

REAL ORIGINAL THINKER

*A solo performance
for a man and video
with the assistance
of an attendant*

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text edited by Jim Carmody

A video monitor atop a black gallery stand, downstage left. A chair, downstage right. Two tripods holding large drawing tablets, downstage center. A rolling prop cart, visible to the audience, but out of the playing area. A 9'x12' projection screen suspended upstage. The two video programs run simultaneously and without interruption. They are completely synchronous with each other and with the live action. The running time for the show is exactly 53 minutes.

The man has three aspects: MAN (the live actor), MONITOR (a prerecorded video of the actor—face and head only), and SCREEN (a prerecorded video in which the actor appears in a variety of costumes and situations. Other actors, storyboard drawings, text, and numerous supportive shots are also a part of this video which is projected onto a 9'x12' screen.) ATTENDANT is an actor (male or female) who, ideally, is the same size as the actor performing the role(s) of MAN and wears a three-piece suit identical to that of MAN. ATTENDANT also wears a black gauze mask that completely covers the head and face, leaving only the eyes exposed.

PART ONE

All fade to black. In the darkness the two performers take their positions. MAN is upstage center, directly in front of the projection screen. ATTENDANT is seated in the chair downstage right. The two video programs start. The title "Real Original Thinker" appears simultaneously on both screen

and monitor, white letters against black. The title is replaced by a blue universal leader countdown, i.e., 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2. At the end of the countdown, the screen goes black, and MONITOR appears in the monitor downstage, facing in profile, watching the action about to commence onstage. MAN walks downstage and stops once he reaches a point just between and slightly in front of the two storyboard drawing tablets mounted on tripods. Resting upon his chest is a small tablet of paper attached to a string worn around his neck. He holds a large black felt tip marking pen.

Lights up on ATTENDANT and MAN. In Part One, ATTENDANT watches the action but does not move. MAN rips off the blank top sheet of the small tablet he is wearing, revealing the numeral 5. A beat later, photographic slides of black graphic images appear on the large tablets: on stage right, a car; on stage left, a person. Since these graphic images are, in fact, slide projections, they will persist until the slides are turned off, regardless of how many sheets of paper are used and discarded.

5

MAN: This is a picture of a cat. (MAN writes the word "CAT" under the car.) This is a picture of a dog. (MAN writes the word "DOG" under the person.) I have always loved cats and dogs. When I was growing up we didn't have any cats, but we did have two dogs. And when they had babies we kept one, and so for awhile we had

three dogs, but then one of them got run over by a car and we were back to only two. My brother is allergic to cats but he loves dogs; he owns five. He's a compassionate person, much more so than I, and is especially sympathetic to dogs. All his pets are dogs he has rescued from abandonment and mistreatment. (The sentence "I prefer to think he died from old age rather than from neglect" travels across the top of the screen. By the time MAN says the same sentence, the last word has just disappeared out of frame.) I used to have many cats and one dog. I had a wonderful dog for many years, but she got cancer and died. Actually, I lost her even before that, through divorce. All the cats ran away except one. He was old and white. Very old and very dirty, and I just wasn't able to take care of him anymore. I prefer to think he died from old age rather than from neglect. I now have neither cats nor dogs. I don't have any pets at all anymore because I am away from home a lot, and it doesn't seem right to leave them alone, or to put them into kennels, or to leave them with other people. (The sentence "Oh, it's fun to play along" travels across the top of the screen.) I believe that if you can't take care of something or someone then you shouldn't have it or them. (MAN rips off sheet 5 and tosses it onto the floor, revealing sheet 4.)

4

Such are the words and style of an amateur dissembler. Oh, it's fun to play along, call a car a "cat," call a

person a “dog.” We experience, do we not, a perverse enjoyment at the mismatched mating of word to image. We feel a certain frisson as we visualize the inappropriate signifier violating the integrity of the sign. It is always the hope of intentional incongruity that some new poetic truth will be revealed in the accidental configuration. But, I ask you, have we learned anything new or unusual from this particular incongruity? I think not. (*He rips down the top sheet from the stage right tablet; since it is a projection, the graphic image of a car still remains on the newly exposed sheet as it will on all subsequent sheets until the slide is turned off.*) This is not a cat; it is a car. C - A - R . (*Writes “CAR.” He turns away from the stage right tablet and rips off the top sheet from stage left tablet.*) Likewise, this is not a dog; it is a person. (*Writes “MAN.”*) Of course, this is not a car; it is a representation of a car. Likewise, this is a representation of a person, a person symbol. Yet we understand them to be a car and a person, and in our mind’s eye we picture our own car and our own person, or all cars and all people, or just those cars and people we have known and loved. Yet what we were told by number 5 was “I have always loved cats and dogs.” If what was really meant was “I have always loved cars and people,” why not simply say as much? Why dissemble? Was the sole purpose of the previous speaker’s narrative merely to endear the speaker to the spectator? Or was it, perhaps, a beginner’s exercise in the art of friendly persuasion towards the larger, pernicious goal of ultimate inclusion into the continuum of the hegemonic spectacle? (*MAN rips off sheet 4, revealing sheet 3.*)

3

I am less disturbed by Number Five than I am by Number Four. Four exhibits hostility and, furthermore, presents symptoms of emotional

disorder. (*The sentence “Why such Sturm und Drang?” travels across the top of the screen.*) The appeal to logic was deceptive. The argument that what is is what it is, now, always, and forever, assumes an occult knowledge of physical reality, of time, and of the true nature of things, a knowledge I doubt the previous speaker has in his possession. Metaphysically, a car and a cat, a dog and a person, might well be the same darn thing. (*He rips off the top sheets from the large tablets. He writes “CATCAR” under the car and “DOGMAN” under the person.*) My immediate predecessor is obsessed with the appearance of things, and with the exact finitude of language—a kind of intellectual anality commonly found in people of acute intelligence, in conjunction with such neurotic disorders as panic anxiety, insecurity, fear and loathing of the body, wandering libido, and that haunting sense of being an impostor. This type of personality often takes refuge in what I call the stance of the professional observer, and may even turn this exigent analytical propensity into a career, becoming, for example, a terrorist, or in extreme cases, a critic. In this instance, it is obvious that the previous speaker has been thoroughly indoctrinated in the French school of existential phenomenology. The word frisson was, of course, a dead giveaway. The prissiness of the word frisson, meaning a tingle or shiver of excitement, is a splendid indicator of a severe antagonism between the mind and the body. The use of this particular word always indicates a high degree of nervousness with regard to the gender identification and the sexuality of the user. Curiously, this person is not only disturbed but personally insulted that a car has been called a “cat” and a person has been called a “dog.” Why such Sturm und Drang? We’ve all heard of a car being called a lemon or a piece of shit, and certainly the colloquial equation of canine with

human is as old as language itself. Bitch and son-of-a-bitch. The point being we do not always call things by their rightful names because, in fact, it is often more descriptive to call things by what they are not. (*MAN rips off sheet 3, revealing sheet 2.*)

2

I can relate to liking cats and dogs. I also like cars and people a whole lot, too. I like things that move, soft and sharp, things that purr and bite. These people criticizing and tearing apart everybody else aren’t really listening to what’s being said. They read too much into the words people use, words themselves don’t mean jack. (*He rips off the top sheets from both of the large tablets. The sentence “Words cause trouble” travels across the top of the screen.*) Words cause trouble. Words get stuck in your mouth, ground up like broken teeth. You push ’em around with your tongue, and then spit ’em out. You have to follow the words like a trail of blood...I mean...you have to follow ’em like a trail of bread crumbs through a forest. The trail leads the way, but what’s really important is the feel of the forest floor beneath your feet. Peace and love, man. (*The sentence “You gotta get in touch with your feelings” travels across the top of the screen. By the time MAN speaks the same sentence, the last word has just disappeared out of frame. Very fast and agitated.*) Yeah, that’s what it’s all about. Being there. All alone, all by yourself in the forest, late at night, running. Yeah, running for your life, pumping. Sharp rocks stab into the bottoms of your feet. You stumble and fall. Got to get up, keep going. You hear the dogs howling. They’ve picked up your smell at the gate. You’re ready to give up. Jesus, you’re just so goddamned tired, only a miracle can save you now. Yeah, a hand’s gotta reach outa some heavenly cloud and snap you out of there. (*Pause. Recovers.*) Yeah, so what’s really im-

portant is how you feel. You gotta get in touch with your feelings. That's the reality; that's the truth. There's way too much importance attached to thinking. Thinking is just the mind keeping busy. It's animal instinct, the will to survive, that's gonna save you. That's what separates the wolves from the lambs. You can think anything you want. Go ahead, take your time. But there's a witch in the woods with her nose up sniffing the wind. She isn't thinking things over. She's getting the oven ready. She's hungry, she knows what she wants. When she gets you, she's not gonna wanna talk things over. All you are is food. So, talking about people as though they were dogs...*(Barely controlled anger, then abrupt recovery. Writes "DOG" under the person.)*...as though they were dogs, lets us feel what it would be like if we really cared about our fellow losers—yeah, man's best friend. You wanna have a word and a picture, you're just trying to talk about two things at once. Fine with me. I've got my priorities straight. *(Writes "CAT" under the car.)* Cars run over cats. *(MAN rips off sheet 2 revealing sheet 1. The sentence "It might get me to think" travels across the top of the screen.)*

