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Café le Monde

by CHARLES L. MEE

The sidewalk in front of a café.
Café tables.
The façade of the café.

No one is sitting in the café.
A waiter comes out,
wipes off a table,
puts a towel over his arm
and looks on at the street scene.

A woman enters,
holding a computer in one hand,
with an ear piece in her ear,
dancing to the music (which we can't hear) on her computer.
Not 10 seconds of dancing,
but a full couple of minutes.

A guy enters while she is dancing.
He takes a chair at one of the café tables,
speaks to the waiter,
who eventually brings him an espresso.

The guy watches the woman dancing.
When she finishes,
she turns and sees him watching her.

SHE

Is this chair taken?

HE

Oh, no!

SHE

May I join you?

HE

Yes, yes, of course. Yes, please. Of course.

SHE

what are you doing here?

HE

well, I'm...

I'm having a cup of coffee

SHE

that's all?

HE

yes, I think so

SHE

and then you have plans?

HE

well, no

SHE

You're meeting someone?

HE

No.

SHE

You're going somewhere?

HE
No.

SHE
You'll be getting together with someone later on.

HE
No.
No, not that I know of.

SHE
You remind me of George Washington

HE
I'm sorry?

SHE
or Genghis Khan

HE
Genghis Khan?

SHE
the kind of guy who steps into the world
he had no idea where he was going
or what might happen next
or what would become of it
or where it all would end

HE
oh

SHE
and so, to me,
that's what it is to be a hero

HE
a hero

Suddenly, she gets up and leaves.

HE calling out after her
Wait! Miss! Miss! Wait!

a group of dancers comes in and dances
they all just walk in
[blocking our hero from the computer woman,
keeping him from following her out],
turn and face the audience
and then dance

MUSIC

dance
MUSIC
dance
MUSIC

and when they are finished, they just drop it,
turn,
and some of them find tables to sit at
and order coffee

and the others all just turn and leave
just walk out

A MAN SPEAKS

Human existence, fundamentally, has two modes—
facticity and transcendence—
and human beings
are forever negotiating
a kind of "metastable"
oscillation
between these two modes.
However,
if one tries to occupy only a single pole of that pairing
if one acts simply as an object
and so denies one's freedom
or if one pretends to be unencumbered
by the givenness of his or her situation
and so denies his or her facticity
then one is living in bad faith.

The café waiter, for example,
is guilty of the first—
of the denial of freedom or transcendence.
He believes that he can
"be a waiter" in the way that an inkwell is an inkwell.
His movement is quick and forward,
a little too precise,
a little too rapid.
He comes toward the customer with a step a little too quick.

He bends forward a little too eagerly;
his voice, his eyes express an interest
a little too solicitous
for the order of the customer...

He is playing,
he is amusing himself.
But what is he playing?
We need not watch long before we can explain it:
he is playing at being a waiter in a café. ___

But
he is in bad faith
because he is "fleeing his freedom."
He is trying to realize the being-in-itself (*en soi*)
of "the café waiter."
But he can never simply be a waiter in that way
because he always has the freedom to transcend that situation
(even if he denies it).
There is nothing stopping him from waking up one morning
and deciding not to go to work,
or not to perform his job so eagerly and solicitously,
save his denial that such actions are real possibilities.

Every time we attempt to reduce ourselves to our facticity,
we immediately realize that those facts can be transcended. Correspondingly,
every time we pretend that we are unencumbered by our facticity,
we find ourselves confronted
with the limits of our freedom.

ANOTHER GUY, at another café table
The man inhaled another hit from his cigarette,
and slowly sighed out the smoke.
Death stood quietly
as the smoke caressed his cold cheek
like a gentle demon's kiss.
Sternly,
Death began to speak.
'You have 3 days to find someone who loves you,
if by the end of the 3 days you are still loveless,

then I will return and take more than your voice.'
With a hazy mist settling in
and by the red ambers discarded by the cigarette,
Death was gone.
The man carefully sat up
and realized that Death had taken one more thing from him,
his color-vision.

The man couldn't help but think
how he is to find love if he couldnt even speak.
how he had set out for the day
with nothing more than his wallet,
lighter,
pen + notepad,
and a pack of cigarettes.

His face covered in ash
smoking away his problems and his life.

A WOMAN [speaking to the man she is with, at another table]
It's the way you'd always call me after dark and ask me to spend the night...and ask
me to bring pizza from my side of town...
in a blizzard,
on a Sunday night,
twenty minutes before the last train.
It's the way all our telephone conversations wind up
marred by wind noise,
or faulty connections.
It's the way we can't agree on the proper placement of furniture,
or stand to watch each other eat.
It's the way neither of us has found a way
to sleep well in the other's bed.
It's the way we fight over radio stations
and access to electrical outlets.
Light on or off.
Comedy or Horror.
Diet or Regular.

