Our Times: On the Street Where I Live

by CHARLES L. MEE

Dawn.

Music!

We see the street in front of us, and the sidewalk, and a line of stores with signs over the shop windows:
Bruno's Hair Styling
Sallustio Real Estate
LAW FFICE [Note: the O of office is missing from the sign]
Community Brokerage Insurance (Auto, Home, Business, Life)
Me and My Egg Roll (Take Out)
No. 1 Fresh Beauty Spa (Back Rub...Foot Rub...Facial)
and the Community Book Store
with piles of wrecked old books on a table and on some old orange crates in front of the store.

And we can see in the windows of the second floors of all these stores that there are apartments on the second floors.
And during the course of the play, people will sometimes appear in these windows, but just to look out, not to have songs or scenes out the window.
And there will be lots of passersby (with doubling and tripling) of all ages and races and types who will sometimes just stroll through, coming in one side and going out the other.

At the very center of all the stores is a café with tables and chairs on the sidewalk and big double doors going into the café.

And chairs can also be brought out the doors of all the stores onto the sidewalk.

As the dawn lights come up and the music fills the theatre nearly the entire cast steps out of the doors of the café with their cups of coffee and tea in their hands and out the doors of the neighboring stores—all singing opera

singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
while

several people help The Artist
drag in a wrecked car,
a completely filthy, ruined car
[maybe, to make it easier, a small car like a Chevrolet Aveo].
The Artist himself wears a white Andy Warhol wig.
The car is filled with what looks like trash,
but, as we spend a little more time looking at it,
we will see that it is all
Art.
Many, many paintings,
with awful Pollack like random scrawls of paint
and smeared, dirty places on the canvases
and the cloths that have been used to wipe up the paint.
Finally, he puts a sign on the side of the car saying
"Art for Sale."

Another guy watches the artist bring in the art car,
and then he turns around and leaves
and returns in a moment
with an artist's easel
with a rectangular frame on it
and an old filthy gray T-shirt covering the frame
and hanging down on one side
with some random messy painting on one corner of the T-shirt
and a skateboard fastened to the front of the T-shirt
with a Coca Cola sign fastened to the skateboard.

Another guy brings in a dozen nabisco shredded wheat cardboard boxes
and a couple of other people help him construct a pyramid out of them,
with some full boxes and other boxes flattened out and taped to the pyramid.

Another guy brings in a chair,
finds a place to put it down,
sits in the chair,
and relaxes.
Beautiful flowers floating in the air
drifting slowly down from the heavens.

A guy breaks a dozen wine bottles by throwing them into a big wooden box, then puts his face down into the pile of broken glass, has another guy stand on his neck to press his face down into the glass—and while we were all expecting some miraculous trick to avoid being cut, he stands up with a lacerated forehead—while a teen age girl hands out postcard ads to the audience for some other show.

The cast continues
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera

And then,
a hot young woman in a minidress—
sits at a table with a telephone,
looking sexy and seductive,
crossing one leg over the other and then switching crossed legs and switching again
as the singing continues
[or this whole performance could be done by one of the guys having a phone conversation]

and finally she begins to speak into her cell phone:
Hello
Hello
Hi
Hello
hi
hello hello

[she hangs up phone
crosses her other leg
then picks it up again]

hello
hello hello

[hangs up
crosses opposite leg]

Hello
Hello hello
hello
Hi
hello hello

[from time to time she says 'who is this?' or 'is this raimondo'
or something of the sort
but mostly she only says hello hello hello
while the singing continues]

singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera
singing opera

[And, finally, a pot of geraniums is brought out and set down on the table then a pot of plum flowers is brought out and set down on the table then another pot of flowers is brought out and set down on the table and another until the young woman on the phone has disappeared behind the flowers and the singing stops.

And now the guy sitting in the chair speaks.

THE GUY SITTING IN THE CHAIR
I remember dingle berries.

I remember wanting to sleep out in the back yard and being kidded about how I wouldn't last the night and sleeping outside and not lasting the night.

I remember stories about bodies being chopped up and disposed of in garbage disposals.

I remember stories about razor blades being hidden in apples at Halloween. And pins and needles in popcorn balls.

I remember jumping off the front porch head first onto the corner of a brick. I remember being able to see nothing but gushing red blood. This is one of the first things I remember. And I have a scar to prove it.

I remember white bread and tearing off the crust and rolling the middle part up into a ball and eating it.
I remember stories about what goes on in restaurant kitchens.
Like spitting in the soup.
And jerking off in the salad.

I remember laundromats at night
all lit up with nobody in them.

