The Montreal's Festival du Nouveau Cinéma is in New York!

An Interview With its Director Claude Chamberlan

HOT WRITERS IN THE TRIANGLE

Three Cities in a Tale

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Jean-François Chassay
Pete Feinberg
Joe Fiorito
Jean Pierre Girard
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Le prix du refuge
"non si vive di solo pane"

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The forces which gave birth to industrial civilization fought hard against the ideas championing social justice, while those same forces also alleged that ideas of social justice were a vehicle for a materialist and vulgar view of life.

One of the apparent paradoxes of modern times is that those forces have themselves subsequently become instrumental in the Triumph of materialism, of injustice and vulgarity. So, is the game over?

We shouldn’t think so. But then how can the political domain be transformed?

Solitary explorers have been looking for the political quantum since the remotest past. Just as the world in which classical physics applies is also the world of quantum physics! It’s the optic, the level of visualization which must change. Classical politics is naturalistic: it has its roots in common sense which views human beings as accomplished, immobile and isolated. A being whose ties with the Universe have not been severed. Quantum politics reintroduces the Universe with all its possibilities and the countless variables of life which in the final analysis, are also those of politics.

Today we see that science, by involuntarily discovering the great complexity of matter, has again cast itself into the role of philosophy. Thus, it discloses to our eyes a considerable amount of qualities that common sense used to consider “immaterial”, if not “spiritual”.

These qualities are human qualities, too. There is no meta-physics but one single enigmatic nature that politics can no longer afford to ignore. Quantum politics therefore claims the totality of the Human and puts it back on the social territory of the city by trying to solve — beyond the rift between individual and citizen — the conundrum of extreme human alienation.

Le Festival du Nouveau Cinéma is in New York!

Vice Versa: Claude, what brings you and the Festival du Nouveau Cinéma to New York City?

Claude Chamberlan: This is just a beginning. In the past, I've organized many events between Montreal and New York. I know lots of "cultural workers" there. Finally, three years ago Jerry Sherlock, the director of the New York Film Academy came to our festival and he literally "flipped". Jerry said he'd love to have such a festival in New York because it corresponded to the craziness of New York. Of course, I was very interested. Things finally worked out this year.

V.V.: Is it this sort of "craziness" that links our cities?

C.C.: There are film and painting retrospectives; one-shot deals. You have a Canadian cinema festival, then you don't hear anything about it for ten years. What I'm interested in is creating a permanent link, and not only for the festival! I also mean all the special events... this is only a beginning.

I want to bring some people there from Montreal. I want to mix the crowds of Montreal and New York... in terms of programming, of different projects — that can be done, because the New York site, the building is wonderful. It's cinema, video, new technology. But it's also culture at large. Of course, the name of the game is sponsorship — financial backing. That's what I am working on.

Now, as far as marketing Canadian cinema... it is also a chance to give more exposure to Quebec and Canadian independent productions. Of course, quality and originality is the name of the game. I've announced that a portion of our program would be Canadian, but it's basically an international film program. I am also trying to create all kinds of possible exchanges and special projects.

V.V.: How is Montreal perceived in New York, other than by cinema specialists?

C.C.: Let's say their attitude is relaxed. They see us as seducers perhaps on account of our wonderful hospitality!

V.V.: Do you describe yourself as a Montrealer?

C.C.: I feel close to the native Indians. My heart is in many breeds... and for filmmakers who have something in their guts to express.

V.V.: What do you feel about Toronto?

C.C.: You know, I am more interested in relationships between people...

V.V.: To you, is there such a thing as Canadian film?

C.C.: It's the soul of film that counts...

V.V.: So you want to bring together cultural creativity here with cultural creativity there?

C.C.: It's to extend a "love affair"... discovering a pleasure in working together.

V.V.: Are you looking for a reaction vis-à-vis cultural nationalism?

C.C.: Let me tell you that last year, I met Louise Beaudouin (the Quebec Minister of Cultural Affairs). She has always been very supportive of the festival. Mrs. Beaudouin told me I should be going to Paris with the Festival to expand the "francophonie"
friendship. Her comment took me by surprise but I told her that someone else could take care of that and that we should be working everywhere on earth! In other words: “Arrêtez d’avoir peur!” (“Stop being afraid!”) Paris is not so exciting anymore and New York is just an hour away.