[as she goes on,
another woman begins to speak simultaneously
to the man she is with]

It's the way I can't leave in the morning
without putting on half an hour of eye makeup,
and you read the paper all through our brunch dates.
It's the way I never have change for the bus,
and you get paranoid about waiting for the bus longer than you have to,
and then we miss the damned bus anyway.
It's the way you refuse to bathe,
or wear clean clothes unless I force you to,
and the way I ignore the dishes
and let them get crusty under the bed.
I omit details,
and you go on desperate searches for potential evidence against me.
I hide my face all evening,
and you stay up late to think of reasons to be hurt.
It's your lying,
and my pessimism,
and your accusations,
and my cruelty,
and your indecisiveness,
and my indifference.
We shout for hours,
you break things,
I cry,
we share a bottle of wine and spend hours in heated silence.
Then we pass out beside each other on the couch,
and start again after work that night.

ANOTHER WOMAN, at another table
Give up your job?
Are you crazy?
Are you such a coward that a doctor can scare you like that?
What's the matter with you?
He only told you about that stroke to keep you coming to him.
I suppose you think
it's right to loaf around until we get put out in the streets?

However small your salary we'd starve to death without it.
Can't you think of anyone beside yourself?
How about me?

[and, as she speaks, yet another woman
begins to speak, filled with rage,
at the same time
to the man she is with]

What's going to buy the children food?
We owe the grocer and the butcher as it is.
If they found out you weren't working
they wouldn't give us any more credit.
And the landlord?
How long would he let us stay?
You'll get another job?
You can't get another job!
And this is all the thanks I get for working my fingers off!
What a father for my poor children!
How did I ever marry such a man?

YET ANOTHER WOMAN, at yet another table
It's easy to say:
"Why don't I beat it?"
How can I?
I never have enough money to make a good break and get out of town.
He takes it all away from me.
And if I went to some other part of this town
he'd find me and kill me.
He's got me where he wants me all right.
He makes it OK with the cops
so they don't hold me up for walking the streets.
So I can take care of the children if nothing else.

[and as she speaks,
a fourth woman begins to speak simultaneously
to the man she is with]

I've looked for work and I've starved at it.
A year after I first got here I quit and tried to go straight.
I got a job at housework—
twelve hours a day for four hundred dollars a month.
But what was the use?
One night they have a guy to dinner
who's seen me some place when I was on the town.
He tells the lady—
his duty he said it was—
and she fires me.
I tried the same thing a lot of times.
But there was always some one who'd drag me back.

A FOURTH WOMAN

You can love someone you're incompatible with,
and many people do.
Most often,
there's no reason or explanation for why you love someone:
You just do.
People can and do love more than one person.
There is no guarantee the greatest love of your life will marry you.
Divorced people can still love each other, and yet not wish to remarry.
Not all love is constant—
many times love comes, goes, and returns like a breeze.
Most people, at one time or another,
will confuse love with emotional dependency.
Some people can be much happier single than married.
Not everyone who loves, loves well, nor ever learns how to love well.

[To silence all these complaints,
a man rises from a table
and begins to sing, above the babble of complaint,
a love aria—
a famous love aria from an opera,
or maybe even one or two pop songs in the mix.]

aria
aria
aria

aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria

And, when he finishes,
another person steps forward onto the sidewalk in front of the café
and sings a love aria straight out to the audience

aria
aria

And then another steps forward onto the sidewalk
and sings a love aria

aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria

And, finally,
all four singers sing a love aria together.

There should be three completely amateur singers
[actors, not singers]
and one fabulous opera singer
so we have:
amateur sings,
amateur sings,
professional sings,
amateur sings,
and then all four together.

aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria

aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria
aria

It could be that the first two singers sing pop love songs
then the professional opera singer does the first operatic aria
and then all four together do another operatic aria.

Or not.

They could all do opera.