I remember being hit on the head by birdshit two times.

I remember loafers with pennies in them.

I remember my father's collection of arrow heads.

I remember potato salad.

I remember the chair I used to put my boogers behind.

I remember my first erections.
I thought I had some terrible disease or something.

I remember when, in high school,
if you wore green and yellow on Thursday
it meant that you were queer.

I remember that for my fifth birthday
all I wanted was an off-one-shoulder black satin evening gown.
I got it.
And I wore it to my birthday party.

I remember fantasies of someday reading a complete set of encyclopedias
and knowing everything.

I remember the little thuds
of bugs bumping up against the screens at night.

I remember picnics.

[The dali woman with the loaf of frenchbread on her head
comes in.]
There is an inkwell on top of the breadloaf, 
and a tiny man and woman, standing on the loaf, 
and around her neck a necklace of two ears of corn.]

THE DALI WOMAN
I'm surprised I haven't been buried alive.
I have to struggle to keep a path clear between bed and toilet, 
toilet and kitchen table, 
table and front door.
If I want to get from the toilet to the front door, 
I have to go by way of the kitchen table. 
I like to imagine the bed as home plate, 
the toilet as first, the kitchen table as second, the front door as third:
should the doorbell ring while I am lying in bed, 
I have to round the toilet and the kitchen table in order to arrive at the door. If it 
happens to be Bruno, I let him in without a word 
and then jog back to bed, the roar of the invisible crowd ringing in my ears.

I often wonder who will be the last person to see me alive. 
If I had to bet, I'd bet on the delivery boy from the Chinese takeout. 
I order in four nights out of seven. 
Whenever he comes, I make a big production of finding my wallet. 
He stands at the door holding the greasy bag 
while I wonder if this is the night I'll finish off my spring roll, 
climb into bed, and have a heart attack in my sleep.

[A giant claw, 
of the sort found on a huge construction crane 
comes down from the heavens 
holding a ton of miscellaneous clothes, 
and, when the stage floor opens up, 
the claw descends down under the stage, 
where the wire holding the claw can be disconnected 
so that the wire can ascend again 
while the stage floor closes

Nikki de Saint Phalle monsters 
big plaster heads 
with open mouths and big round eyes
painted bright blue and crimson red
and a hand with all five fingers for hair
rise out of the stage floor
or come in from the sides

a transvestite comes in, sports his fox tail,
and finally leaves,

and the naked artist's model enters
in a skin tight "naked" flesh colored body suit
with the genitals painted on the fabric with black paint.

THE ARTIST'S MODEL
I'm tough
I can do anything
I wear black leather bands around my wrists
around my ankles
no other clothes
a thick bicycle chain around my neck
if I have to I can sleep with anyone a man a jellyfish
no compunctions
I just can't stand to talk to them
I have no morals I can rob without being caught
pretend I'm sweet and innocent in pink organdy
pretend I know everything about sex I won't let anything disturb you
harm you
my tailored black suit and silk stockings tan Gucci scarf
with sailors from all over the world.
I know everything.
I destroy I burn college buildings and laugh
I destroy college professors
cops who think they can stick their noses into my business
quickly learn better.
I don't want anyone to touch me
stick thin finger knives into my brain and destroy my brain
bother me
pretend to like me then hit me over the head
lure me into revealing myself and opening myself
then turn away "goodbye your cunt's too wet."
Most people are stupid boring too much fire inflammations result
I'd rather be alone shut the door shut the bedroom door
I live in furs under a black bear blanket
I swathe myself in velvets.

I love being severe and elegant
I wear only scarves around my body
I know the special places in New York:
the massage parlors for women,
the hundred-dollar wins
I can stick my tongue out at the top pleasures no one can possibly kill me.

I don't care if I'm alone I want a permanent and a temporary lover-friend
I don't want to know anyone else no one else exists
I want to leave my town house on 61st Street between Second and Third once a week
enter into a room in which there are thousands of people I want to meet
love as much as possible
go home to drink by myself I'm extremely shy
I don't fuck as much as I want.

[A guy brings in a statue of an upside down elephant,
not standing on his head, but standing on his extended trunk,
his hind legs up in the air
or does the elephant descend from heaven?