V.V.: What about the film program?
C.C.: It’s a selection, within the selection of the Montreal film festival. But nothing prevents me from taking Quebec films or Canadian films from a year or two back. Right now we are working on the program: films, video. Peter Wintonick, (director of Manufacturing Consent, a documentary on Noam Chomsky) will be collaborating with his Virtual Film Festival.

V.V.: How has New York reacted?
C.C.: The New York Film Academy has been very supportive. Their building in Union Square is one of the most fantastic in New York. It’s elegant and very funky! Seven hundred students undergo a very intensive three months’ course to produce their films. We can develop all kinds of different things in conjunction with them. I want to open the door to people from here. Finally, aside from the presentation in the film theatre, I will be screening films on the rooftop, among the skyscrapers. It’s fantastic. There will also be a photo exhibition of Jacques Dufresne’s works, the festival photographer.

...A Japanese company showed interest in us for the first year. They want to see what we are doing. For the second year, we’re counting on increased popularity. Several Canadian companies have contributed a few thousand dollars each to support the initiative. I want to establish joint ventures between filmmakers, producers, distributors; it would be a way to cut expenses. During the Festival I’ll try to link up every important filmmaker that I bring here with a local personality. When Al Pacino came I had him meet Robert Lepage (note: celebrated actor, theatre and film director, author of Elseneur, a one-man takeoff on Hamlet, and of Le Confessional, his latest film, among other works.) because he is interested in theatre. I did the same with Robert Frank. There is so little money in Quebec that you have to develop other means that will favour collaboration.

V.V.: How many films will be showing?
C.C.: 15 to 20 programs at most.

V.V.: On a personal level, what is your background, what brought you to film?
C.C.: I used to be a rock ‘n’ roll singer. A lot of musicians were practising their music in my loft — L-shaped, low rent. In the old days, I was on the political left in East End Montreal. I was committed in a very militant, esthetic and experimental way. I lived all this. After, I became a full-time projectionist and my passion for films took off.

V.V.: We want to know something about the Montreal “event”...
C.C.: The festival is more than New York, more than Montreal. If everybody can get along well, it’s a rejuvenation.

V.V.: Will you be projecting in Montreal in different areas, outdoors?
C.C.: We will be in Cinéma du Parc and at the Cassavetes Outdoor Screen on Prince Arthur and Avenue du Parc. We will be screening Italian films at the Jean Talon market.

Through the years I’ve developed connections with people from all walks of life, nationalities, creeds. What (former premier) Parizeau said, killed all these links. For 20 years, I worked with the St. Lawrence street merchants’ fair and they were always very supportive of the Festival but a great division set in after October 30th.

V.V.: Who are some public backers and what are some of the events, connected to the Festival in Montreal?
C.C.: The Laurentian Bank is very committed to the Festival. I am also working with various Italian associations. For the first time this year Place du Parc is in too. Last year, one of the participants, a Rumanian “countess”, said of our fiesta: “Nous nous sommes littéralement ruinés, mais les enfants se sont amusés follement.” (We literally went broke, but the kids enjoyed themselves immensely.)
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THURSDAY, JUNE 20: OPENING NIGHT
Film & Video to be announced

FRIDAY, JUNE 21
1 5:00 AU CLAIR DE LA LUNE, André Forcier
Canada/Québec, 1982, 35 mm, color, 90 min., in French
with English subtitles
2 7:00 MAIDEN HEAD, Marie Craven
Australia, 1995, 35 mm, color, 15 min., in English
3 GOOD MEN, GOOD WOMEN, Hou Hsiao-Hsien
Taiwan/China, 1995, 35 mm, color, 108 min., in Chinese, with English subtitles
4 9:30 LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER, Léa Pool
Canada/Québec, 1996, video, color, 13 min., in English