1

The only advantage I can see in getting me to call a car a cat is that it might get me to think of my car as a living thing and get me to treat it a little better. You ask me, people really are dogs. Let's face it, some are better bred than others. I say get the bitches fixed, put the strays in the pound, and if they bite, put them to sleep. Simple, straightforward policy, easy to understand, solve a lot of problems. Yeah, well, like it or leave it, it's just an opinion. All joking aside, the only point I can see in having an opinion as to whether or not it's cool to call a car a cat or a person a dog, is that it just goes to show how useless it is to have an opinion. It just doesn't

mean a thing. *(MAN turns towards the tablet at stage right.)* Do I believe a car is a cat? *(He rips off top sheet. Slide out. He turns to stage left tablet.)* Do I believe man is a dog? *(He rips off top sheet. Slide out.)* I'll keep that to myself. *(He rips off sheet 1, revealing last sheet upon which is written the word "ME." He leaves the confined area he's been playing in and walks downstage towards the audience, and delivers the following monologue in an intimate, confidential tone and manner.)*

ME

I have been pretending. Not telling the truth. Lying to you. I am a narcissistic, pathological liar. The game's up. I know you've figured it out by now. I've been using certain familiar techniques of the solo-performance genre to indulge in a shameless display of ego, all safely presented under the protective cover of "playacting." *(The sentence "Now I'm going to tell you the truth" travels across the top of the screen.)* [Photo 1] I project myself like this because I'm driven by my overwhelming desire to be seen. I want you to see me as what I am, what I want to be, what I will be, what I could have been, and what I'm not. Now, I'm going to break through the fourth wall and tell you the truth about me. Not some fairy tale, some

therapeutic song and dance about me as a victim, a survivor, a likable kinda guy. I'm gonna tell you the truth...*(He turns and walks upstage, and says over his shoulder.)* about me...*(A close-up head shot of SCREEN appears on the screen. MAN arrives at his upstage mark, turns to face the audience, and says the final line of this section as a murderer.)*

PART TWO

Lights up. ATTENDANT rises and crosses the stage, gathering up the discarded paper and depositing it off to the sidelines. ATTENDANT recrosses the stage and strikes the two tripod/paper tablet units off to the opposite sidelines. ATTENDANT rolls the prop cart over to where MAN stands waiting and hands him a glass of water. While MAN drinks, ATTENDANT removes the small paper tablet from around his neck, replaces the cap on the marking pen. ATTENDANT returns the prop cart to its position and then resumes sitting in the downstage right chair.

MONITOR: I strongly advise you not to say another word. I hate to disillusion you, but you're not as clever as you think. *(He turns his head towards the audience and speaks to them directly.)* Surely you see that he's mad. You can't believe a word he says.

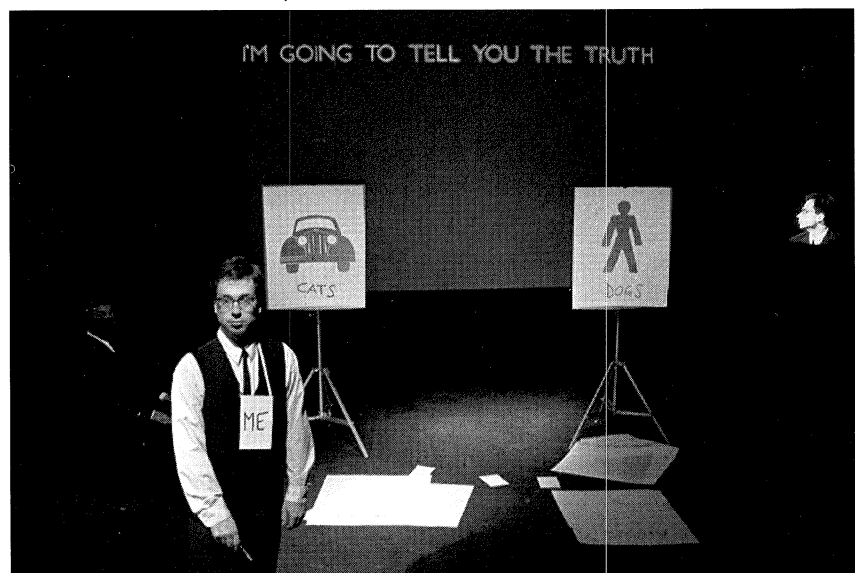


Photo 1: The Attendant (Janhabi Nandi) and Man (Volker Schachenmayr).

Photo: Alexander Stewart

MAN: I committed murder and got away with it. I'll never be caught. Nothing connects me to the crime. Not a shred of evidence.

MONITOR: You live in a fantasy world. Look where you are! Displaying yourself like this, in a public forum, vaunting your despicable deed, tooting your own horn about an act most people, most sane people at least, find barbaric...Nothing sympathetic about it...Really, I must insist...

MAN: Oh, please, relax. Public disclosure poses no threat to me. I'm merely doing my job, here, performing my humble role in a certified work of fiction, just as you are. There's no cause for alarm. The threat of danger has passed...see? All gone. The all clear sign has sounded. Did you hear it? Do you?

MONITOR: I hear you, what you say. Nothing's clear. I don't know what to think. I never believe you, the things you say. *(The face of SCREEN fades out to black. A new sequence begins of swirling blue cigarette smoke.)*

MAN: That's as it should be. Even when I'm telling you the truth, I'm telling you a lie. You're not sure of anything are you? That's the way I like it...you, uncertain, me, solid as a rock, fresh as a daisy.

MONITOR: You're a liar. *(On the screen, a woman's hand, cigarette clenched between painted red fingernails, sweeps across the screen.)*

MAN: I am a liar. You are a lie-detector. Lying is what I do best. Let me get on with it. Detect, scrutinize, analyze, evaluate as you wish!

MONITOR: As you wish. *(Same hand brings cigarette up to the lips of a woman. Only the lower portion of her face is visible. She inhales.)*

MAN: I have committed the perfect crime. I killed without lifting a finger. And now I will tell you the tale of how I murdered my mother. The Mother Creature. It. *(An ominous sound. MOTHER CREATURE appears. She exhales. A young woman obviously made up to look like a crone: thick,*

cracked, discolored make-up; a black wig cut in a pageboy hairstyle. She is a monster. She wears a gray robe flecked in red. The voice of MOTHER CREATURE is that of another woman. Thus, most of her dialogue is heard as a voice-over, and only on select lines are the lips of MOTHER CREATURE sound-synched with the voice-over. This technique, like the falsification of age, is an obvious fabrication. Lines that are sound-synched will be printed in bold.)

MOTHER CREATURE: I wish to hell you'd never been born. **You disgust me.** You've always wanted me dead, don't think I don't know that. You don't fool me. I've got you figured out, you and your lies. You're a homicidal maniac, **just like your father.** Do you hear me? A homicidal maniac!

MAN: She must have known, she must have always known that sooner or later, somebody, someday, somewhere, somehow, was going to kill her. She knew. She knew. She just didn't know who it would be. She suspected everyone. Especially the family, the immediate family. There was that time, so she said, when she was a little girl, and she awoke to find her older sister holding a knife to her throat. *(This section is illustrated on the screen with a series of storyboard drawings: A girl stands holding a knife in a threatening gesture over another child lying in bed.)*



Or the time her uncle tried to run her over. (A car with its headlights on driving straight towards us.) Her parents were both dead, otherwise you know they would have tried to kill her. Probably they did kill somebody before they died, because, according to the Mother Creature, we're all cold-blooded killers. She said my brother had killed his girlfriend and buried her body out



at the beach. *(A man digging a hole.)* She said my dad killed a man, some stranger, some nobody, and buried

his body out in the desert. *(A man pushes a wrapped body into a hole.)* She said, I strangled my, my lover, and threw the body overboard into the sea. *(A man drops a wrapped body over the ship's railing into the sea. On screen: MAN and MOTHER CREATURE sitting next to each other in an empty room, watching TV. MOTHER CREATURE turns her head towards MAN, takes a drag of her cigarette and blows the smoke towards him. She does this repeatedly. He strains away from her. ATTENDANT stands, steps behind MAN. ATTENDANT's hands cradle MAN's head onstage, elevating him onto his toes, and thus suspended, rotates his body during the delivery of the following section of text.)* As fate would have it, her potential killers passed away, each one fled into the safe, dark harbor of oblivion before they could strike the final blow, put her out of her misery. Like a pack of false suitors, everyone left her. In the end. Alone. Everyone she ever loved, whomsoever loved her, went away. Everyone gone. Her sister gone. Never spoke to her again. Her parents dead. Her uncle dead. Her husband, the father of her children, my dad, dead and gone. Never saw him again. Her son, my little brother, gone, long gone. Nobody left except me. Not another living soul. No friends, no enemies, no family. No one left to love or be loved, to kill or be killed, except me, just me and the Mother Creature.