A man enters,
with a tree branch growing out of his head
with birds in the branches.
Are the birds chirping?

two guys carrying small round café tables
pointed forward like a pair of glasses
and each of them has a single eyeball for a head

A woman enters on her hands and knees
with a glass coffee table on her back
and someone sets a coffee cup down on it,
and she exits
three decker hamburger
with tubes of paint instead of burger in the bun
was this brought in on the glass coffee table?

the white pig covered in tattoos

5 foot tall upright silver thumb

NICK, THE TREE BRANCH POET
For my part,
I don’t understand.
I pay a babysitter so that I can go to Naidre's café
to write my poetry.
It’s, you know, an expensive way to write poetry,
but with the baby at home
I don’t get anything done
so all I know to do is pay the babysitter
and go to Naidre’s café.
And there is this guy there named Bob,
a nice guy,
I’ve known him for years
and there’s nothing uncomfortable in our relationship
he never made a pass at me
I never had a thing for him
but he sees me in the café
and he starts a conversation
I mean because we’re neighbors
and he’s a nice guy
and it’s all very friendly
and he tells me what he’s been up to
and all about his wife and his kids
and what he thinks about politics and the budget
and what plays he’s seen recently
or: have you seen any movies?
and even he wants to talk about the production he saw at the Met
of Orpheus and Eurydice
and what he thought
and how he took voice lessons when he was a kid
and he's talking to me
and I'm thinking:
I'm paying a babysitter!
I'm paying a babysitter!
I don't think this conversation is worth $18 an hour
and I'm not writing any poetry!
and I'm paying $18 an hour,
and I can't go home yet
because the babysitter and I have a deal
and I can't mess up our deal
and run the risk of losing my babysitter!

[12 people on cell phones at the same time
having the same conversation
about a love affair
a breakup
each taking different lines of the same conversation
or of archtypical conversations around this event
archetypal lines

then music

and they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
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they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing
they all sing

everyone sits in a semi circle singing
and making music with their instruments

finally one woman’s harsh almost screaming singing
dominates the room
and people leave one by one

the last guy tries to stop her
and she kicks the shit out of him
gets him down on the ground
pounding and kicking him
while she finishes the song

when she leaves
several people come back out
with immense rolls of white paper
that they unroll to cover the floor

the whole stage floor is paper
and now a number of others come in
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance
and dance

and, while they dance,
they draw on the paper floor with pencils
and blood
red and black ink
with a sponge
so in the end you have a stage floor that looks like
a painting by Arshile Gorky

big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
big music here
recorded classical music

the red and black ink runs down the rake into the gutter

a woman lifts her dress up above her head
hiding her upper body entirely
exposing herself from the waist down
and takes a long, slow exit

so, alone, covered with red and black ink—
after a pervasive feeling of tragedy that has come with everyone
spattered with this color of blood and dirt
looking wrecked,
now a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly
to a heartbreaking piano solo
and they finally leave

And, as the music continues,
the actors rush through
on the sidewalk in front of the cafe:

A five year old girl (or a thirty year old woman),
eating an ice cream cone, smiling,
sitting in a red wagon pulled by her father,
enters and leaves, smiling.

A golf cart, driven like crazy by a caddy,
while, in the back,
a couple embraces passionately,
enters and leaves, as the couple continues to embrace.

A couple being pulled along on a picnic blanket
with food and a champagne bottle in a bucket,
and she is drinking and drinking and drinking the champagne
enter and leave.

An electric wheelchair—
a man driving,
a woman sitting on the handlebars,
she running her fingers through his hair over and over and over—
enters and leaves.

A skate board,
with a woman lying on her back on the skate board
as a man twirls it round and round in ecstasy,
enters and leaves.

A silk sheet, with silk pillows,
she lying back in her lingerie
he taking photos of her,
enters and leaves.

A homeless guy with cart of stuff
enters and leaves.

A man and woman on a bicycle built for two—
one peddles while the other eats pizza—
enter and leave.

There are as many of these entrances and exits
as there are vehicles with wheels
and actors in the cast who can do a quick change and come through again.

And now a lone guy comes in,
takes a moment to notice the big mess of books
in front of Community Book Store,
steps up to the table and opens one of the books.
And, to his surprise,
the book speaks!
He steps back away from it.

THE BOOK SPEAKS
In a language,
any language,
we see that
saying and said are correlative of one another,
and the saying is subordinated to its theme.
It can be shown that even the distinction between Being and entities
is borne by the amphibology of the said,
though this distinction
and this amphibology
are not thereby reducible to verbal artifices.

[And, as the book speaks,
other people come in,
notice the book speaking,
and stand there listening to the book.]