SATURDAY, JUNE 22
1 3:30 STRAY DOGS (CHIENS ERRANTS), Yasmine
Kassam, Belgium/Moroc, 1995, 35 mm, color, 7 min.,
English subtitles
2 5:30 MIKROS IMAGE PROGRAM
France, 1995-96, video, color, 90 min., in French
3 7:30 THE DREAM OF GARUDA, Takahisa Zeze
Japan, 1994, 35 mm, color, 60 min., in Japanese, with English subtitles
4 9:30 CAUGHT IN THE ACT (DÉLITS FLAGRANTS), Raymond
Depardon, France, 1995, 35 mm, color, 110 min.,
in French, with English subtitles

SUNDAY, JUNE 23
1 1:30 4 TELEVISION PLAYS - NACHT UND
TRAUMEN, ONLY CLOUDS. QUAD I 6- II
2 4:00 WHAT WHERE? Samuel Beckett
Germany, 1977-85, video, color/b & w, 60 min.,
in French/no dialogue
3 6:00 LHOMME ATLANTIQUE, Marguerite Duras
France, 1981, 35 mm, color, 42 min., in French/no dialogue
4 8:00 THE CONFESSIONAL, Robert Lepage
Canada/Québec/England/France, 1995, 35 mm, color, 100 min.,
in French, with English subtitles

MONDAY, JUNE 24
1 1:00 THE FREETHINKER, Peter Watkins
Sweden, 1994, video, color, 276 min., in Swedish, with English subtitles
2 4:00 BOOYAKA, Denise Iris
United States, 1995, video, color, 24 min., in English
3 7:00 THE DREAM OF GARUDA, Takahisa Zeze
Japan, 1994, 35 mm, color, 60 min., in Japanese, with English subtitles
4 9:30 THE CONFESSIONAL, Robert Lepage
Canada/Québec/England/France, 1995, 35 mm, color, 100 min.,
in French, with English subtitles
On Jackie Robinson

HE Fielded, HE Hit AND HE Ran, WITH SO Much Grace

Donald Cuccioletta

On the 24th of May of this year (1996) we, in Montreal, will celebrate a 50th anniversary of an episode in baseball, which at the time seemed only important to professional sport, but later, historians would recognize it as a significant and momentous event that had a profound effect towards the struggle of the elimination of discrimination and the beginning of the post World War II struggle for Civil Rights for the African-American. Jackie Robinson, a blackman, broke into professional baseball with the Montreal Royals, the triple A (AAA) farm club of the mythological Brooklyn Dodgers of the National League. Robinson played one year, 1946 and helped Montreal win its only Little World Series. The next year Jackie Robinson moved on to the Major Leagues.

To fully understand the real social and cultural significance of the appearance of Jackie Robinson and not to simply dismiss it as only a baseball story, the environmental context remains primary. After World War II, a war in which hundreds of thousands of black North Americans served and gave up their lives, the integration of the returning soldiers into society became an utmost priority for North American society. The war was to play a direct role in the integration and recognition of the black soldier into civil life. However things did not evolve as some would have hoped: Discrimination, segregation, racism and outright hostility even towards a population (black soldiers) who had risked their lives in the service of their country, continued and the hope for the future seemed dim.

Within this context of hostility towards the black population of America, was decided to introduce a black baseball player, as a possible hope for the beginning of change. Baseball throughout history has been seen and felt as more than just a sport or a game. Baseball in many ways was and still is, a cultural reflection of where America was at. A traditional pastime geared towards the blue collar worker and his family. An urban game, reflective of our urban culture. An activity where the individual and his particular skills is foremost, even though it is played between two teams. The idea where the individual is foremost, overrides the collective. To make it, one only had to show ones skills. Merit over connections. This was the American way, was it not?

Yet in 1946 there were no black ballplayers. Baseball no longer reflected the American dream but actually reflected the American nightmare. Americans (black, white, red and all the colors in between) had fought and died for the ideals of liberty, justice, fair-play, equality, individual freedom but they had not found any of this upon their return. Was not baseball the pastime where liberty (no time frame), fairplay, equality (each according to his skills), individual freedom (nine separate players freely combining their skills for the collective), the embodiment of America?