(Cut to close-up of their heads, same position. At the end of the above monologue, the shot cuts to a close-up of his face. He speaks.)

SCREEN: I can't breathe; get me out of here!

MONITOR: An Oedipal suffocation. There was nothing I could do, I was locked in, trapped. *(MAN breaks free from ATTENDANT and walks downstage. ATTENDANT gestures towards him and then returns to the chair. Close-up of MOTHER CREATURE.)*

MOTHER CREATURE: You are not going anywhere. (*ATTENDANT rises and slowly, with cautious compassion, approaches MAN.*)

MAN: I said, look, I'm an adult, I need to live my own life. I moved out of her house and got a place of my own. Still, I couldn't get away from her. Everywhere I turned, everywhere I looked, there she was. (*He shudders and cries out. At this moment, MAN turns and recoils from ATTENDANT.*) Get away from me! (*MOTHER CREATURE fades out to swirling smoke. ATTENDANT, upon rebuke, returns to the chair and resumes sitting and watching.*)

MONITOR: I couldn't get away no matter how hard I tried. (*MAN walks upstage left and stands close to the edge of the screen. More storyboard drawings on the screen during the following section: MAN in a room with shadowy friends; MOTHER CREATURE standing in the doorway.*)

MAN: She scared away my friends. (*Interior of a big work room with many identical workstations. MOTHER CREATURE stands in the doorway. MAN is in the foreground, wearing a panic stricken expression.*) She embarrassed me at work. (*MAN walking down a street,*



MOTHER CREATURE following a short distance behind.) She followed me. (*MAN seated in an empty room in a pose similar to that of Whistler's Mother/Carlyle. A window looking into the room is filled with MOTHER CREATURE's enormous face.*) She watched me. Night and day. Day in, day out. She drove me crazy. I lost my friends, I lost my job. I was about to lose my life if I didn't do something drastic to save myself.

(*Same room, but MAN is gone. The chair is empty. ATTENDANT rises,*



walks on the diagonal to center mid-stage. MAN begins walking simultaneously and hides behind ATTENDANT.) I decided to become invisible. (*AT-*

TENDANT and MAN, crouched in fear and holding onto the coattails of ATTENDANT, walk to downstage center. MAN peeks out from behind ATTENDANT.) I made myself disappear. (*Cut to blue cigarette smoke, same as before. Still peeking out from behind ATTENDANT.*) Like a vampire, I hide from the light of day and only venture forth under cover of darkness.

MONITOR: A creature of the night. Separated from all living things, belonging to no one, answerable to no voice other than my own. I began to isolate myself. (*ATTENDANT turns and walks away, resumes seat.*)

MAN: (*still crouched*) I am my own man.

MONITOR: In a world of my own. (*MAN walks over and kneels in front of ATTENDANT, like a child seeking comfort from a parent.*)

MAN: My head hurts. My ears. No, my eyes, my eyes. Ooooh, my hand, my hand. All my fingers. My whole hand is throbbing, burning up. Make it stop. (*MAN lays his head on ATTENDANT's lap. ATTENDANT takes MAN's hand and caresses it.*) [**Photo 2**]

MONITOR: At last, I was standing on my own two feet.

MAN: At first the Mother Creature didn't know what I was doing. (*Close-up head shot of MOTHER CREATURE appears on screen.*)

MOTHER CREATURE: What do you do, sleep all day? **What are you doing?** (*Cut to close-up of MOTHER CREATURE's hand dialing the telephone.*)

MAN: She put up a fight. The telephone, which she had always abused, now became her instrument of torture. (*Cut to close-up of MOTHER CREATURE talking on the telephone.*)

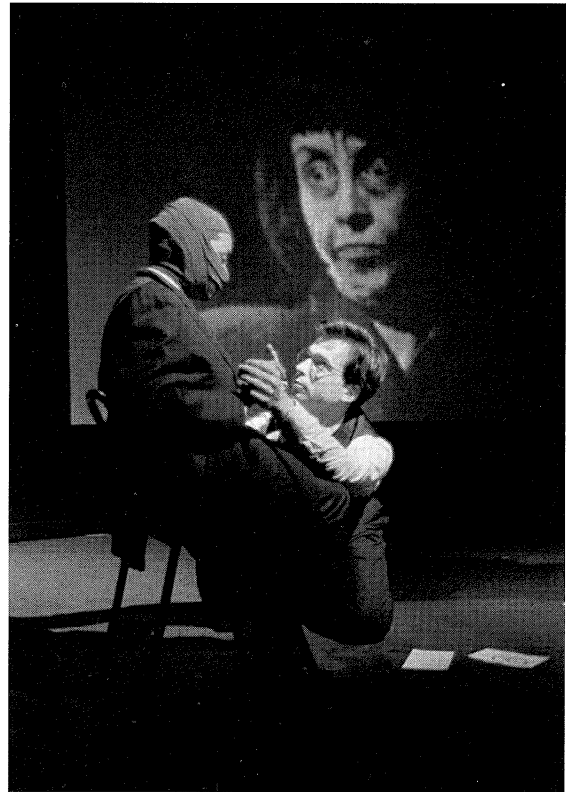


Photo 2: The Attendant and The Man.

Photo: Alexander Stewart

MOTHER CREATURE: Why are you avoiding me? I just want to be friends. I get so lonely all by myself. I don't have anyone to talk to. **Why are you so mean to me?** (*MAN lifts his head from the ATTENDANT's lap and looks imploring while delivering the following text.*)

MAN: I felt ashamed of myself, for hurting her feelings, for being so selfish. She could tell when my heart was melting. She could feel me opening up to her, wet with sorrow, sick with remorse, and then, then she would strike, move in for the kill.

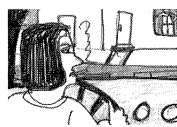
MOTHER CREATURE: (*still on the telephone*) You're only nice to me when you want something, when you need money, when you're down on your luck. You don't care about me, you never have, **you only care about yourself**, and you'll only have yourself to blame when you end up in the gutter, or in jail, or dead. Some nameless bum in some backwater dump. Don't blame it on me. I'm sick of all your self-centered posturing, and whining, and delusions of

grandeur. (Cut to shot of MOTHER CREATURE desperately pounding on front door.)

MAN: I stopped answering my phone. She didn't give up. She wasn't done with me. She would pound on my door, waking the neighbors, making a scene. (Cut to MOTHER CREATURE running down the front porch and getting into her car, which is parked in front of the house.)

MONITOR: There was no way to get away from her, no place to hide. Sometimes I would lock myself in the closet, and sit behind the long winter coats and the dress suits just for some peace and quiet, some privacy.

MAN: (During the following text: Same

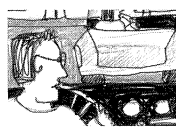


shot of MOTHER CREATURE in her car, parked outside of

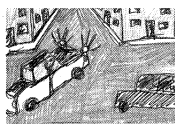
a house. MAN walks into frame on the front porch and makes big gestures signifying "Go away!" Cut to close-up of MOTHER CREATURE.

Cut to shot of MAN driving his car past MOTHER CREATURE's car, away from his house and out into the street.)

[Photo 3] She kept me under constant surveillance, sitting in her car, parked outside my house, watching me. I couldn't leave with her out there! I couldn't get any food! (He breaks free from the smothering embrace of ATTENDANT and moves towards MONI-



away. Later, when I come back, I park



a distance up the street and sit in my car watching her sitting in her car watching my house. This was it. I had reached the point of no return. I gave up my place, everything I owned, except my cellular phone, and started living in my car. (Traveling sequence: MAN in his car, driving through city streets. He goes to a fast food drive-thru and buys lots of food. He's dirty and needs a shave.)

MONITOR: I've always had a penchant for talking out loud to myself. The sound of my own voice helps me locate where I am. Like a bat, I need to echolocate to know where I am in relation to everything else. Helloooooo...