THE BOOK
The correlation of the saying and the said,
that is, the subordination of the saying to the said,
to the linguistic system and to ontology,
is the price that manifestation demands.
In language qua said
everything is conveyed before us,
be it at the price of a betrayal.
Language is ancillary and thus indispensable.
At this moment language is serving a research
conducted in view of disengaging the otherwise than being
or being's other
outside of the themes in which they already show themselves,
unfaithfully,
as being's essence—
but in which they do show themselves.

[Among all the others who come in while the book speaks,
a guy wheels in a tall wooden chair on wheels,
in which a bearded man sits.

The bearded man wears an iron pot upside down on his head,
and with one hand he holds a small human figure,
whose head is stuck in the bearded man's mouth
as birds fly out of its anus.]
THE BOOK CONTINUES SPEAKING
Language permits us to utter,
be it by betrayal,
this outside of being,
this ex-ception to being,
as though being’s other were an event of being.
Being,
its cognition and the said in which it shows itself
signify in a saying which,
relative to being,
forms an exception;
but it is in the said
that both this exception and the birth of cognition
[la naissance de la connaissance]
show themselves.
But the fact that the ex-ception shows itself
and becomes truth in the said
can not serve as a pretext to take as an absolute
the apophantic variant of the saying,
which is ancillary or angelic.

[When the book finishes speaking,
there is a moment’s silence
and then the bearded man on the tall chair on wheels
takes the human head out of his mouth and,
holding up a cone,
speaks.

THE BEARDED MAN
I can give you Vanilla
or Chocolate any time
Strawberry if you prefer
or Butter Pecan
Broccoli swirl
Almond Crunch
Coffee
Coffee Mocha Fudge
Coconut Chip
Alumni Swirl
Apple Cobbler Crunch
I've got Arboretum Breeze
Bananas Foster
Black Cow
Beet fantasia
Booger Banana
Caramel Critters
Cotton Candy
Canned pea souffle
Crunchy gravel
Dulce De Leche
Earwax Appeal
Escargot Ecstacy
Fresh mowed dandelion with grass clippings
Goo Goo Cluster
Happy Happy Joy Joy
Infidel Fried Chicken
I Scream Ice Cream
Keeney Beany Chocolate
Kitty Litter crunch
Lichen candy
Lemon Slime
Monster Mash
Mossnificent
Ravishing radish
Rutabaga-turnip-parsnip Crunch
Squash sherbet
Tofu custard
Toad-drool
Termite Crumble
Orange Shitbert
Seymour's Hickory Smoked
Semen
Rocky Roadkill
Micecream Supreme
Vomit Comet
[And, while the bearded man is speaking, another random guy brings in a wooden beam from which six slender four foot tall poles stick up. On each pole is a painted cardboard cutout of a human figure—a guy in a swimming suit, a guy in a business suit, a woman in a fashionable dress, a guy in work clothes wearing boxing gloves, etc. And atop each of these figures is a head—one head is a bunch of bananas, one is a cluster of dark storm clouds, one is a television set with a human face on the screen, one is a thick, u-shaped, wooden block, etc.

When the bearded man finishes speaking, the guy with the wooden beam speaks.

THE RANDOM GUY WITH THE WOODEN BEAM SPEAKS:
Hail Hail the Gang’s All Here

[And then the characters on the beam reply—each has pre-recorded lines on speakers embedded inside their heads]

A Perfect Day

Good Morning, Mister Zip-Zip-Zip

Are You From Dixie, ‘Cause I’m From Dixie Too

Gee, But It’s Great to Meet a Friend from Your Old Home Town

How’d You Like to Spoon With Me

Ma! He’s Making Eyes at Me
My Sunny Tennessee

My Hero

My Wonderful One

My Lovin, Honey Man

Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life Be My Little Baby Bumblebee

I'll Be with You in Apple Blossom Time
Call Me Up Some Rainy Afternoon

Fairy Tales Do Come True, It Can Happen To You, If You're Young At Heart

I'm Falling in Love with Someone

Everybody's Doing It Now

Let Me Call You Sweeetheart

Please Come and Play in My Yard

Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes

Where Do We Go From Here

Music.

Deafening music.

Brutes with plastic garden chairs—
sit to deafening music, looking straight out—
then stand and do unison kicking dance
unison kicking dance
unison kicking dance
unison kicking dance
a woman walks among the brutes, yelling, but the deafening music drowns her out

THE WOMAN SCREAMING
[repeating what the book said, but screaming in disbelief and rage]
In a language,
any language,
we see that
saying and said are correlative of one another,
and the saying is subordinated to its theme.
It can be shown that even the distinction between Being and entities
is borne by the amphibology of the said,
though this distinction
and this amphibology
are not thereby reducible to verbal artifices.