It became only natural for baseball, as a symbolic reflection of America, to become the arena where was to be played the first inning of the new post World War II era. Where else could America see and understand the need for change if not through its most symbolic reflection of itself. Baseball was the Shakespearean stage upon which the new Hamlet, in the person of Jackie Robinson, was to voice outloud for all (America and the world) to hear, TO BE OR NOT TO BE.

When Jackie Robinson, came to the plate for the first time in Montreal, his crack of the bat was heard around the world. Without any political statements, without any flamboyant speeches, Jackie Robinson did what he did best, play baseball. In doing so, his presence, his courage, his sense of fairplay, showcased the freedom, the freedom of each individual to use his skills among his equals, for the betterment of his fellow man.

In this period of turmoil in North America, where we are witnessing a rise in racial hatred, religious intolerance, spousal abuse, child abuse, homophobia, maybe we should take a little time on the occasion of this fifth anniversary to remember the courage it took for a Jackie Robinson, to say I am an equal and I just want to play baseball.
Le prix du refuge

KARIM MOUTARRIF

Une histoire montréalaise, une histoire canadienne, mais plus pour longtemps. Il y a plusieurs lunes, comme disent les Sauvages, que je dors mal. Depuis ce maudit coup de fil m’annonçant que mon ami, Atanas Georgiev Stoïlov, avait reçu son avis de déportation.

Atanas est musicien, il a fait déflection à une troupe d’artistes bulgares au cours d’une tournée aux États-Unis.

Depuis quatre ans, il a fait trois fois appel pour un statut de réfugié. Ses appels ont été rejetés trois fois. Atanas ne sait pas bien s’exprimer, il est plutôt timide. Il n’a pas crié suffisamment fort qu’il était menacé.

Habituellement ses instruments d’expression favoris sont sa flûte, sa cornemuse ou son accordéon. En plus, la plupart du temps, ce genre de client n’a pas assez d’argent pour s’offrir une défense décente et c’est souvent un travail bâclé par les avocats.

En quatre ans, il en a vu de toutes les couleurs, vivant d’expédients et de solidarité. Il a fait d’avantage connaître, au Canada, une musique chaleureuse et mélancolique qui nous réchauffait le cœur. Il a exhibé son art dans plusieurs manifestations dites « de rapprochement entre les cultures», à part de t’ça. Quoi de plus civilisé, comme rencontre ?

Au bout de quatre ans, Atanas commence à constituer son réseau et à avoir des contrats. Mais l’angoisse le talonne. Et pour cause ! Cette fois-ci le couperet est tombé, il a jusqu’au 14 juin pour disparaître du territoire canadien. Quatre ans de son existence perdus. Entre-temps, des artistes canadiens ont reconnu qu’il apportait, avec lui, un patrimoine musical tout à fait passionnant, à notre pays. Socialement, il était un voisin discret. En amour, il a rencontré une blonde avec qui il vivait depuis une couple d’années.

Mais tout cela est très loin des préoccupations des bureaucrates de Big Brother... Heureusement qu’aucun psychopathologiste ne s’est pas penché sur son cas. On aurait pu apprécier les symptômes et les syndromes que toute cette histoire a provoqué.

S’il revendique le statut de musicien indépendant, il doit être plus fort que les musiciens du cru. En effet, en dehors des billets que tout un chacun assume tant bien que mal, Atanas doit se trouver quelques milliers de dollars en sus, pour assurer l’instruction de son dossier. Développe toujours tes ulcères, camarades.

On sait que le coût humain n’a pas de prix. Ça tombe bien !

À mois d’un miracle, Atanas Georgiev Stoïlov sera éffacé de l’histoire du Canada. Il partira humilié, dans le silence et l’indifférence. Et même si le miracle se produisait, il restera tous ceux et celles qui ne recevront pas la bénédiction... Ceux dont j’entendrai jamais parler.

Dans ces moments-là, surgissent de grandes questions, en désordre, bien sûr : Comment peut-on procéder ainsi, vis-à-vis de quelqu’un qui, par la force des choses et des procédures, était en train de s’intégrer, au moment où on décide de le déporter ? Les droits du Propriétaire ne sont-ils pas exorbitants ? De quelle humanité parle-t-on dans les beaux discours, «...Canada, terre d’accueil... » ? L’humanitaire ne peut pas se contenter de demi-mesure. L’accueil des réfugiés et des faux réfugiés ne se résume pas à des procédures à sens unique, il devrait prendre en considération le chambardement économique dont nous avons profité pendant plusieurs décennies, en les encourageant.