MAN: Helloooooo...

SCREEN: Helloooooo...

(During the following dialogue, ATTENDANT rolls the prop cart up center stage and helps MAN out of his vest, jacket, shirt, and ties, and redresses him in a distressed shirt and tie, matching that worn by his counterpart in the video projected on the screen.)

MONITOR: If you're tired, close

your eyes. I'll watch over you.

MAN: What are you going to do if there's trouble?

MONITOR: I'll tell you a story, make something up.

SCREEN: (at the wheel of his car, talking to himself) Shut up shut up shut up shut up shut up...

MONITOR: Have you looked at yourself lately?

MAN: What?

MONITOR: You're starting to look a little ragged around the edges. It has become apparent to me that It has taken Its toll on you. It seems to have gotten the best of you.

MAN: It's not... That's not true. I'm perfectly clean, perfectly presentable.

SCREEN: (still driving) Shut up shut up shut up shut up shut up...

(When the task of costume changing is completed, ATTENDANT rolls the prop cart back to its position on the sidelines and resumes sitting in the chair.)

MAN: Living in an automobile takes its toll on a person. You can only get so clean in the men's room at a gas station, or the restroom at a restaurant. My skin...stinky, sweaty, sticky. I disgust myself. Dirty, dirty. Bugs. Spots. The sun breeds maggots in a dog. Son-of-a-bitch. Son-of-a-barking-bloody-bitch. I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore. I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take It anymore!

SCREEN: (still driving) Shut up shut up shut up shut up...

MONITOR: I was upset.

MAN: Yes, very upset.

MONITOR: No doubt Freud would say I was suffering symptoms of anxiety hysteria...

MAN: No! Freud would say the Mother Creature was suffering symptoms of anxiety hysteria, not me. Not me, oh no. Delusional paranoia, I think, is much more likely the case. Yes, and persecution fantasies. Certainly, and I was projecting! Don't forget that, I was projecting, thank you very much! All over the place. Projecting like mad, and sending sig-

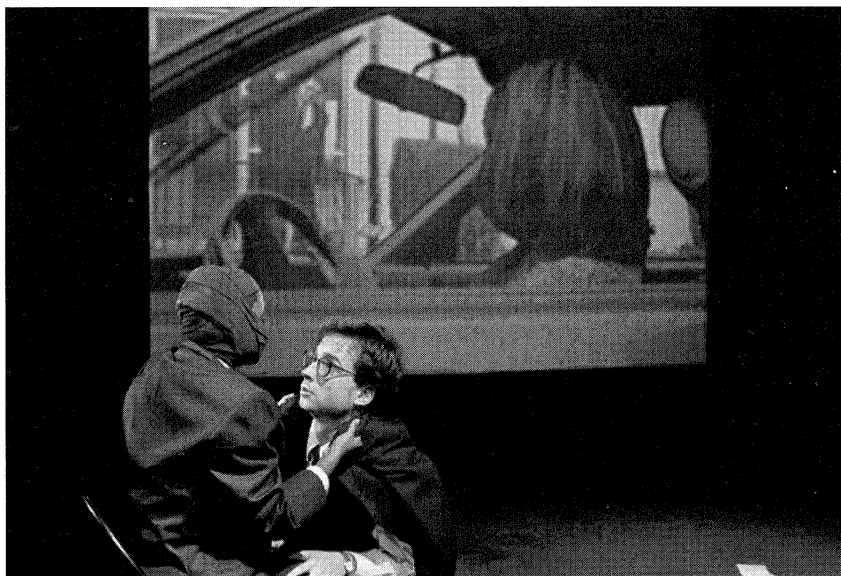


Photo 3: "She kept me under constant surveillance..." Photo: Alexander Stewart

nals! Sending and receiving! Sending and receiving! (Cut to wide shot of the exterior of the door to the men's room at a gas station. Cut to close up of the male icon on the door.)

MONITOR: Signals.

SCREEN: (voice-over) Signs.

MAN: Messages. (During the following text, SCREEN is inside the men's room, standing at the sink, washing his hands.) Freud would have said I was suffering a psychotic breakdown. My narcissistic need for omnipotence in conflict with my infantile fear of losing my progenitrix compelled me to displace my murderous thoughts and to project the source of my persecution elsewhere, onto a substitute object.

MONITOR: Murderous thoughts?

SCREEN: (Cut to close-up of his face and its reflection in the mirror.) Somebody's gonna pay for this. I'll kill the son-of-a-bitch that gets in my way.

[Photo 4]

MAN: I suffered a seventy-two hour psychotic breakdown, during which time I dedicated myself to the task of committing mass murder. (Cut to shot of SCREEN getting into his car and driving away. ATTENDANT gets a second chair and places it next to the pedestal supporting the monitor. ATTENDANT leads MAN to this chair, and once he is seated, takes a position standing just behind him.)

MONITOR: Contrary to all appearances, I don't like talking about this part of my history very much, so I'm going to go through it at a good clip. No real names, fictitious locale. You get the picture. You do require, however, one bit of factual information about me if you are to believe the unbelievable account I'm about to render as the truth. To put it modestly, I am something of a genius, you might say, when it comes to electronics. A computer whiz. Robotics. A.I. Rounding off my character, so to speak, I'm also a survivalist, and a military hardware buff. (To MAN.) Okay, take it away.

MAN: Okay, so there I am, in the

car, driving around aimlessly, blind with rage, wanting nothing so much as to kill the Mother Creature, but I can't, I can't do it. I won't, goddamit. I won't give her the satisfaction! I can control myself! I've got myself under control! Nothing's gonna make me crack! Nothing! I'm so tired. I have no place to go, no place to sleep. Have to stay awake, have to keep driving. (On the screen, more shots of MAN driving. Sometimes the shot cuts to street and traffic, and then when it cuts back to MAN inside his car, he is noticeably dirtier and crazier. Travel shots of highway leading away from the city.) I head out on the highway. Maybe I'll go down to the ocean, I think. Maybe I can wash my feet in the water, stretch out on the sand, make myself feel better. Drift off into the comforting roar of the crashing surf. You see, I am making an effort. It's not like I was looking for trouble. Quite the contrary, I was looking for a way out. I'm still looking for a way out. Anyway. It's late at night. I'm on an old, two-lane blacktop stretch of road. Narrow. Not a lot of room. Just enough room for two cars to pass safely, no more. It's against the law to park on the side of the road! I want to make that point. So, I see two cars parked side by side up ahead, block-

ing the road. It's a curve, a blind curve! I have no choice. I have to do something or I'm going to crash into them! I swerve around them and just miss having a head-on collision with a car coming the other way! I pull over to the side of the road. And I think to myself, did I just see what I think I saw? Were those two cars...did I almost die because, because those...two cars...I made a U-turn and drove back. (Storyboard drawing of two cop cars, parked side by side, the cops leaning through their windows, embracing. During the following sequence about the cops, the screen alternates between drawings and shots of actors in cop suits and real cop



cars in circumstances that support the narrative.) And there they were, two cop cars! Still kissing! [Photo 5]



No, one cop car and some other civilian car, and two cops, or one cop kissing a girl! Kissing, a cop! By the side of the road! Illegal! Against the law! A flagrant abuse of power! People were very nearly killed! These cops aren't gonna get away with it! They must pay for their crimes! They've picked the wrong time and

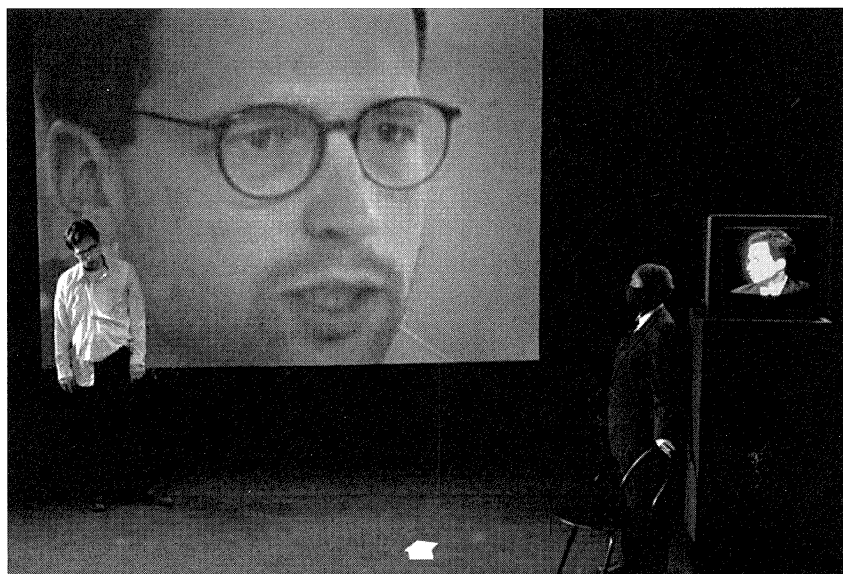


Photo 4: "I'll kill the son-of-a-bitch that gets in my way."