The correlation of the saying and the said,
that is, the subordination of the saying to the said,
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outside of the themes in which they already show themselves,
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[la naissance de la connaissance]
show themselves.
But the fact that the ex-ception shows itself
and becomes truth in the said
can not serve as a pretext to take as an absolute
the apophantic variant of the saying,
which is ancillary or angelic.

[The brutes huddle for football—the football lies in the middle of the huddle—they all grapple violently and fall down—and just that is the football play]
football play
football play
football play
football play
football play
football play
football play

a woman in bikini underwear runs through a deserted, down at heel, loft –
or just runs through this scene of the football huddle
while Yesterday plays

Yesterday,
All my troubles seemed so far away,
Now it looks as though they're here to stay,
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Suddenly,
I'm not half the man I used to be,
There's a shadow hanging over me,
Oh, yesterday came suddenly.

Why she
Had to go I don't know, she wouldn't say.
I said,
Something wrong, now I long for yesterday.

Yesterday,
Love was such an easy game to play,
Now I need a place to hide away,
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Why she
Had to go I don't know, she wouldn't say.
I said,
Something wrong, now I long for yesterday.

Yesterday,
Love was such an easy game to play,
Now I need a place to hide away,
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

Mm-mm-mm-mm-mm-mm-mm-mm.

THE GUY SITTING IN THE CHAIR
I remember when, in high school, I used to stuff a sock in my underwear.

I remember planning to tear page 48 out of every book I read from the Public Library, but soon losing interest.

I remember my grade school art teacher, Mrs Chick, who got so mad at a boy one day she dumped a bucket of water over his head.

I remember liver.

I remember the only time I ever saw my mother cry. I was eating apricot pie.

I remember when my father would say 'Keep your hands out from under the covers' as he said good night. But he said it in a nice way.

I remember a girl in school one day who, just out of the blue, went into a long spiel all about how difficult it was to wash her brother's pants because he didn't wear underwear.

I remember one very hot summer day I put ice cubes in my aquarium and all the fish died.

I remember a story about someone finding a baby alligator in their toilet bowl.

I remember how exciting a glimpse of a naked person in a window is even if you don't really see anything.

I remember dreams of walking down the street and suddenly realizing that I have no clothes on.
THE ARTIST’S MODEL
I wake up and I’m in my bedroom,
as usual all dark
even though it’s well into the morning,
but the window in front of me
huge in sections
isn’t curtained.
Out of it I see the house from the outside,
oh that’s why they’ve been scraping,
they’re about to paint.
As if I’m seeing the future,
a newly painted white surface on the stucco.
To my left,
the next room,
which is the kitchen,
a boy and girl are doing the painting.
I can’t go into the kitchen cause they’ll see me through that huge window.
I hear them talking about me.
"Bloody hell she’s 50 years old."
Probably drinks all the time, whiskey bottles everywhere."
"Actually as far as I know she doesn't touch the stuff."
"She's mad you know. Never goes out."
Their voices are so loud, they must be in the house.
Should I be scared?
No, they can’t be.
When I wake up, I realize I’ve been dreaming.

THE DALI WOMAN
When I came to America, I knew hardly anyone, only a second cousin who was a
locksmith, so I worked for him. If he’d been a shoemaker, I would have been a
shoemaker; if he had shovelled shit, I, too, would have shovelled. But he was a
locksmith, he taught me the trade, and that’s what I became. We had a little
business together, and then one year he got TB. They had to cut his liver out, and
he got a 106 temperature and died, so I took it over. I went on sending his wife half
the profits, even after she married a doctor and moved to Bayside. I stayed in the
business for more than fifty years. It’s not what I would have imagined for myself.
And yet. The truth is I came to like it. I helped in those who were locked out; others I
helped keep out what shouldn’t be let in, so that they could sleep without
nightmares.
Then one day I was looking out the window. Maybe I was contemplating the sky. Put even a fool in front of the window and you'll get a Spinoza; in the end life makes window-watchers of us all. The afternoon went by; little grains of darkness sifted down. I reached for the chain on the bulb and suddenly it was as if an elephant had stepped on my heart. I fell to my knees. I thought, I didn't live forever. A minute passed. Another minute. Another. I clawed at the floor, pulling myself along toward the phone. Twenty-five per cent of my heart muscle died. It took time to recover, and I never went back to work. I stared out the window. I watched fall turn into winter, winter into spring.