Des économies entières ont été mises à sac, pendant qu’on se dorait la pilule en prenant du bedon. Quand les économies sont à terre, les gens ont faim, et je comprends qu’ils essayent par tous les moyens, de survivre. Il y a très longtemps que cette terre accueille les opprimés d’ailleurs, je ne comprends pas pourquoi, aujourd’hui, il faudrait arrêter.

Je ne comprends pas l’amnésie.

La route vers le Village Global semble bien ben chaotique...

* Nom et prénoms fictifs.
Editorial from Toronto

SUSPENSION OF BELIEF

With this issue, Toronto — the most ethnically diverse polis on the planet — in partnership with Montréal and New York, emerges as a persuasive accomplice in a vital transcultural exchange. The premise has not changed: to propose an alternative medium where cultural and linguistic plurality can enter centre stage and flourish.

Throughout the 90's, intolerant nationalist discourse has been gaining a feverish following everywhere, even in the most affluent and enlightened countries in history. Witness the Lega Nord in Italy or elements in the Parti Québécois in Canada, while some members of the U.S. Congress are preparing to make English the official language of the United States, fearing a revival of the Spanish language. That this should be taking place among us is a paradox. Nightly on our TV screens we witness the unspoken horrific consequences of a politics based on ideas of national continuity and ethnic purity.

It is little wonder, then, that to pursue pluralism and inclusiveness Vice Versa has opted to echo the critical posture of "suspension of disbelief". In founding this Montréal–Toronto–New York geographical triangle Vice Versa posits its own suspension of belief in national borders, as the magazine seeks to erase cultural margins, to harmonize our sensibilities, to transcend differences without dissolving them, without annihilating their innate essence, open to their inevitable contribution.

The more Vice Versa has delved into the subject of culture and identity — as it has done with rigor for the past 13 years in Québec — the more hybrid individual and collective identity have appeared to be. Vice Versa, therefore, cannot be mistaken for an insignificant gesture of End of the Millennium. The premise has not changed: to propose an alternative medium where cultural and linguistic plurality can enter centre stage and flourish.

Quanto più Vice Versa ha approfondito i temi della cultura e dell'identità — come ha fatto con rigore in questi ultimi 13 anni in Québec — tanto più è si manifestate forme di impurezza e ibridazione individuali e collettive. Non si può dunque confondere Vice Versa con un facile gesto cosmopolita da fine millennio. L'esperanto non fa parte del suo bagaglio ideale. Vice Versa parla varie lingue nazionali, consapevole del fatto che tutte le civiltà sono state meticce. La lingua inglese non fa eccezione e non va dimen­ticato che il suo ibrido vocabolario e le sue irregolarità fonetiche testimoniano dell'ap­porto di diversi popoli e culture. I nazionalis­mi di ogni rima comportano una visione della cultura rigida, ma ogni cultura è flusso e la migrazione è il proprio del genere umano. Cultura e identità si compongono e ricom­pongono senza sosta. Per la redazione di Toronto, come speriamo lo sarà anche per i suoi nuovi lettori, la rivista rimane un medium fondamentale per cogliere il senso della pro­pria identità, un'identità aperta al sentimen­to d'appartenenza al mondo.

A vecce numero, Toronto — la plus cosmopolite des villes de la planète — s'associe à Montréal et New York pour une complicité convaincante dans un échange transculturel vital. Le principe n'a pas changé : proposer un médium alternatif où la pluralité linguistique et culturelle puisse être au centre de la scène et n'y épouser.