Photo: Alexander Stewart

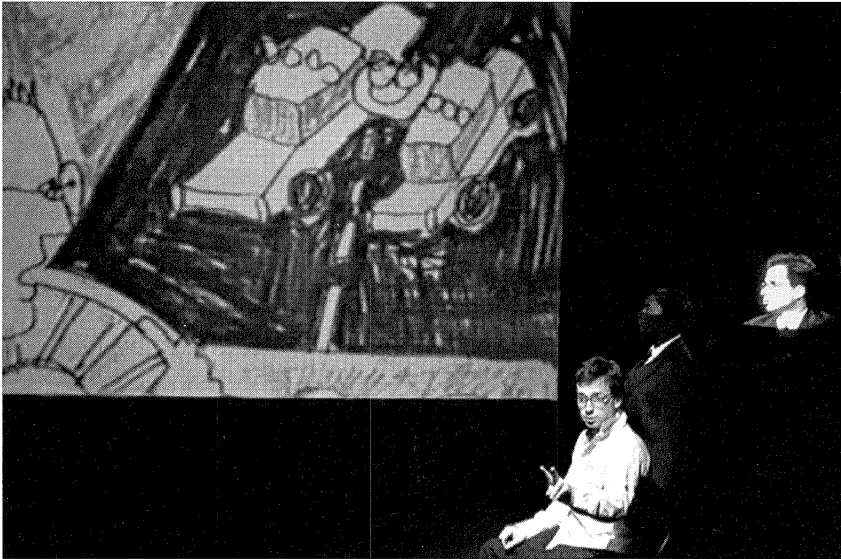


Photo 5: "And there they were, two cop cars! Still kissing!"

Photo: Alexander Stewart

place to fuck around! I get out of my car and I charge up to where they are, still kissing, still kissing. They hear me coming and separate. I go right up to that stupid cop and I tell him he's a fucking idiot and I'm putting him under citizen's arrest. He's coming with me, I say, and going to jail! He says, he says to me, "Pipe down sport." (Pause for a couple of beats.) "Pipe down sport." I say to him, "You're a dead man."

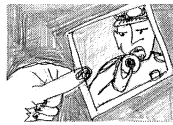
SCREEN: You're a dead man.

MAN: I turn on my heel and march back to my car, get in, and get out of there fast. I see in my rearview that the cop is chasing me. But, I'm a better driver, I've got a faster car, and I make a clean getaway. Yeah. Clean as a whistle. Immaculate. I found a billboard and parked behind it. Spent the night. Didn't sleep. Had some time to think. Started planning my strategy. At dawn I went and surveyed the battle site...Let's call it the Our Lady Police Station, because that's the part of town where the incident occurred. I was going to have to take out the whole command post. I had no choice. A sniper attack, just to get one lousy cop. What a waste of adrenaline. If you're gonna go, I figured, you might as well go big.

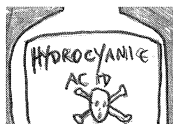
(**SCREEN** is dressed in camouflage. He

is behind a bush with binoculars. Storyboard drawings are interspersed with the dramatic video enactments throughout the rest of this monologue.)

MAN: My masterpiece. I camped out in the bushes. Took photos. (A series of Polaroid snapshots of cops at the police station.)

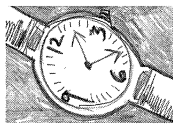


Kept a log: who came, who went, what times. Had them under surveillance every moment. I didn't close my eyes for one second. At night I used an infrared image enhancer. (More shots of **SCREEN** spying in the bushes.) Did all that on Day 1. At o-four hundred hours on Day 2, I crept in close and cracked the access code to the security system. Easy. Like stealing from a baby. Now, if and when I want to, I can jam the system and lock the cops inside the building. No exit. I'm gonna lock them in and pump hydrocyanic acid in through the air duct. (Storyboard



drawing of a poison bottle with a label on which is printed "hydrocyanic acid.")

I'm gonna pipe it in, sport. Kill them all in about three minutes. (Storyboard drawing of a wristwatch.) I went



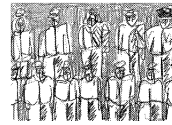
out shopping that afternoon, got everything I needed. Continued to monitor the situation. Early in the a.m. of Day 3, everything is up, ready to blow. I know they change shifts at seventeen hundred hours. That's when the most cops will be inside the building. All I have to do now is wait.

MONITOR: I don't know where this kind of behavior comes from. I'm a refined person, delicate in some ways, concerned with things sartorial, intellectual, aesthetic. I don't know where this rage comes from. It's distasteful, and for this, I apologize. It will soon be over. In that we can all take some comfort. (**SCREEN**, lying down in a clump of tall weeds, peering through



his binoculars.)

MAN: I think about their soon to be last moments, their agonizing death throes, their surprise and horror, pissing and shitting and weeping like babies. Oh, yeah this. (Cut to a storyboard drawing of the police station. Cut to a storyboard drawing of a large group of officers.)



And then, the unexpected happens. All the police officers march outside. What is this, a counterattack? I'm not prepared for man-to-man combat. My whole strategy is to gut them with a sneak attack. I don't have any guns or grenades or anything like that. I specialize in finesse, not brute force. The cops assemble themselves in an orderly way. Do they know where I'm positioned? Is this a firing squad? The whole damn force lined up against me? I close my eyes. I think this is it, I better surrender now while I still can. I put my hands up and am about to come out from hiding. The words "don't shoot" are gnarled up in a ball of vomit ready to spew, when...when...all at once they...sang...to me...of divine redemption. (Cut to a storyboard close-



up of officers faces singing—a recording of a chorale singing The Wiffenpoof Song.

MAN and SCREEN sing snippets of the chorus at random. MAN throws himself onto the ground, grief stricken and ashamed. His behavior is infantile. He wallows in self-pity and self-loathing. During the song, he interjects the following, repeating as much as needed.) I'm insane! Insane! I don't deserve to live. I'm a homicidal maniac! A homicidal maniac! (Also, during the song, on the screen, SCREEN gets back in his car and drives out of town. Film clips stolen from road movies are used to show getting out of town, across the desert, and up into the mountains. When the song concludes, MAN lies on the floor in a deranged heap.)

MONITOR: For Crissake, pull yourself together.

MAN: I can't. I'm too dirty, too disgusting! I can't stand myself! (ATTENDANT rolls the prop cart to mid-center stage and approaches MAN.) Don't touch me. (ATTENDANT lifts MAN to his feet. He removes the distressed shirt and puts the clean shirt back on him. He also helps him put on a fringed buckskin cowboy jacket.)

SCREEN: (Gets out of his car and walks down to a mountain stream. He kneels by the water and holds his hand in the rushing water. Voice-over.) I have been given a reprieve. A gift from heaven. I can see, now, that there is no escape. My fate is sealed. I have a purpose in life and I must fulfill it. Like an atomic bomb blowing itself up in the desert, I will take myself away into the wilderness, away from the prying eyes of mankind, to vent my wrath and test my strength against my enemy. (He scoops a handful of the water up, looks at it and then lets it run through his fingers as he says the following.) "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

MAN: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

MONITOR: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb."

(ATTENDANT hands MAN a cowboy hat, and then rolls the prop cart off to the sidelines. MAN puts on the hat and smiles.) [Photo 6]

MONITOR: Oh, very well. (He puts on a cowboy hat also. ATTENDANT reenters the playing area, and joins arms with MAN.)

MAN: Let me give you the grand tour. (Together they promenade around the perimeter of the stage. They stop at a position upstage right and watch the "slide show," although, really, it's still video. Photos that support the narrative appear on the screen.) This is a picture of my little cabin. That's the mountain range in New Mexico, Angel Fire. That's the tallest mountain—8,500 feet. You see, there's the elevation sign. In all my life, twenty-four hours had not passed without the Mother Creature knowing exactly where I was. And, now, hours, days, weeks had gone by without a word from me as to my whereabouts. Finally, I felt the right moment had arrived. I went into town and called her on the public telephone. (Shot of SCREEN, dressed in the identical cowboy jacket and hat as his counterparts, at an outdoor public telephone, dialing. Cut to MOTHER CREATURE on the telephone.)

MOTHER CREATURE: I've been worried sick! Where are you? I can't

take this kind of stress, you know that. My heart, the doctor says. I have to take it easy. Too much worry. I have an aneurysm, you know that. Where are you? When are you coming home? What have you been doing? Have you killed somebody?

