about 10:30 AM he'd come out of his room all dressed complete with tie and everything, he'd come and he'd sit down “Good morning, any mail yet Neal?” and I'd say “No I didn't go for the mail yet.” And so, and he'd say, “well” and he'd sit right down in his chair, man, right there a minute and he'd start reading his mails, first thing in the morning, reading a newspaper or something, and if he felt good why he'd be talking to Joan “Well I see Peaches Browning got another divorce here” and Joan'd be “Yeah yeah” in the kitchen, you know, right over the embankment is what it was, see the kitchen's there and there was

*Mrs. Burroughs' daughter by another marriage, b. 1944. (These events take place in 1947.)
just a little half wall, so they'd be lookin at each other, and, but if he
wasnt feeling so good he'd just sit there

JACK And he wouldn't say nothing!

NEAL In the meantime old Hunkey, he's been out gathering firewood
'cause he's used all the firewood everywhere around so he's packing it,
man, from a quarter halfmile away, here he is, Old Hunkey... Bill would =
Building himself up, see, and he's got this terrible disease of his skin,
man, what a horrible disease, great boils on his legs and everything, and
holes everywhere—No one knew what it was, even the doctors didn't know,
he'd been to a doctor twice and they didn't know what it was, some kind
of skin disease, never heard of, but, imagine, so everybody's leary of
Hunkey, see, Poor Hunkey, nobody'll go near him, and he'd go bathe
by himself down in the crick 'n everything—But I don't know if that's
the case but it seems to me, it doesn't seem like it's usually been now as I
remember because I wasn't thinking about those things, I certainly wasn't
hung up on that, but it seemed to me Joan was the instigator of all this,
better watch out for Hunkey, you know

JACK Yes

NEAL He'll give you that fungus bungus you know... It's a fuckin thing—
But what I'm saying is that Hunkey he'd have the firewood because he
had to cook the steaks, as soon as it was getting dark, you know, he had
to have plenty of firewood to get good and hot—Oh he was always hung
up on his firewood you know, he was always talking about firewood

JACK Hunkey?

NEAL Well yeah, you know, he had to get all this damn wood... what
I'm saying, that, I can remember him several times distinctly walking a
long distance under his wood—And also complaining about it—And
also feeling a big release and relief when he got to go into Houston and I
got to drive him in, that's sixty miles

JACK Hmm

NEAL Man, and he'd sit down and he'd be talking about this and that,
man, he'd be happy as a little kid, he's goin into Houston to pick up the
Benny, 'cause we had stripped all the benzedrine out of every store every-
where around including Huntsville, the state pen, and everywhere, you
know man, and so we had to go, we finally got a place in Houston down-
town we had a gross of it, 144 benzedrine tubes, so we had to do that
every two weeks, go into Houston and get a gross of benny for Joan, man, O Jesus Christ what a trip—And pick up some nembutals, man, that's what that Hunkey was hung up on then, he was vicious too on that stuff

JACK What he do

NEAL Oh he was, ah, ah, how would you say it? vilifying everybody; you know he was, ah,—well him and Joan really were in the heights of a great feud, no shit, I really think so, because Joan was always “That Hunkey”—In fact it got so bad, I can remember, you can ask Allen, the incidents like at the supper table Hunkey would get hysterical, you know that never happens, and he'd throw up his dish and go away, and Bill, he'd, “Ah, Hunkey” you know, but I'm not digging any of this so much, I'm on other things somewhere

JACK What were you doing?

NEAL Oh I dont know what I was doing, I cant remember man, it's a terrible feeling not being able to remember what I was doing...Hee hee hee...Jesus was I there? I dont remember where I am but I think I was there, shh, one time or another, damn that, O Christ, mmm. . . .That's an interesting question, what was I doing! (laugh)...What I was doing, I think the reason I dont remember too well=

JACK All I know is what Allen told me

NEAL =what's that?