Among the operatic arias, they might do
L'amour est un oiseau rebelle (fickle love) from Carmen
and the tragic aria Ah! vers toi toujours s'envolera
from Lucie de Lammermoor

and they all just sit again
as the waiter serves them coffee

while our attention is taken by
a young actress on a cell phone

THE ACTRESS

I have a fucking song
what does the director mean I don't have a fucking song to sing
I have a fucking song to sing I'll sing the fucking song
well I do have a song
I do have a song
I do have a fucking song
I did tell the director

I told him I do have a fucking song to sing
yes it's ready
yes
yes I could sing it right now
yes I could fucking sing it now
yes I could fucking sing it anytime
I told him I could fucking sing the fucking song any fucking time he wants
well why the fuck doesn't he fucking listen when I say any fucking thing?

friends gather around to console the actress, one seems to be her boy friend, puts
arm around her, they kiss, all part in different directions—or she storms out solo as
they watch, and then:

a human statue performer comes in and takes his position
[later, halfway through, he will just take off his headgear
sit and have his dinner break
and then get back up and statue again till the end of the play]

as
eight dogs go through
two dogs go through
one dog goes through

a guy walks by, carrying a pane of clear glass

a guy walks by with a bathtub on his head

a guy who plays the violin
[who was playing it with one of the songs perhaps]
puts it in a trash can
and stomps it
or smashes it with a baseball bat?

[later on he will return,
get the violin out of the trash can,
play it beautifully,
and then put it back in the trash can and stomp it again;
he might do this a third time, too]

then a dance piece;
it could be Camille Brown's solo dance,
The Evolution of a Secured Feminine,
with music by Ella Fitzgerald, Betty Carter, and Nancy Wilson
[this piece could be divided into three parts
so that one part can be done now,
and the other two parts later—
or, of course, three separate dances can be done in the course of the piece]

and then:
a guy agonizing about his life

A GUY

The trouble is
I can't make sense of my life at all.
I can't see a beginning and a middle and an end
It seems to me to be just a bunch of random vivid moments.
I think, when I am on my deathbed,
I won't look back on a story of my life
I'll just remember a constellation of moments....
vivid moments
but just that

HIS FRIEND

I think this is how it is.

A GUY

Is it?

HIS FRIEND

A Jackson Pollock painting,
it doesn't have a story.
A sunset
it's an experience, not a story.
Perhaps a life is like a sunset.
Or even if it has a story
or it has a hundred little stories
that's the least important thing about it.
On your deathbed

you don't remember the story of how you became president
or how you came to america and started a small business
and built the business into a large business
and then a larger business
and then merged with Walmart
you just remember coffee with Martha in that little café on Bleecker Street
and the summer in twilight park by the pool
and the conversation by the pool with dick about proust or donald hall
and the long drive with the kids up to that ski place
wherever it was
in Vermont
and this is a life
if you're lucky
if you know what it's all about
a constellation of vivid moments
like the stars in the universe
ephemeral
and eternal
and not some reductionist little narrative
that is all you can remember on your deathbed
that would be too pathetic

A GUY
really?

HIS FRIEND
really

A GUY
How do you know that?

HIS FRIEND
Because I have a life.
Have you got a life?

the headless accordion player plays—
that is to say,
a man with his dress shirt and suit jacket pulled up so high
that he doesn't have a head showing

plays the accordion
—and then leaves or sits at a table?

a guy puts his head in a box of glass

while

a guy puts on his suit jacket,
getting it wrong again and again—
first one sleeve wrong, then the other,
then the whole jacket upside down, and so forth,
like the classic clown performance of this routine by James Thiérrée

To me, where we are,
this is, like:
the center of the world
like rome
the empire
the center of the empire
Dean and DeLuca
shelves full of
tea from India
vanilla from Mexico
nutmeg from Indonesia
saffron from Kashmir
the treasures of the world
brought back for the pleasure of the lucky
but then you think:
the empire's going to fall
it always does
and you think
that will be the end of the world
but it won't be
greece fell
rome fell
life goes on
you might even say
after it falls
everything is better
like Paris

ever since the French lost their empire
Paris is better
like the French just died and went to heaven

guy runs through, to catch a bus?, holding up his ghetto pants

more James Thiérrée classic lazzi,
such as the guy with the folding chair

You've heard about the first emperor of China.

No.

Well, you know,
he conquered all the known world
his name was Chin
that's why they call it China
and he conquered everything
he standardized the legal codes
he standardized the coinage
he standardized the language
he standardized the wheel axle
he built expressways
he built bridges
he built canals
he burned books
and then he built the Great Wall of China
to protect everyone from the barbarians
he did it all
he looked around and he thought
I've done it all
there's nothing left for me to do
except to conquer death itself
to be immortal
and so he began to take an elixir
that would make him live forever

but the elixir contained lead
and so his ambition to be immortal
that's what killed him.