SCREEN: I haven't killed anybody. Why do you always say things like that? Why do you always think such hideous thoughts about me? I didn't call to fight with you. I, I took some time off, a little vacation.

MOTHER CREATURE: I could use a little vacation. All you ever think about is yourself.

SCREEN: I am in New Mexico, a place called Angel Fire. It's up in the mountains. Very pretty.

MOTHER CREATURE: How high up in the mountains? You know I can't go any higher than 5,000 feet. My heart will burst, you know that.

SCREEN: You don't have to go any higher than that. I'll meet you someplace, I'll meet you at the elevation sign. Get in your car, and start driving. (MAN hangs up. He wears a devilish grin. Generic pictures of snow covered mountains.)

MAN: So far so good. The Mother Creature succumbs to temptation. By my calculations, she will arrive in Angel Fire in three days. Time enough

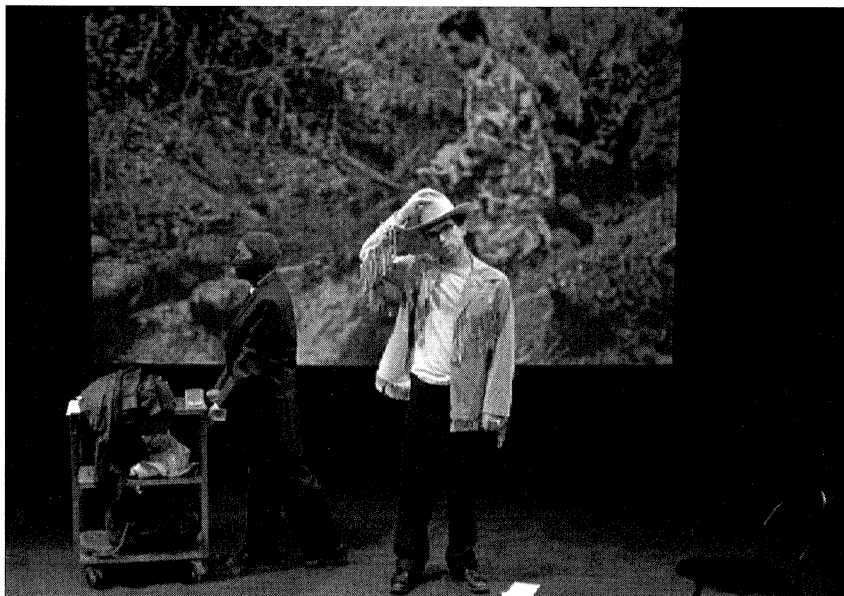


Photo 6: "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

Photo: Alexander Stewart

for me to plan my course of action. The deed must suit the environment. High-tech devices, while suitable for the city would never do for the country. I need something pastoral, so I visit the library and consult the encyclopedia. (*ATTENDANT lifts a big book off the cart and holds it out. MAN turns the pages. Close-up of MAN's hand turning the pages of a big book. We see the word "murder."*) Let's see. A gun. I don't think so. Too common. A bow and arrow. A crossbow. H'm. No. Too strenuous. Poison, that's an idea. But why make her come all this way just to slip her some hydrocyanic acid? No, no. Just say no to that. A missile, inappropriate for reasons already stated. A heat seeking device, ditto. A knife? Oh no, oh god, too much blood. I don't want to put holes in her, I don't want to even have to touch her. I want to kill without lifting a finger. (*Pause.*) I'm starting to panic. She's on her way, and if she gets here and I'm not ready for her, she'll walk all over me, wipe the floor with me. (*Same travelogue sequence as used earlier to indicate leaving the city, crossing the desert, climbing the mountains. This time there are close-ups of MOTHER CREATURE smoking and storyboard drawings.*)

MOTHER CREATURE: You're gonna pay for this, sonny.

MONITOR: Will I never be free of her?

MAN: Will I never know happiness or peace of mind?

MOTHER CREATURE: Over my dead body. (*ATTENDANT quickly strikes the book to the prop cart and then returns and kneels in front of MAN.*)

MAN: I went into a trance. I heard a voice say to me...

MONITOR: Climb every mountain.

MAN: Climb every mountain. What does it mean? I can't climb every mountain, there are too many, I don't have time!

MONITOR: The mountain's high. (*ATTENDANT holds out both hands, palms up.*)

MAN: The highest mountain? Climb

the highest mountain? Yes. I begin to understand. Climb the highest mountain. (*MAN climbs the mountain by stepping onto ATTENDANT's offered hands.*) Yes, yes, yes. Up, up, up. Climb, higher and higher. I look down from my vantage point, I can see the Mother Creature below. She is here, the moment of truth has come. (*ATTENDANT rises, gets a small flag on which is printed "8,500" and hands it to MAN who happily waves it in large swooping arcs.*) Yoo hoo! Here I am! (*Shot of SCREEN standing on top of a snow covered mountain. He smiles, he waves. Shot of MOTHER CREATURE looking up at him through binoculars.*)

MOTHER CREATURE: Come down!

SCREEN: No, you come up!

MOTHER CREATURE: You said no more than 5,000 feet.

SCREEN: I was lying. Come on.

MOTHER CREATURE: Why do you lie to me?

SCREEN: I'm a liar, a pathological liar! Now either go back where you came from, or stay where you are or come up here. It's up to you. (*MOTHER CREATURE starts to climb up the mountain. MAN stops waving the flag, hands it to ATTENDANT, and then holds out his hand for ATTENDANT to inspect.*)

MAN: "There ariseth a little cloud out of the sea like a man's hand." (*ATTENDANT grasps the hand of MAN and leads him to a position mid-center stage. ATTENDANT removes the cowboy hat and jacket and dresses MAN in the same terry cloth robe as worn by MOTHER CREATURE in the screen video, as well as in the same wig.*)

MONITOR: When I was a little boy, my mother and I would take walks together. Those were the good old days when we still enjoyed each others' company. We'd walk through the park. I would kick stones with the toes of my little brown boots, and jump over logs, and swing from the tree branches, and chase squirrels, and study the ants in their ant hills. Ah, yes, a child at play with Mother Nature.

MOTHER CREATURE: (*leaning against an elevation sign, "6,000 ft," and looking up the mountain*) Please come down from there.

SCREEN: (*on top of the mountain, standing in an indomitable, like Superman*) I'm not coming down. This is where I make my stand. (*She continues to struggle up the mountain.*)

MAN: I feel that...I believe that...I am touched, somehow.

MONITOR: I'd run off ahead and wait for her to catch up, and then jump out from behind big flowering bushes. There was a gully, very steep, with a stream down at the bottom. This was where I most wanted to be, down in the water, inside the moist intrauterine belly of the earth, carefully stepping from one slippery rock to the next. I wasn't supposed to go down there. She was afraid I'd drown. Fall and hit my head, knock myself out and drown.

MOTHER CREATURE: (*at the 7,000 ft mark*) Why are you doing this to me? I've always been good to you. My heart can't take much more of this. Come down from up there. I need you to help me.

SCREEN: I can't hear you. You'll have to climb up higher so I can hear you. (*She continues to ascend. ATTENDANT sets up the two chairs downstage center. ATTENDANT leads MAN over to them and they sit in the chairs, very close together, facing each other. Slowly, MAN leans forward in his chair and into the arms and lap of ATTENDANT, who holds him in an embrace as though if he were a child.*)

MONITOR: One time I ran away from her and scrambled down the side of the ravine, and hid from her. It's a game, I thought. When you're playing a game, you can break the rules. I heard her walking towards me. I held my mouth shut to keep from laughing. She's expecting an ambush, but I'm going to surprise her this time, coming up from below! I made a mad scramble up the slope, but the dirt was loose and I lost my footing. I

grabbed for a handful of dead grass, but it pulled right out of the ground and I slipped back down, tearing up the skin on my legs. I cried out. I was scared. I really was just a little guy, after all.

MAN: I think, I believe, that another world exists beyond this one, and all the men in my family are there, the lost men whose names are never spoken, for whom no tears are wept, who lie buried and forgotten. If I could touch him for just one moment, hold his hand in mine. If I could kiss my father's face, just one more time again, I would feel...so much more...alive.

MOTHER CREATURE: (now at the 8,000 ft sign) I can't go on. I'm dying. Can't breathe.

SCREEN: You can't get me here. I think you've gone about as far as you can go. This is my domain! I'm king of the world! Go away! Go away!

MONITOR: And there she was. Way up there looking down at me, and she wasn't mad or anything. Hey, buster, what're you doing way down there? You want a hand up? I was so scared I couldn't move. I was frozen stiff. So she came down, and she gave me her hand and helped me get back up the hill to safety.