[A woman comes 'downstage'
which is to say, center, and close to the audience
sits at a dinner table
is given two finger bowls, one for each hand
by tall serving men
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
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BIG MUSIC
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BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
BIG MUSIC
and she begins to wail and wail
wail and wail
wail and wail
she continues to wail as she eats
an elegant, rich, spoiled woman
in anguish over what life itself
even she does not escape the pain of life
so is this a monologue or a dialogue with someone trying to cheer her up?

a woman in a beautiful black dress enters
and paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
paces while she smokes
she is angry, hostile
as though challenging anyone's right to challenge her smoking
or her being there
or her existence as she exists or chooses to exist
to marry or not, to treat her grown son that way or not
her lover, her grocer
—does she say this in words?
and, in the end, she just turns upstage and rushes out

are the opera singers accompanying this?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?
singing?

she returns, dragging a guy by the hand
he is naked from the waist up
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over

the sleek old Mafioso in the chair puts on dark sunglasses

as she rips the nipple ring out of the naked guy's chest
and leaves him bleeding from the wound

deafening classical music (Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
(Mozart?)
another woman in an elegant black dress with a blood red face does a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
a wild wild dance
and smears red lipstick all over her face in time with the crashing Mozart music
and then throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over
she becomes covered with dust as she kicks and writhes wildly on the ground on her back like a cockroach frantic on its back
little guy in dunce cap walks in and around

3 girls in lingerie on leashes
and a guy with a whip

guy on a leash hopping up and down

a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over
a girl hopping up and down over and over and over

now a church choir sings gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
gregorian chant dirge
as another woman in a black dress and also a black veil
enters up center and comes all the way slowly down center
holding a bouquet of flowers in front of her
motionless in every way except her walking very slowly
to lay the bouquet flowers on the ground
her eyes are streaming tears of blood

An extremely tall skinny naked guy with caked blood on his head
and his entire body charcoal black—burned from head to toe
does butoh walking
but seems genuinely to have mobility issues
walks stumbles shuffles lurches on his tiptoes
falls over to the side
goes into a crouch
goes to the ground
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
writhing
this, too, just seems intensely real

and then a guy with a horses head
and front legs that end in hooves
comes in and falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
falls over to the side
and struggles to get up again

a guy stands to one side with bloody hands
showing them to the audience

someone to the side drowns in a tank of water

the black burned cripple writhes on the ground

the young man with downs syndrome
enters wearing a crimson prom dress

the charcoal crip staggers out

the downs boy comes down center

a guy in a dress with a red crown of flowers
comes downstage and smokes cigarette smiling
just that, no more, and is happy
—or does he speak about his happiness
and this comes up earlier?

as a bloody guy in woman's swimsuit with board like cross
comes in and falls and falls

And now,
several random guys come in,
and look around
and finally speak.
A RANDOM GUY
When I first moved onto the block,
I was standing on the sidewalk
before the movers even got the first chair into the house
this guy came out of his house a couple doors away
and came up to me
and said
Hi, welcome to the neighborhood.
My name is Vinny.
I live just there.
Some people think of me as the mayor of the block.
Anything you want:
you ask me.
And then
a couple of days later,
I was parking my car on the block
and this guy came strolling slowly across the street
and said
Is that your parking place?
And I said: well, it is now.
And he said: oh? You live on this block?
Oh, he said: are you Italian?
I said: of course I am.
And he said: when I say Italian, I mean: from Sicily.
And I said:
what else would I mean?
And he said: OK then.
And it has been OK. I'd even say great.
Although most of the old Italian families have sold their houses
and moved to Florida.
But I find it reassuring
at Christmas time for instance
when you might see Dennis out on the street
throwing snowballs at his daughter.
And then you know everything is OK.
A RANDOM GUY
There was a time,
like, not a hundred but like maybe twenty or thirty years ago
these yellow robes moved into the brownstone
and the brownstone had been, before that, a nunnery
and when the nuns moved out
they left a lot of stuff behind
like statues of Jesus and the Virgin Mary
and some pictures of the saints
and some of their own robes
and so
when the yellow robes moved in
they just took all the old nuns' things
and put them out on the street
for the garbage guys to pick up and take away
and so
years later
when the yellow robes moved out
the local Italian neighbors came into the brownstone
with cans of gasoline
and they poured the gasoline all through the brownstone
from the top floor down into the basement
and just lit it on fire.

ANOTHER RANDOM GUY
In time, you know,
there'll be a population of demented very old people,
like an invasion of terrible immigrants,
stinking up the restaurants and cafes and shops.
I can imagine a sort of civil war between the old and the young
in 10 or 15 years.

There should be a booth on every corner
where you could get a martini and a medal.

