



excerpted from *After the Revolution*

AFTER THE REVOLUTION time was free. Time had been emancipated. Nobody would ever need more time again. Those people who had invested their time carefully before the revolution now felt bewildered and betrayed. Those of us who had wasted our time felt nothing. Now we could no longer buy or spend time and would have to find other things to do with it. Time was the only thing we would never run out of. Long after all the food and medicine had been stripped from the shelves we would still have enough time. This was the time we had always hungered for. Time was now perfectly elastic. Either we would stretch it around gigantic projects or it would snap back and be forgotten in less than a second.

This was time during which novels could be written or symphonies composed for a world with no publishers or orchestras but possibly readers and audiences. For a few weeks someone continued to ring the hours on a distant bell tower and dutifully clocked every hour. Eventually whoever it was overslept or gave up or left town like all the other people. It was impossible. Time meant little more than distance and the certainty of sunrise and sunset and the possibility that autumn would grow colder. Time had been freed from its rules and measurements and we discovered we needed other rules and measurements. The order of the day became the order of the day. We invented new rules for everything each time.

We tried new ways of walking talking cooking eating and sleeping. We found dozens of old board games and tried to figure out different ways to play them. We never consulted the old rules. Now that we were able to live without decisions we began to make and follow them. Those of us who were anarchists before now obeyed our own rules more zealously than anyone. Often the rules didn't work: like eat without using your hands or don't touch the ground. We finished every game any way. We had finally found that the only way to have fun or accomplish anything was through rules. The only way to give free play to our creativity was through a labyrinth of restrictions. We wondered if inventing rules should have rules. Even casual conversation had become impossible without rules. Without limiting ourselves to four letter words or a particular verb tense there was too little to say and too many ways to say it and we would end up talking about ourselves and each other and who hadn't done the dishes and what rules might get him to. We used strange rules to become friends. Now the handful of us were alone together in a world without automobiles or muzak whose electricity had died and whose billboards were peeling and we had to work through the jostling shifting of our various enmities and alliances until we each shared a language with every other person and had learned to enjoy and depend

upon each of our idiosyncrasies. We managed to do this surprisingly quickly. We began to wonder what we could do as a group on the day we agreed on the rule to speak without using singular pronouns.

AFTER THE REVOLUTION I always told you to meet me at the library—the third largest University library in America—I always said you'd find me—even though it was now deserted and the few people you did see were reading and you respectfully subdued the urge to greet them—I had hoped we would never meet (and inevitably discuss what was going on with our friends at home—and how we weren't sure why—even now after the revolution—we couldn't talk about them in front of them—and whether Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle made more sense with interpersonal interaction than subatomic particles—or at least—interpersonal relationships being more urgent—especially now when there was no electricity to power particle accelerators—whether the principle was a more useful model when applied to them—etcetera—instead I had hoped we would each wander a maze of carrels—wandering opposite directions down parallel aisles—researching old ideas of the new society—reading waiting reading sitting waiting etcetera—finding messages we scrawled to one another in the margins of pre-Revolutionary revolutionary