MOTHER CREATURE: (Still at the 8,000 ft mark, she is lying in the snow, curled up.) I can't live without you.

SCREEN: "My mother groaned! My father wept! Into the dangerous world I leapt. Helpless, naked, piping loud, like a fiend hid in a cloud." (Whisper.) "All that live must die." (Shot of MOTHER CREATURE dead in the snow. MAN lifts his face up to heaven. Close-up: he is smiling a tender, sad, triumphant smile. Close-up on his face, which will hold till the end of Part Two. ATTENDANT abruptly rises out of the chair, leaving MAN slumped forward. ATTENDANT circles around and roughly pulls the chair MAN is seated out from under him, sending him sprawling across the floor. During the following monologue, ATTENDANT and MAN struggle in a violent contest.)

[Photo 7]

MAN: At once I feel the world tilt and reel. The inside of my head spins uncontrollably. I am nauseous. Dizziness overcomes me. I sense that I am falling. I drop to my knees and throw myself onto the mountainside in a desperate embrace, clutching at the weeds and the snow, afraid that the mountain will shake me loose and cast me into the bowels of the earth, where I will be doomed to fall forever in a meaningless interior orbit. (Pause. MAN is thrown "out" by ATTENDANT and recovers his composure while standing downstage by the monitor.) Suddenly, the air grows still, quiet. The terrible dizziness has passed. I am released from my spell. Slowly I stand up. My balance is restored to me. I'm not going to fall. I can walk, I can walk away. I look back down the mountain. The body of the Mother Creature lies at peace with the world. (He removes the wig and the robe and throws them at ATTENDANT, the force of which knocks ATTENDANT to the ground. Video on the screen slowly fades out to black.) I feel numb from the cold. But I notice the sun coming out from behind the dark clouds, and I feel its warm breath upon my cheek. (MAN makes a sudden, complete change of tone and presence, the actor has stopped acting—refer back to "ME" section of Part One.) Endings are so difficult.

PART THREE

(ATTENDANT rises from the floor and quickly exits to the sidelines with the robe and wig. ATTENDANT gets the prop cart and

puts it into position mid-center stage and, rather than dressing MAN, leaves him to dress himself in his original costume of three-piece suit and tie. ATTENDANT again retreats to the sidelines and returns with one of the tripod/paper tablet units and positions it downstage right. ATTENDANT exits to the sidelines, and there, in semi-obscure, puts on the robe and wig. During all this, MONITOR delivers the following monologue.)

MONITOR: In these few remaining minutes, I would like to sum up what I think...about...a few things. This enterprise is, structurally, an argument in three parts. We have completed the first two sections and are now embarking upon the third. The first part, as you may recall, was an appetizer, a silly bit of entertainment enfolding certain points I felt it necessary to make, proving how ontological and ideological constructs shape not only the formation, logic, and coherency of thought, but determine the presenting personality as well. In other words, the container is shaped by its content. Form ever follows



Photo 7: "I drop to my knees and throw myself onto the mountainside in a desperate embrace..."

Photo: Alexander Stewart

function. (At specific times, a photographic slide of text, written in white type, is projected onto the surface of the paper tablet mounted on the tripod downstage. The first such begins now: "I rationalize my immediate past that I may control my uncertain future.")

MAN: So many loose ends to tie up, at the most inopportune moment, at the end, when one has grown weary, one's nerves are frazzled, and one feels all thumbs.

MONITOR: Part two was a more dangerous undertaking. I am short of breath, my hands still tremble, and I fear my arrest is still imminent. Although confession may be good for the soul, my purpose was other than purely sacramental. Disguised as a melodrama, this little *divertissement* was meant to demonstrate how a mal-adjusted individual can nonetheless bring the world into an adjustment that accommodates their condition. *Ars est celare artem*, art lies in concealing art. I have told you the truth, I held back nothing, trust me. The effort has cost me much. I grow weary.

MAN: Oh, please. (The following sentence appears: "I pretend to be responsive to beauty.")

MONITOR: I yearn for the comfort of silken beauty. My senses long to feast upon morsels of delicate...to sip at the font of succulent...luscious...honeydew melons...inhale the fragrant scent

of peaches and cabbage roses...pluck the taut strings of the viol...to admire the cold glassy eye of the stag's head, and find therein the reflection of the canny hunter and feel the flutter of the noble dying heart...wet my finger on the glistening rim of the wine goblet. (Pause.) It is still life...I want to live...in...a...still life. "A peace above all earthly dignities...

MAN: ...a still and quiet conscience." (ATTENDANT enters, dressed in the Mother Creature costume, and sits down. MAN takes the adjacent chair. ATTENDANT hands MAN a telescoping pointer and a script.)

MONITOR: In our few remaining minutes together, I invite you to look at some paintings. Our serious work is done. Now we are in Part Three, where we can unwind and relax.

MAN: Let us begin with *Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 2: Portrait of Thomas Carlyle*. (Whistler's *Portrait of Thomas Carlyle* appears on screen. Studying script, recites as though selecting just the interesting tidbits.) He couldn't get the hair right. Lank and scraggly, an old man's hair. Not the coiffure of a hero. Never happy with the feet—one can see evidence beneath the surface of many failed efforts to arrange the legs. (A Groucho Marx comic bit: he extends the wand and points downstage, rises, follows the tip of the pointer which leads him to the paint-

ing upstage. He points to the butterfly in the painting.) Hm...ah, do you see the butterfly? That was Whistler's personal icon, his signature. Beautiful, isn't it? Such whimsy. (The following sentence appears: "A poor substitute for you, father; this is more than a picture, mother." Back to reading from the script. He reads in a parody of grand oratorical style.) Thomas Carlyle, the great writer of *Heroes and Hero Worship*, had, as a young man, intended to enter the ministry but left when his doubts became too strong. (Crosses and stops behind seated ATTENDANT.) A transcendentalist, he saw the material world as mere clothing for the spiritual one. "He who takes not counsel of the Unseen and the Silent, from him will never come real visibility and speech." (MAN walks downstage, stops and holds the script in front of him. We see the cover for the first time and see a color reproduction of Whistler's *Mother*, and the printed title "Real Original Thinker." He speaks with tenderness.) Carlyle had discovered in Whistler's *Arrangement in Gray and Black: Portrait of the Painter's Mother*, 1872, an estimable silence and translucence. [Photo 8] He, too, wanted to bask for eternity in the gentle, luminous shades of gray and black. (MAN resumes professional persona.) Look at the two paintings side by side. (The *Portrait of Carlyle* reduces in size and moves to one side of the frame, and the *Portrait of Whistler's Mother* appears on the other side. Amused that his command has been met by the appearance of the two paintings on the screen, he now addresses the audience with confidence and enthusiasm.) Yes, let's look at the two paintings side by side. (He hurries upstage to the screen. Using his pointer, he gestures towards the paintings to illustrate his observations concerning them.) Yes, marvelous. You see? The man is vertical and the woman is horizontal. You see? And the triangulations! Such articulation! See? Look, look at the man. Here, here, one, two, external objects, borders, margins if you will, and

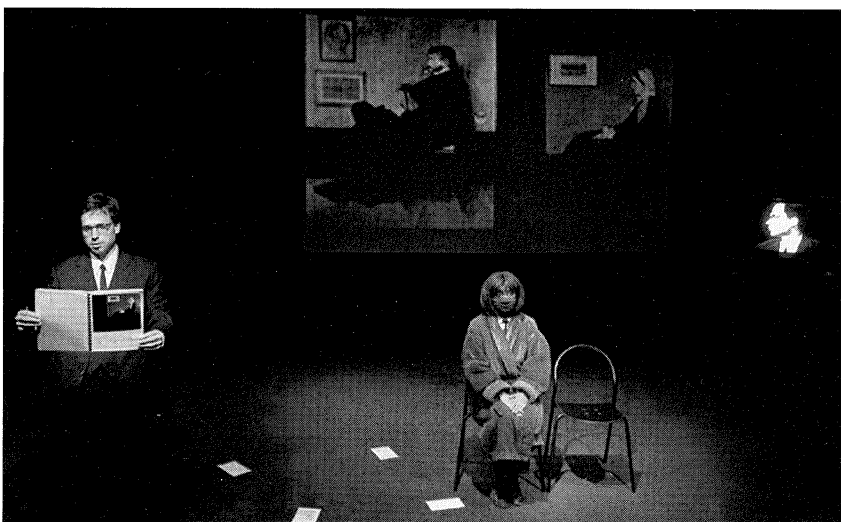


Photo 8: "He, too, wanted to bask for eternity..."