There should be a way out for rational people
who've decided they're in the negative,
like they have Alzheimer's.
That should be available, and it should be quite easy.
I can't think it would be too hard to establish some sort of test that shows that you understand.

Would I kill myself? There’s a certain point where your life slips into the negative.

YET ANOTHER RANDOM GUY
And then, think about Walter. The point is—about Walter—the point is two-fold. First of all, he shouldn’t leave his old ruined cars just sitting there rotting in the vacant lot rusting the hood crunching in and vines growing over them cars from I don’t know when like the fifties with those big swooping fenders and really long and big and wide and filled with junk I don’t know what papers and books and coffee pots and old wooden boxes setting a bad example for all the kids in the neighborhood and second of all he should donate the cars just as they are to the Smithsonian Museum because the Smithsonian would love them and they would be amazing in the museum.

ANOTHER RANDOM GUY
You think what can you do? You wish you could do more. Anything less than devoting your entire life to easing the suffering of others is not enough.
It should be your life's work.

But this is not how you want to spend your life.

Because you are selfish.

If you take only five minutes a day for yourself, you are selfish. Because you are so privileged. You have so much. Even if you are not in the top 1 percent. And anything less than giving your whole life to others is selfish. And you negotiate that every day. Justifying your behavior. Rationalizing. Arriving at an understanding deeper and more sophisticated than simple regret and self criticism and sorrow. So that you can go on with what you want and even think from time to time I think I’ll have just a little bit more.

AND ANOTHER RANDOM GUY
I’d like to live forever. I don’t mean I have to be magically in my twenties forever. Just in my current state of health. And nothing special. Just more and more daily life. To see the kids. To see my wife. To walk down the block. To see…you know: the buildings. The trees. The sky. Because I love it. Maybe once in a while to sit in a cafe. I wouldn’t mind the occasional trip to Paris. I’d love to stay for a few months,
but even for a few days.
Or, say, maybe ten days.
Enough to get over the jet lag
and then wander around
go to a couple cafes
sit in the Luxembourg gardens.
Then come back
and then I’m happy.

STILL ANOTHER RANDOM GUY
Still, today,
this is the ideal street for a boy,
a lover,
a maniac,
a drunkard,
a crook,
a lecher,
a thug,
an astronomer,
a musician,
a poet,
a tailor,
a shoemaker,
a politician.
A family block.

A guy sings a love song into a mike
while wearing a roller blade on only one foot
going in circles
while another guy rolls around with yellow high heeled shoes on his hands
love song
love song
love song
love song
love song
love song
love song
love song
love song
love song
Another guy uses ukelele as a tennis racket
to 'serve' small stuffed animals

and a man and a woman, both in black underwear, do a lascivious dance

behind a glass wall
she takes off her top

During the singing
a bunch of people have entered from every direction—all sorts of people, a construction worker, a pole dancer, a secretary

A guy wearing a big messy wreck of a bright red turban—
but not a turban of the sort we see these days:
this is the red turban from Jan van Eyck’s self portrait of 1433.
man with tree branch growing out of his head
with birds in the branches

three decker hamburger
with tubes of paint instead of burger in the bun

5 foot tall upright silver thumb

two guys carrying small round café tables
pointed forward like a pair of glasses
and each of them has a single eyeball for a head

the old woman with a big breadbasket or country mailbox on her head
the breadbasket covered in fabric

the white pig covered in tattoos

two dice on strings
going diagonally across the space

THE GUY SITTING IN THE CHAIR SPEAKS
Imaginary Still Life
I close my eyes. I see pink. And green. And gold. All mixed up together. But now
slowly evolving into three distinctive shapes. (. . .) It is a pink kimono, gently
discarded upon the corner of a green dressing table, which enters the picture frame
at a very sharp angle. Behind it stands a gold screen of three panels. In this
particular Japanese still life one gets the impression that something is going on that
cannot be seen.
Imaginary Still Life
I close my eyes. I see white. Lots of white. And gray. Cool gray. Cool gray fabric
shadows. (It is a painting!) With no yellow. By a very old man.
Imaginary Still Life
I close my eyes. I see old fruit. Pots and pans. And various and scattered utensils.
Brown. Art. Dutch. By nobody in particular. (Museum.) And so, on to the Frans Hals.
Imaginary Still Life
I close my eyes. I see a light-green vase. A very pale light-green vase. Right beside
it sits something black. Something small. It is a small black ashtray. Getting smaller
by the moment. Until—really—it is hardly more than—now—a tiny speck.
THE DALI WOMAN
I try to make a point of being seen. Often when I'm out I'll buy a juice, even if I'm not thirsty. If the store is crowded, I'll sometimes go so far as to drop my change all over the floor, the nickels and dimes skidding in every direction.
A few months ago, I saw an ad in the paper. It said, "NEEDED: NUDE MODEL FOR DRAWING CLASS. $15 AN HOUR." It seemed too good to be true. To have so much looked at. By so many. I called the number. A woman told me to come the following Tuesday. I tried to describe myself, but she wasn't interested. "Anything will do," she said.