JACK Oh, hitch hiked, from Denver=

NEAL Yeah

JACK =he said you kneeled on the road in Texas at night—swore, or something

NEAL No kidding

JACK Yeah, facing each other, he said you kneeled in the road=

NEAL Oh I remember now...But that's not what it was, except some understanding

JACK =some understanding

NEAL Yeah
JACK  To understand...Some understanding to understand

NEAL  Yah...We were very, high...Yeah...Ah...Yeah

JACK  Well why did he shoot, why did he let go a blast of the shotgun at all?

NEAL  He'd shoot an armadillo, you know, just something to play with. (To baby):—Hey kid aren't you ever going to bed, it's past your bedtime man. You ben sitting there staring at that light for three hours! I wonder what you—hey he hasn't done nothin but stare at that light for three hours,—what are YOU thinking about man?

JACK  Why he's high

NEAL  He just lays there—What's the matter with you son? That's all he wants to do is look at that light. Aint that crazy? Look at that friggin light man, every time I look at it it just looks like this to me—it's too strong—Look right into that light like he does...Jee-sus

JACK  But he looks away from it once in a while doesn't he?

NEAL  He doesn't seem to—wal, I guess he is

JACK  Well that's harder than staring into it all the time, you know, its re focus and focus

NEAL  He's getting his eye exercises see

JACK  He knows what he's doin

NEAL  Goddam right...Well lookit man, I'm gonna change your pants and put you to bed, right? He is a weird kid, weirdest kid I ever seen—What the hell did I do with my=Oh damn it, where'd I put it boy? You see I'm high???

JACK  Diaper? Wh—?

NEAL  The—the pin=

JACK  Hey there it is!

NEAL  =Ah here it is—yet, there was two pins, ... Here it is (mumble) Well, what are you saying?

JACK  I said you never told me what you did in Texas?

NEAL  No
See. All I know is what Allen said

Yeah. Goddamit what did he say?

He said that when you were driving— Across Houston you told some — (pause) That's one thing I don't know what the hell

Yeah, well I'll tell you man, the interesting thing about this stuff is I think the both of us are going around containing ourselves, you know what I mean, what I'm saying is, ah, we're still aware of ourselves, even when we're high

Well I feel like an old fool

Well, I've been an old man, Jack, in Watsonville, and my eyes going bad, and my—yeah, well I feel like a middleaged fool

You do?

Yeah but I know I'm very young kid—type—in fact sometimes it might even occur to me to worry about it—but I haven't ever yet—You know. Man, I kinda dig you as a young kid type too you know

What?

I kinda dig you as a young kid type, like myself, but anybody else digging us thinks we're young kids but not you so much 'cause you're dark but I'm light complexioned so I look like a young kid all the time. . . But I never thought of that as—anything to worry about (pause) Well I'll tell you this, I don't feel very intelligent any more, at times, for a long time... When I get high I feel =

That has two meanings

Yeah? Well =

I mean intelligent =

=I don't feel able, capable of the work, the effort, not the effort itself, I go through a lot of effort you've seen me, man, I've been on my feet here for sixteen hours, I =

You can't keep something up

=I can't write it, I can't say, I can't, ah, you know, I mean, I'm— I can't get anything personally done like that

Yeh
NEAL. I can't even get arr-- And when I'm high, shoo, I realise, that it
doesn't have to matter—Now you drank water, see, you ruined that—
our mouth is so dry and so—arent they—that you ruined it with some
water and I dint catch you till just now...And here's what I was gonna
do, see, I was going to open this up, see? 'Cause our mouths is so dry

JACK. Oh gee...Well isn't there a roach? (pause) Go ahead

NEAL. Well that's a, that's a—how many did we smoke man? how many
you think?

JACK. I shouln't have drank that water, that's all

NEAL. THAT'S the only thing, that's right...Well we'll smoke some more
in a minute here but I gotta put this kid to bed, see I've been hung up an
hour, I'll be RIGHT down in two minutes, or less than that possibly.