But then
sometimes you hear other stories
I saw this play once
the first act was in a living room
people coming and going
a cocktail party
some flirting
that sort of thing
and as it went on
the stagehands would come in
and remove a chunk of the floor one chunk at a time
these 3 by 5 foot panels of floorboard
so that,
as the cocktail party went on
people had to be more and more careful
where they stepped
so they wouldn't fall through the floor
until, by the end of the first act the floor was gone entirely
and then you saw:
under the floor was three feet of water
and for the whole second act
the actors just walked around with water up to their waists
they just lived in the sewers under the city
that's all
until they got into arguments
and killed each another
and they were all dead floating in the sewers

well, but
as you say
that was just a play

it could be true

well....

then a dance piece—
perhaps Camille Brown's solo dance,
The Evolution of a Secured Feminine,
with music by Ella Fitzgerald, Betty Carter, and Nancy Wilson
[do three such pieces, or divide this into three parts
and do one part at a time through the piece]

A couple comes into the café and sits.

NORA
Look what I got.

TORVALD
What you got?
You mean you bought all this?

NORA
You know
this is the first time we can let ourselves go a little bit,
when we don't need to think all the time about economizing.

TORVALD
Yes, well,
still
we don't want to be spending money recklessly.

NORA
Maybe we can be just
a little bit more reckless?
You're going to have a big salary now.

[others in the café begin to glance at these two]

TORVALD

Well, bonuses and so forth.
But not quite what we can count on just yet.
Meanwhile, thinking of the cash flow....

NORA

We can just borrow till the bonuses come along.

TORVALD

Nora!
Are we featherheads?
Suppose I borrow a thousand dollars today
and you spend it all this week
and then a piece of cornice falls from a building
and hits me on the head

NORA

No, Torvald, no,
please
don't talk like that.

TORVALD

Still, suppose it happened....

NORA

Well, if that happened
then I wouldn't care whether I owed money or not.

TORVALD

And what about the people who had loaned the money?

NORA

I don't think I'll bother about them.
I don't even know them.

TORVALD

I don't want to say:
this is like a woman.

[others in the café react a little more visibly]

NORA

Then don't.

[the others in the café look at one another]

TORVALD

No.

Still, you know what I think.

No debt, no borrowing.

There's no freedom about a life that depends on borrowing and debt.

NORA [sad, repentent]

I'm sorry, Torvald.

TORVALD

Oh, well, please, Nora, not so sad.

My little skylark musn't droop her wings.

My little squirrel musn't be disheartened.

Look.

Look what I have for you.

NORA

Money!

TORVALD

Yes. Of course.

Do you think I don't know at all
a household needs a budget.

NORA

Oh, thank you, Torvald!

This will keep me going for a long time.

TORVALD

Well, yes, I hope so.

NORA

Yes, yes, it will.

But look,

let me show you what I've bought.

It's a doll

and a doll's bedstead for Emily.

TORVALD

Ah!

NORA

And a little trumpet for Robert.

TORVALD

Lovely.

Very nice.

And what's this?

NORA

Oh, no! You musn't see that until this evening.

TORVALD

Thank you, Nora.

And now, one little favor.

You need to tell me what you would like for yourself.

NORA

For myself? Oh, thank you, Torvald,

but I don't want anything.

TORVALD

Well, but you must.

Tell me something you would particularly like to have.

NORA

Really, I can't think of anything—

unless....

TORVALD

Yes?

NORA

If you really want to give me something,
you might give me money.

Only just as much as you can afford;
and then one of these days I will buy something with it.

TORVALD

But, Nora.

NORA

Oh, do, Torvald, please do.

Then I will wrap it up in beautiful gilt paper.

And then I'll have time to think
what I most want.

TORVALD

I must admit,

I look at you, Nora,

and I wonder if you aren't a little
uneasy today?

NORA

Uneasy?

TORVALD

Look directly at me.

NORA

Yes?

TORVALD [smiling, the hint of a humorous laugh]

Has Miss Sweet-tooth been breaking rules in town today?

[one of the others in the café stands, looking a little shocked,
looks around at the others there]

NORA [laughing]
Certainly not!

TORVALD
Has she paid a visit to the confectioner's?

NORA
Certainly not!

TORVALD
Not been nibbling sweets?

NORA
No.
Really, TORVALD!

TORVALD
Not even taken a bite of a macaroon or two?

[another person in the café stands,
looking non-plussed]

NORA
Certainly not!

TORVALD
I was joking, Nora.

NORA
I wouldn't think of going against your wishes.

TORVALD
I'm sure of that.
Besides, you gave me your word.

a performance piece on the scale, if possible,
of Cirque du Soleil

or else
a young woman
with a large porcelain basin on head
picks up stones with her bare toes,
and, by kicking her feet up into the air,
tosses the stones into the basin

or else she breaks eggs on her body
letting the yolk run up and down her arm (if she can)

and is this where the human statue sits and has dinner?

or some other performance piece

[A man enters the café,
sees two young women sitting together,
goes to them.]