THE ARTIST’S MODEL
Why do you deprive the body? The body wants sex, that is its joy, not namby pamby little holier-than-thou—but joy full and in the face. The kind that overturns consciousness—what we think is the soul.

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

silence

all 12 look straight out at audience

The Tree Branch Poet returns
still with a tree branch growing out of his head
with birds in the branches.
Are the birds chirping?

NICK, THE TREE BRANCH POET
So I have these poems I've written.
And, um, I'll recite one of them for you.
Because I like them.
This ons is called
forgetting something:
Try this—close
your eyes. No, wait, when—if—we see each other
again the first thing we should do is close our eyes—no,
first we should tie our hands to something /
solid—bedpost, doorknob— otherwise they (wild birds)
might startle us
awake. Are we forgetting something? What about that
warehouse, the one beside the airport, that room
of black boxes, a man in each box? I hear
if you bring this one into the light he will not stop
crying, if you show this one a photo of his son
his eyes go dead. Turn up
the heat, turn up the song. First thing we should do
if we see each other again is to make
a cage of our bodies—inside we can place
whatever still shines.

[Silence. He considers his poem.]

That was a little bit short.
So I have another one.
This one isn't a poem.
This one is prose.
But it might become a poem.
You might think of it as an unfinished poem.
And maybe I'll leave it unfinished.
I like an unfinished poem.
Because: unfinished—
that's like life.

So here it is:

It's called The Ticking is the Bomb

Here's a secret:
Everyone,
if they live long enough,
will lose their way at some point.
You will lose your way,
you will wake up one morning and find yourself lost.
This is a hard, simple truth.
If it hasn't happened to you yet, consider yourself lucky.
When it does,
when one day you look around and nothing is recognizable,
when you find yourself alone in a dark wood having lost the way,
you may find it easier to blame it on someone else—
an errant lover, a missing father, a bad childhood—
or it may be easier to blame the map you were given—
folded too many times, out-of-date, tiny print—
but mostly,
if you are honest,
you will only be able to blame yourself.
One day I'll tell my daughter a story about a dark time,
the dark days before she was born,
and how her coming was a ray of light.
We got lost for a while, the story will begin,
but then we found our way.

[Everyone turns abruptly and leaves.

Just three women remain,
all of them only in underpants.

(Again, they can be wearing skin-tight, flesh-colored body suits
with genitalia painted on them in black ink.)

A naked man
and a woman in evening clothes
enter
and join the three naked women sitting at a dinner table.
They are a snapshot of society.

An asian woman runs in
wearing only white underpants.
She sees how the others are dressed,
is flustered for a moment,
and turns and runs back out.

two guys play ping pong on the dinner table
while the elegantly dressed woman solos

the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'
the song: 'Time is but a memory....'

During the song
the asian woman runs in again and again,
looks around, is flustered,
and leaves again and again,
each time wearing a different outfit,
hoping one of them will be appropriate for the occasion.

Finally, a rack of clothes is brought on
and everyone turns to look at it
and they get up and examine the clothes
and carefully choose something to wear,
taking something off the rack, putting it back,
taking something off the rack, putting it back,
and finally making a choice,
putting on their choice of clothes
appropriate for a dinner party,
and getting dressed

they wear lots of different sorts of clothes:
whatever is the fashion of the day when the play is staged

it is as though,
when they were in their underwear,
they had stripped down to the essentials
or 'desocialized' themselves
and they now 'resocialize' themselves
but this time in their own choices of persona/fashion

the asian woman enters again,
this time appropriately dressed
and they all gather around the dinner table
get settled,
and break bread together

breaking bread is the most basic of all social rituals
they all break bread
break bread
break bread
and, yes,
here society is reconstituted

freeze photo

THE END

A NOTE:
The text for *Our Times* was taken, in part, from Joe Brainard’s *I Remember* (for the guy sitting in the chair), Kathy Acker (for the naked artist’s model), Nicole Kraus (for the Dali woman), Allen Ginsberg, and Nick Flynn for the *Tree Branch Poet*’s poems.

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