Le années 1990 nous ont amené un dis­cours nationaliste intolérant trouvant une audience fervente partout, même dans les pays les plus développés et les plus éclairés. En témoignent, la Ligue Nord en Italie ou même la ligne dure du Parti québécois au Canada, pendant que des membres du Congrès des États-Unis se préparent à rendre l'anglais langue officielle unique, par crainte de l'envahissement de la langue espagnole. Le paradoxe prend ainsi place parmi nous. Nous les soirs, à nos écrans de télévision, nous assistons aux indescriptibles et horribles conséquences des politiques fondées sur le nationalisme et la pureté ethnique. Il n'y a pas de doute, en défendant le pluralisme et la participation, Vice Versa a décidé de faire écho à la position critique de la « suspension de disbelief ». Avec la création du triangle géographique Montréal–Toronto–New York, Vice Versa exprime son doute sur les frontières nationales, en cherchant à éliminer les barrières culturelles, en harmonisant nos sensibilités. Il s'agit de transcender les différences sans les désagréger ni annihilier leur essence propre et aller chercher leur contri­bution incontournable. En développant le sujet de la culture et de l'identité — cela a été fait avec rigueur depuis 13 ans — Vice Versa a mis au jour une identité individuelle et col­lective de plus en plus hybride. Ainsi, Vice Versa ne peut être considéré comme une manifestation facile des débats cosmopolites liés à la fin du millénaire. L'esperanto ne fait pas partie des idéaux du magazine. Vice Versa s'exprime dans plusieurs langues nationales, tout en étant conscient que toute civilisation est hybride. Souvenons-nous, même la langue anglaise avec son vocabulaire et ses irrégularités de prononciation, est le fruit de plusieurs peuples et cultures. Le nationalisme, individuel ou étatique, induit une vision arrêtée de la culture. Or la culture est aussi fluctuante, aussi mouvante que l'espace humain qui la crée. La culture et l'identité sont en perpétuelle reconstruction. Pour le comité de rédaction de Toronto donc, ainsi que pour ses nouveaux lecteurs nous l'espérons, Vice Versa demeure un médium fondamental pour saisir le senti­ment de notre identité, une identité ouverte sur notre sens d'appartenance au monde.
Three Cities in a Tale

special fiction

Writing in the Triangle

An issue dedicated to fiction in the Triangle begs the question, Why? Vice Versa throughout its 13 years has not only based its content on the exclusive representation of our socio-political and socio-cultural environment. Vice Versa has above all been a defender of the word in all its journalistic, novelistic and poetic forms. This exercise into the realm of fiction, however, opened the door to robust discussions on the numerous entries received but above all stimulated reflections on the state of fiction writing in our times. Being on the threshold of the third millennium, does the novel still occupy a socio-political space, will it still serve a purpose besides fattening financial portfolios? In or technoguided cultural space, will the novel continue to exist and if so, in what form? As you can see dear readers, this issue has provoked in us, an inquiry into the existential meaning of the word. What about you? Do we share the same interrogations or not? Write and let us know. Vice Versa welcomes and promotes the dialogue. Till then, good reading and enjoy #52!

e-mail: vice@generation.net
RUSSELL SMITH

Russell Smith's first novel, How Insensitive, was short-listed for several awards, including the Governor General’s, in 1994. A Western reviewer with the unintented name of Candace Fertile wrote: "It's too cool for words; unfortunately there are 258 pages of them." He has published articles in Details, The Globe & Mail, Toronto Life and others.

He lives in downtown Toronto, where he knows a great many people with unproduced feature film scripts. He is working on a new novel, called Noise.

Photo: Josef Geranio / Electronic treatment: Guy Verville

The people in the room turn away from them, trying not to look. Dominic hold out his glass and Christine fills it with foam, spilling sticky wine on all their knees. They are all laughing too hard.

"Well," says Dominic, "we're making quite a scene."

"Oh, I know," says Sharon. "Who cares. Who gives a fuck?"

Sharon's neck and chest are glowing white. He can smell her perfume. He puts his hand on the metallic expanse of Christine's knee. He wants to see what she is thinking, but can't look at her too obviously. Sulkily he has nothing to say. He sips the fuzzy wine and starts to hum.

No one says anything.

"Well," says Christine, "we should get going."

When they have their coats on in the crowded hallway, Sharon is still trying to convince them to stay. "Oh come on," she says. "I'm holding Dominic's lapels with her two hands."

"I have this thing tomorrow I have to — "

"Sharon," says Christine, laying a hand on her bare shoulder, "whatever you're looking for tonight, you're not going to find here. You should go home."