Photo: Alexander Stewart

the third point is here, the collar around the subject's neck. Another border, of course, but one containing, framing the neck. The heroic column bearing the wise and seminal head. I'm using the word seminal, here, in the sense of germinal, originating. This was a man of ideas! (*He turns his attention to the adjacent painting of Whistler's mother.*) And, of course, over here it's different. Everything is the same, but altogether different. Here (*Pointing.*), the movement of the triangle is up, to the head. Here (*Pointing.*), the movement is down, to the lap. See? Here, here, and here. Our eyes may drift up to her head, the pallor of her cheek, the fragile brow, but our sight is pulled downwards into her lap, the source of generation, the source of the artist's very being. Semination (*Points to the male figure.*) and generation (*Points to the female figure.* The Portrait of Carlyle *disappears*; Portrait of the Artist's Mother *fills the screen.* MAN *gazes upon the painting with love.*) To me, it is the most beautiful picture ever painted.

MONITOR: May I make a small suggestion? Try not to talk quite so much. Let the paintings speak for themselves.

MAN: I'm following the script, thank you very much, word for word.

MONITOR: If you insist.

(*The Gross Clinic by Thomas Eakins appears on the screen.*)

MAN: *The Gross Clinic* by the American painter Thomas Eakins, 1875. (*Chastised, he begins to read from the script in a dry tone. But as he proceeds, the morbidity of the painting's subject both repels and intrigues him.*) Hm...no detail is spared...The wound...the blood...the hand that held the brush was as steady as the hand that held the scalpel...Strong features, fine brow, silvery hair catching the full force of the light...probing the incision...Most famous historic prototypes were Rembrandt's two great *Anatomy Lessons*, but they depicted cadavers; *The Gross Clinic* shows an operation on a living man.

(*His imagination has run away with him; he is lost in a rapture of fear and excitement. On the repetition of the "enigma" phrase, he rises and walks upstage to the screen. ATTENDANT also rises and moves to the screen.*) With all its clarity, *The Gross Clinic* is not easily read at first glance. It has elements of enigma, elements of enigma, elements of enigma. (*MAN stands on the left side of the screen. ATTENDANT gets the other tripod/paper tablet unit and positions it downstage left. Projected onto it are custom-made photographic slide replications of The Gross Clinic. MAN plays the role of the youth. ATTENDANT, in robe and wig, is also in the slide portraying the mother. ATTENDANT produces a small pointer from a side-pocket in the robe and points to the slide projections in conjunction with the monologue.*) The center of the action, the patient, is almost hidden. His face is covered by the anesthetist's cloth, and all that is visible of his body is his left buttock and thigh and his sock-covered feet. It takes a little time before one realizes what the doctors are working on. A living person is being dissected. This poor young man, naked for all the world to see. And look, that's his mother. Has she sold her son to these people? To these doctors? How much did they pay her to put her son into this operating theatre? (*Pause.*) Look at this hand, the hand that holds...the knife...(*The following sentence appears: "I imbue select objects external to me with those emotions and fragments of memory I am compelled to repeat."*) Every stroke an incision into living flesh and bone. Every downward stroke carves a syllable of text this body is forced to utter...in blood. When, and if, the spirit wakes from its stupor and reanimates its gory vessel, all it will see upon the surface of this tormented limb will be the stitches—black thread sewing up the gaping mouth of this once articulate wound, leaving a trace, a faint echo of the boy's stifled cry of anguish and out-

rage. (*Pause. MAN returns to reading from the script. Slides out. ATTENDANT strikes both tripod/tablet units, resuming seat when task is completed.*)

MONITOR: The hand behind the hand.

MAN: The hand behind the hand behind the hand. The original, the representation, and...the executioner.

MONITOR: The artist.

MAN: The one who executes the representation.

(*A series of paintings by de Chirico. However, the titles spoken are not the correct ones for the paintings shown.*)

MONITOR: *The Child's Brain.*

MAN: *Enigma of a Day.*

MONITOR: *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street.*

MAN: *The Disquieting Muses.*

MONITOR: *Nostalgia of the Infinite.*

MAN: *Hector and Andromache.* Tell me the story. (*MAN sits down next to ATTENDANT.*)

MONITOR: Hector, son of Priam and Hecuba, brother of Paris, husband of Andromache, father of Astyanax, was the mightiest of all the Trojan warriors. Although Priam was king of Troy, Hector held all the power. Agamemnon could not take Troy while Hector was still alive. Until the tenth year of the war, Hector avoided fighting in open country since he knew that Achilles was among the Greeks, and that he was helpless against Achilles, for he was fated to die at his hands. Apollo hid Hector in a cloud.

MAN: Apollo hid Hector in a cloud. "There ariseth a little cloud out of the sea like a man's hand." And the apparition swept him away. (*MAN passes his hand in front of the face of ATTENDANT, who grabs his hand and holds it tenderly until MAN pulls it free. ATTENDANT indicates unexpected loss.*)

MONITOR: Apollo hid Hector in a cloud. The cloud was a veil, not a shield. Inside the cloud, time stood still. But the cloud could not last forever, and when the cloud evaporated, Hector was exposed, a terrible battle ensued, and Hector was slain by Achilles. But the rage was on Achilles,

and he could not stop killing that which was already dead and gone. He tethered Hector's corpse to his chariot and dragged the carcass through the streets. He left the remains for the dogs to eat. (*In extreme slow motion, ATTENDANT collapses onto MAN's shoulder until draped across his chest in a forlorn embrace.*)

MAN: Hecuba, his mother, wept.

MONITOR: "Alas my son," she cried, "what have I left to live for now that you are no more?"

MAN: Andromache, his wife, mourned her loss, but even more so she grieved the inevitably misery of their infant son, lost in the world with a father.

MONITOR: "Now that he has lost his father," she cried, "his lot will be full of hardship."

MAN: (*During the following section of text, MAN frees himself from the weight of ATTENDANT and rises out of his chair. He stands at a point midway between ATTENDANT—dressed as the Mother Creature—and MONITOR.*) De Chirico was asked to recount his most impressive dream: "I

struggle in vain," he said, "with the man whose eyes are suspicious and very gentle. [**Photo 9**] Each time I grasp him, he frees himself by gently spreading his arms which have an unbelievable strength, an incalculable power. It is my father who thus appears to me in my dreams. The struggle ends with my surrender. I give up. Then the images become confused..."

MONITOR: The stage is set. Something awful is about to happen in this immense museum of strangeness. (*On the screen appears Cardinal, a red robe painting by Jim Dine. ATTENDANT resumes a passive demeanor. During the following exchange regarding Jim Dine's paintings, MAN crosses upstage and then down right.*)

MAN: Jim Dine. 1976. *Cardinal*: a brilliant, delicately modulated, red robe that glows with an almost hallucinatory intensity against a dark, velvety background. (*On the screen appears Afternoon Robe.*)

MONITOR: *Afternoon Robe*. The obvious pleasure in the image is tempered by ubiquitous disquiet.

MAN: The robe shifts in and out from side to side, an image of continuing doubt. (*On the screen appears Four Robes Existing in this Vale of Tears.*)

MONITOR: *Four Robes Existing in this Vale of Tears*. The self restraint is almost palpable. (*On the screen appears a gray painting by Rothko. MAN stops and stands next to the chair in which ATTENDANT is seated. He leans aggressively over ATTENDANT.*)

MAN: The artist now suggests a contemplative self-existence. Rothko. There are no words. Freud said that the only principle powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle is the instinctual compulsion to repeat. (*Another gray painting by Rothko appears.*)

MONITOR: It is this compulsion that renders certain phenomena daemonic.

MAN: Whatever reminds us of this inner repetition-compulsion is perceived as uncanny. (*On the screen appears Hector and Andromache as painted by Mike Bidlo.*) Endings are so difficult.

MONITOR: *Hector and Andromache*. Mike Bidlo. Not de Chirico. The apparition swept him away... (*De Chirico's painting of Hector and Andromache appears on the screen next to a copy of that same painting by the artist Mike Bidlo. MAN resumes his seat next to ATTENDANT. Although he has, in the course of the performance, demonstrated to us that he is intelligent, cultured, clever, manipulative, emotionally damaged, imaginative, and resourceful, he appears to be enthralled by ATTENDANT, who is mute, enigmatic, omnipresent.*)

MAN: Let's look at the two paintings, side by side. "We have done with Hope and Honor, we are lost to Love and Truth... God help us, for we knew the worst too young." Quotations: Psalms; Blake; Shakespeare; Anna Whistler; Thomas Carlyle; Homer; de Chirico; Hal Foster; Graham W.J. Beal; G.H. Fleming; Rudyard Kipling.

THE END



Photo 9: "It is my father who thus appears to me in my dreams."

Photo: Alexander Stewart