VERSHININ.
Hello, you are Masha?

MASHA
Yes?

VERSHININ
And Irina?

IRINA
Yes!

MASHA
And you must be Alexander.

VERSHININ
Yes. Yes, I am.

IRINA.

Please. Please sit down.
We're glad you've come.

VERSHININ.

Well, and I'm glad. Very glad.
But, as I remember,
there were three sisters?
Three little girls?

IRINA

Yes. Olga couldn't be here.

VERSHININ

Ah!

MASHA

And you're still living in Moscow?

VERSHININ

Oh, yes.

IRINA

Moscow.

VERSHININ.

You know, I must confess:
I don't really remember you very well,
I only remember that there used to be three sisters.
I remember your father well, of course;
I have only to close my eyes to see him as he was.

MASHA.

I used to think I remembered everybody, but ...

VERSHININ.

Of course.

IRINA.

It's wonderful that you've come from Moscow.

MASHA.

We're going to live there, you see.

IRINA.

We think we may be there this autumn.

[They both laugh happily.]

MASHA.

I remember,

everyone at home used to speak of a "lovelorn Major."

You were only a Lieutenant then,

and in love with somebody,

but for some reason they always called you a Major for fun.

VERSHININ.

Yes. I remember.

MASHA.

You've grown older!

IRINA

Masha!

MASHA

[Through her tears]

You've grown older!

VERSHININ.

Yes,

when they used to call me the lovelorn Major,

I was young and in love.

I've grown out of both now.

IRINA.

But you don't have a single white hair yet.
You're older, but you're not old yet.

VERSHININ.

I'm forty-two.

IRINA.

Forty-two.

Masha, why are you crying?

[Crying]

And I'm crying too.

MASHA.

And where do you live now?

VERSHININ.

Old Basmanni Road.

MASHA

Old Basmanni Road.

VERSHININ.

Once I used to live in German Street.

But I got melancholy when I was alone there.

[Pause]

Here the river is so wide and fine!

It's a splendid river!

IRINA.

Yes, but it's cold here in the winter.

Very cold.

MASHA

We miss Moscow.

VERSHININ.

What do you mean?

It's wonderful to live here!

IRINA.

Our mother is buried in Moscow.

MASHA.

At the Novo-Devichi Cemetery.

IRINA.

Do you know, I'm beginning to forget her face.

We'll be forgotten in just the same way.

VERSHININ.

Yes, everyone will forget us.

It's our fate,

it can't be helped.

A time will come when everything that seems serious,
significant,

or very important to us

will be forgotten,

or considered trivial.

And the curious thing is

that we can't possibly find out

what will come to be regarded as great and important,

and what will be ridiculous.

Didn't the discoveries of Copernicus, or Columbus, say,

seem unnecessary and ludicrous at first,

while wasn't it thought that some nonsense

written by a fool,

held all the truth?

And it may so happen

that our present existence,

with which we are so satisfied,

will in time appear strange and pointless.

MASHA

But meanwhile,

we will be happy

because we have gone

to Moscow.

VERSHININ

Indeed.

[He raises his glass or coffee cup.]

To Moscow.

[In silent agreement,
the two women raise their glasses or cups and drink.]

another clown piece like those of James Thiérrée

or

a live video cameraman: a girl auditions for a tv show

and she is joined by others

and everyone does audition pieces as though for a reality tv show

someone walks on a beam

while a couple keeps falling down a set of steps like rag dolls

HE

Excuse me, madam,

but it seems

I could have met you before?

SHE

A moi aussi, Monsieur,

il me semble que

je vous ai déjà rencontré quelque part.

HE

Was it, by any chance,

in the city of Manchester we could have met?

SHE

C'est très possible!

Moi, je suis originaire de la ville de Manchester!

HE

Indeed, that's curious,
I, too, am from Manchester, originally.

SHE

Comme c'est curieux!

HE

Only I, madam,
left Manchester some five weeks ago.

SHE

Comme c'est curieux!
Quelle bizarre coïncidence !
Moi aussi, Monsieur,
j'ai quitté la ville de Manchester il y a cinq semaines environ.

HE

Indeed. How remarkable that is.
I took the 8:30 train.

SHE

demie après huit!

HE

Yes!

SHE

demie après huit!

HE

Yes!

SHE

Comme c'est curieux!
Comme c'est bizarre!
et quelle coïncidence!
J'ai pris le même train, Monsieur, moi aussi!

HE
Indeed!

SHE
Ah, oui!

HE
Indeed!