Sharon scowls and takes her hands off Dominic's coat. "It'll be fun if you say with me, and then we can go home — "

"Sharon," says Dominic, "go home."

In the taxi they don't speak. Christine says, "What's wrong? Are you pissed off at me?"

"Christ," says Dominic. "What are you talking about?"

"Well what's the matter?"

"Nothing, for Christ's sake."

Dominic watches the empty store-fronts pass, the salt-stained asphalt in the streetlamps.

"Lock," says Christine, "I couldn't do it. I'm going to be working with her on that Netboy proposal for Bravo, and it would be just too weird. We have to work together, right?"

"Listen," says Dominic, "I didn't say anything."

She looks out the other window. He knows they are both picturing the long bare thighs, the pale little breasts. He sees Sharon in cafes, on terraces on busy streets, smoking, dark glasses, Montreal. The scent of beer in the streets. Her little white breasts flash in his eyes.

Passing outside, all the dark store-fronts are dollar stores, junk stores. They are all closed down.
JEAN PIERRE GIRARD


Je prends son corps dans mes bras ; j'y vais avec des raffinements, des précautions, des douceurs dont je ne me savais pas capable. Il n'y a plus rien à faire pour elle, mais je crois qu'un seul autre choc, même minuscule, un seul coup suffirait à la disloquer complètement ; ses bras et ses jambes inanimés se détacheraient de son tronc, et peut-être rejoindraient-ils son âme qui sûrement flotte en ce moment même au-dessus de Manhattan, légère, libérée enfin. Je ne comprends pas ce qui s'est passé, mon inqualifiable attitude des dernières minutes, mes pas vers ce vide absolu où je me trouve désormais, cet espace de rien, néant douloureux, et les regards, et ce corps dans mes bras inutiles, je n'y comprends rien. Je voudrais que la chaleur de mes mains suffise à ranimer cette petite, c'est tout ce que je voudrais maintenant, je voudrais qu'elle ouvre les yeux pour que je puisse contempler ses noisettes une seule autre fois, essayer de la convaincre qu'une autre réalité est possible pour elle et moi, faire quelque chose.

Mais rien. Elle ne bouge plus. Et moi je la porte.

Sa peau est douce, ouatée, comme je l'ai imaginée quelques minutes plus tôt, les doigts sont effilés, les ongles propres. Je fais très attention afin que le couteau serré dans sa main ne l'effleure pas, ne lui inflige pas de nouvelles blessures.

Je marche vers les gyrophares, au loin, la rue.

Je me demande pourquoi les deux autres femmes m'ont choisi. Si j'ai l'air d'un touriste, ou si quelque chose en moi, tout à l'heure, laissait présager que mon âme ligotée ne répondrait pas, qu'elle ne se rebellerait pas, et que je ne crierais même pas devant qu'elle allaient faire.

En approchant des lumières de la rue, je remarque le teint bistre de la fillette : métisse, Inde et Europe entremêlées, ou quelque chose dans le genre. Des joues découpées au couteau, et du lustre plein les fossettes, qui capte les éclats de lumière et me les renvoie. J'ai connu une Marocaine, pendant un séminaire de maîtrise à Montréal, ou peut-être Toronto, il y a un bon bout de temps, une fille aux yeux semblablement bridés, et dont le teint semblait tout aussi doux. Elle commençait toutes ses phrases par « Ah oui ! », je me souviens, c'était charmant. Je n'avais pas osé lui adresser la parole, à l'époque, paralysé déjà que j'étais quand venait le temps d'agir.

La petite a les cheveux noirs et mats, avec une mèche verte et quelques fils de néon doré, elle porte des sandales, et le sang, ce sang partout sur elle, le sang ne lui va pas. Que puis-je dire. Je n'ai aucune expérience à fournir, il n'y a rien qui tienne, et je ne pourrais rien défendre ou alléguer ; je serais incapable d'accuser qui que ce soit, et je me dégoûte.