SHE
Ah, oui!

HE
Perhaps I saw you then on the train!

SHE
C'est bien possible!

HE
I always travel second class.

SHE
Moi aussi!
Mais je ne m'en souviens pas très bien,
cher Monsieur!

HE
I was sitting in car number 8.

SHE
Huit!

HE
Yes.

SHE
Huit!
Et moi aussi!

HE
You were!

SHE
Oui, monsieur!

HE
How extraordinary.

SHE
Comme c'est curieux et quelle coïncidence !
il est très possible que nous nous soyons vus à cette occasion.

HE
And then, of course, I came straight here
from my apartment
just around the corner.

SHE
C'est vrai?

HE
Indeed.

SHE
Comme c'est curieux1

HE
Yes. Just there to your right.

SHE
moi aussi!

HE
You do?

SHE
Mais oui, cher monsieur.

HE

I've lived there for fourteen years myself.

SHE

Et moi aussi!

Au numero vingt et un.

HE

21.

How extraordinary.

How bizarre.

And so do I.

SHE

Au numero vingt et un?

HE

Apartment 3.

SHE

Excusez moi?

HE

Apartment 3.

SHE

Mai

moi aussi j'habite au numéro trois

HE

At number 21?

SHE

Exactment, monsieur.

HE

How curious!

SHE

Comme c'est curieux
et quelle coïncidence!
et bizarre!

HE

You know,
in my bedroom
is a bed with a rose colored bed spread.

SHE

Ma chambre à coucher a elle aussi un lit
avec un édredon rose.

HE

And a bookcase just opposite
against the wall?

SHE

Bien sur.

HE

Could it be
that we live in the same apartment
in the same several rooms
in the very same bedroom
and that you and I sleep in the very same bed?

SHE

C'est peut-être là
que nous nous sommes rencontrés!

HE

And that you would be my wife.

SHE

Et vous Êtes mon propre époux.

HE

And we've come out together
to have a cup of coffee.

SHE

Pour prendre un cafe.
Comme c'est beau.

[Note:

these "scenes" from Ibsen, Chekhov, and Ionesco
can occur naturally at café tables;

or

"performers" can enter,
do their "scenes" standing on the sidewalk,
as advertisements for plays they are performing elsewhere in the city,
and then,
after they perform their excerpt,
they turn and hand out flyers for their shows to people seated in the café
and, perhaps, even to people seated in the theatre audience.]

the human statue takes up his position again?

another section of Camille Brown's dance piece

JOYCE

It was you yourself
who first led the way.
It was not I who first touched you long ago
It was you who slid your hand down inside my trousers
and pulled my shirt softly aside
and touched my prick with your long tickling fingers
and gradually took it all,
fat and stiff as it was,
into your hand and worked me slowly until I came through your fingers.
I remember that night
you tore off your dress and got on top of me to ride me naked.
It was your lips too

that first uttered an obscene word.
You stuck my prick into your cunt
and began to ride me up and down.

The last drop of seed had hardly been squirted up your cunt
before it was over and my true love for you,
the love of my eyes for your strange luring eyes,
came blowing over my soul like a wind of spices.
My prick was still hot and stiff
and quivering from the last brutal drive it had given you,
you are always my beautiful wild flower of the hedges,
my dark-blue rain-drenched flower.

My love for you
allows me to pray
to the spirit of beauty and tenderness
mirrored in your eyes
or fling you down under me
on that softy belly of yours
and fuck you up behind,
like a hog riding a sow,
glorying in the very stink and sweat that rises from your ass,
glorying in the open shape of your upturned dress
and white girlish underwear
the confusion of your flushed cheeks and tangled hair.
It allows me to burst into tears of pity and love at some slight word,
to tremble with love for you
at the sound of some chord or cadence of music
or to lie heads and tails with you
feeling your fingers fondling and tickling my balls
or stuck up in me behind
and your hot lips sucking off my cock
while my head is wedged in between your fat thighs,
my hands clutching the round cushions of your ass
and my tongue licking ravenously up your rank red cunt.

Have I shocked you by the dirty things I said to you?
It could be you think that my love is a filthy thing.
It is sometimes.

I dream of you in filthy poses sometimes.
I imagine things so dirty that I won't say them

My sweet darling girl
please don't fuck me too much this next few days.
Fuck all you can out of me for the first night
but make me get myself cured.
Fuck me in as many new ways as your lust will suggest.
Fuck me dressed in your full outdoor clothes with your hat on,
your face flushed with the cold and wind and rain and your shoes muddy,
either straddling across my legs when I am sitting in a chair
and riding me up and down
or riding me over the back of the sofa.
Fuck me naked with your hat and stockings on
only flat on the floor with a crimson flower in your hole behind,
Fuck me in your bathrobe (I hope you have that nice one)
with nothing on under it,
opening it suddenly and showing me your belly and thighs and back
and pulling me on top of you on the kitchen table.
Fuck me into you assways,
lying on your face on the bed,
with your hair flying loose .
Fuck me on the stairs in the dark,
like a nursery-maid fucking her soldier,
unbuttoning his trousers gently
and slipping her hand in his fly
and fiddling with his shirt
and feeling it getting wet and then pulling it gently up
and fiddling with his two bursting balls
and at last pulling out boldly the dick she loves to handle
and rubbing it for him softly,
murmuring into his ear dirty words
and dirty stories that other girls told her
and dirty things she said,
and all the time pissing her underpants with pleasure

Get ready.
Put some warm-brown-linoleum on the kitchen
and hang a pair of red curtains on the windows at night.

Get some kind of a cheap common comfortable armchair for your lazy lover.
Because I won't leave that kitchen for a week
reading, lolling, smoking, and talking, talking, talking, talking to you.
How happy I will be!
with my love, my life, my star

It turns out
I swoon at the sound of your voice
singing or murmuring
the passion and sorrow and mystery of life
and at the same time you provoke me with obscene touches.
You are mine,
darling,
mine!
My sweet naughty girl

I love you.

the dance from Dancing at the cafe — Bande a Part (AKA Band of Outsiders)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6pOXjQLh7Y>

Anton Chekhov is writing a letter:

"Three o'clock in the morning.
The soft April night is looking in above the buildings
on the other side of the street
and caressingly winking at me with its stars.
I can't sleep, I am so happy!

My whole being from head to heels
is bursting with a strange,
incomprehensible feeling.
I can't analyse it just now —
I haven't the time, I'm too lazy,
and there— never mind analysis!
Does a man interpret his sensations
when he is falling head first from a belfry,

or when he has just learned that he's won the lottery?
Is he in any state to analyze how he feels?

This was more or less how I began my love-letter to Sasha,
a girl of nineteen with whom I had fallen in love.

I began it five times,
and as often tore up the pages,
scratched out whole pages,
and copied it all over again.

I spent as long over the letter
as if it had been a novel.

And it was not because I tried to make it longer,
more elaborate, and more fervent,
but because I wanted to prolong the process of this writing,
sitting in the café
communing with my own day-dreams.

Between the lines I saw the image of my Sasha,
and other visions,
as though there were,
sitting at the same table writing with me,
spirits as happy, as foolish,
and smiling as blissfully as I was.

I wrote continually,
looking at my hand,
which still ached where hers had lately held it,
and if I turned my eyes away

I had a vision of the trellis of the little gate.
Through that trellis Sasha had looked at me
after I had said goodbye to her.

When I was saying good-bye to Sasha
I was thinking of nothing
and was simply admiring her figure
as every decent man admires a pretty woman;
when I saw through the trellis her two wide, lovely eyes,
I suddenly knew that I was in love,
that it was all settled between us,
and fully decided already,
that I had nothing left to do
but to carry out certain formalities.

the contortionist
—and, it may be that the following text
begins while the contortionist is still doing his thing,
or, indeed, that the contortionist continues
through the entire text

[Two women sit together at a table.
While one drinks her coffee,
the other looks up and addresses the audience directly.]

It was a cold and rainy early spring day.
Evelyn and I had made a date to see the Gauguin exhibit.
We didn't have advanced tickets
but thought we might line up early
and get in ahead of the crowds.
She arrived in flowing raincoat,
under her umbrella, smiling, ready to see the art together.
We had a lot to catch up on
and talked non-stop on the line and through the exhibit
and, I must say, I remember more about the conversation
than about the paintings we saw.
Evelyn's presence,
her comments and stories,
overshadowed even the work of Gauguin.
As always when we meet,
we talked of family, friends in common,
work,
life plans
and aspirations,
feminism,
politics.
As always,
I felt on that day that Evelyn's mind was racing ahead,
somewhere where, soon enough,
I was not sure I could follow.
She was thinking about a new project
and had asked me to look at a paper she was writing.
I had brought the annotated draft with me

and we looked around for a quiet café
where we could talk about it after seeing the exhibit.
We soon ordered our coffee in a small café
Soon we were deep in conversation:
The cafe we were sitting in retreated from view
as I tried to explain my reactions to the paper,
the questions it had raised for me,
and as Evelyn told me what had led her to this project
on mimesis, imitation and identification.
It was not an easy conversation.
When you come out of such different disciplinary spaces
and assumptions,
there is a lot of groundwork to do
before you establish that the same terms
mean the same things to you,
even within feminism,
even in a friendship as close and longstanding as ours.
I had recently worked on intersubjectivity and relationality
in my own work on family photographs.
And I had thought about the problems raised
by the act of identification,
and its appropriative, potentially violating,
and yet also necessary dimensions
in my work on the second generation's
"memory" of the Holocaust,
realizing that that term, "memory,"
used in relation to those who remember only vicariously,
through an act of identification,
probably itself signals the problem of a potential appropriation.
How can someone remember something
she did not herself experience?
How can one signal the interplay between identification
and disidentification
that is at the basis of intergenerational transmission,
particularly of a traumatic past?
What aesthetic strategies can be used
to represent these tensions, this dialectic interplay,
this absolutely necessary way of saying
"It could have been me!"

but also, emphatically, "It was not me?"
I went to Evelyn's paper with some of these questions,
questions very close to my current preoccupations,
and also with a sense of elation
that after years in which our work had taken very different turns
and where I had had some
considerable difficulty following hers,
that now we were again thinking
about what seemed like related,
even similar, questions
emerging from a shared theoretical ground.

[The speaker stops, thinks,
picks up her coffee and takes a sip
as her friend looks at her and smiles.

MAN
how do you make these?

WAITER
these?

MAN
these little cakes

WAITER
ah
yes
well,
you want to take three pounds of very fine flour
well dried by the fire
and put it to a pound and a half of loaf sugar
sifted in a very fine sieve
then three pounds of currants well washed
dried in a cloth and set by the fire;
a pound and a half of unmelted butter
ten spoonsful of cream
with the yolks of three newlaid eggs

beat with it
one nutmeg
and, if you please,
three spoonful of a nice Chateauneuf du Pape.
When you have wrought your paste well,
you must put it in a cloth,
and set it in a dish before the fire,
till it be warm right through.
Then make it up into little cakes,
and prick them full of holes
and bake them in a quick oven,
unclosed.

MAN
It's not easy.

WAITER
No.
Because:
what I believe
I believe in pleasure
because
what else is there?
Do you believe in pain?
Do you believe in pointlessness?
What else should you believe
except
in pleasure
and then, if you wish to become philosophical
or political
you can believe in pleasure for all
pleasure for everyone
and then a painless death at an old age
at a very old age
this is what I believe

[silence]

MAN

Are there any more?

WAITER

Any more! Of course!

Would you like another one?

MAN

Yes, thank you.

WAITER

No trouble!

wild music with someone launching instantly into a wild solo

people return one or two or three at a time
and join in the dancing

until there is a total frenzy of dancing on stage

then all 10 or 12 are making the same gesture together, scattered over the stage,
but dancing the same gestures and moves

and then, all at once, they all grow bored with it
and just stop
and walk away from it,
some sitting back down in the cafe
some leaving altogether

silence

or

a solo talker begins to dominate the proceedings
and so the dancers stop
look uncertain what to do next

look straight out at audience
is it the young woman again
saying yes she can dance
yes she can fucking dance

I have a fucking dance
what does the director mean I don't have a fucking dance to dance
I have a fucking dance to dance I'll dance the fucking dance
well I do have a dance
I do have a dance
I do have a fucking dance
I did tell the director
I told him I do have a fucking dance to dance
yes it's ready
yes
yes I could dance it now
yes I could fucking dance it now
yes I could fucking dance it anytime
I told him I could fucking dance the fucking dance
any fucking time he wants
well why the fuck doesn't he fucking listen when I say fucking anything?

and finally several of the others lead her off

THEN

a piano is wheeled out onto the sidewalk
and someone sits down and plays

the waiter steps forward and sings a solo song

and the waiter sings
the waiter sings

the waiter sings
the waiter sings
the waiter sings
the waiter sings
the waiter sings
the waiter sings
the waiter sings
the waiter sings
the waiter sings
the waiter sings

it could be that a single dancer
does a solo to this beautiful love song
—perhaps the computer dancer returns
and now we hear the music that we couldn't hear during her opening dance;
and then the lights fade slowly

[does the guy from the beginning of the piece come through calling out
Miss? Oh, miss! Miss!
or is this too obvious a bookender
and we just end with the song and the woman dancing?]

A NOTE ON SOURCES:

Café le Monde was composed with the dramaturgical collaboration of Tom Damrauer, and includes texts from Robert Wood, Harry Matthews, James Joyce, Marianne Hirsch, Eugene Ionesco, Henrik Ibsen, and Anton Chekhov (translated by Constance Garnett).

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