La femme à la voix tranchante est sortie de l'ombre, s'est approchée, s'est avancée en traînant une adolescente assez frêle derrière elle, bâillonnée, poignets ligotés, consciente, molle, et qui n'essayait plus de fuir, ai-je pensé. À ma hauteur, la femme s'est arrêtée et mon regard a croisé celui de la gamine, ses yeux marron. Elle ne semblait ni désarmée ni résignée ; une poitrine avait de toute évidence beaucoup voyagé : « Need something... ? », soufflait-elle en fixant le haut de la rue. Le désir a monté très vite et j'ai acquis, sans demander combien, sans réfléchir. Je l'ai suivie dans une ruelle. Après une cinquantaine de mètres, elle s'est retournée pour me faire face. Dans la pénombre, je ne l'ai immédiatement trouvée moins attirante, et j'ai entendu une autre voix de femme, derrière moi cette fois, tranchante : « Don't move. Gonna be easy, man... » Je n'ai pas bougé, crédule profond, se laisser piéger ainsi, et j'ai commencé à avoir peur. La racolleuse a sorti un couteau, ça m'a drôlement effrayé, elle s'est approché de moi et elle a scandé entre ses dents : « Don't move, now... See ? », en me regardant droit dans les yeux avec une haine si dense, si parfaite, dont j'étais à ce point absent, que du coup j'ai compris que je n'étais rien pour elle, même pas un grain de riz, et j'ai cessé totalement d'avoir peur ; cette femme n'en voulait ni à ma vie, ni à mon porte-feuille, ni à quoi que ce soit d'autre, sauf peut-être à ce qu'elle avait deviné à mon sujet, je ne sais comment, et qui pouvait accommoder ses desseins.

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flamme meurtrie, peut-être un peu lasse, mais tellement lumineuse, dansait sous ses paupières, insolente, sans égard pour le tragique, sans hommage à la gravité de la situation, sans aucune espèce de respect envers l'allure et le sens terrifiants que semblait vouloir adopter les choses. Ses yeux, cette flamme, c'était presque une bravade. Elle ne comptait pas sur moi. Elle ne comptait plus sur qui que ce soit. Elle me dévisageait parce que je me trouvais à cet instant devant son phare, c'est tout, et elle me disait : à quoi ça sert d'essayer de fuir, monsieur ?

Je me trouvais là, spectateur pétrifié, alors que cette petite était l'Innocence incarnée, j'en suis certain, et même en cette seconde j'en demeure convaincu : l'Innocence.

De sorte que dans cette ruelle, c'est exactement comme si la Pureté m'avait arrêté sur la rue, m'avait adressé directement la parole, et qu'elle m'avait demandé : à quoi ça sert, monsieur ? Elles ont décidé que j'étais coupable de quelque chose, vous comprenez ? Alors à quoi bon ?

J'ignore ce qu'elle pouvait avoir fait. Ou refusé de faire. Je me suis dit : Question de territoire, ou de ristournes, ou trop d'audace peut-être. "Ça pouvait être vraiment n'importe quoi, mais ça ne changeait rien à l'Innocence. Rien à mes yeux.

Les deux femmes m'ont observé de longues secondes, et mon immobilité a probablement confirmé quelque chose en elles. Elles se sont regardées ; le sort était jeté.

C'est la racolleuse qui a donné le premier coup. Sur la tête, avec le manche du couteau, et la fillette s'est tout de suite évanouie. Elle a chuté au sol, comme un oreiller de plumes, sans un bruit, un souffle sur une joue. Des monstres hurlaient dans mon ventre et mon sang n'a fait qu'un tour, comme on dit, mais je suis resté totalement immobile, loin du trio, à toutes fins utiles assez libre, mais incapable de bouger, de me sauver, d'aller chercher de l'aide. J'étais envahi par une terreur immense, une peur horrible de moi-même, à l'instant même où les coups résonnaient, où leurs efforts pour frapper fort ponctuaient la nuit, et que je n'intervenais pas. À cet instant précis, de la crasse new-yorkaise jusqu'aux strass nuageuses dans le ciel de mon enfance, tout a basculé dans l'insulte, dans le mal, dans l'impommeur, dans le malentendu, dans la honte. Ma tête s'est mise à bouger, comme si j'enfonçais des clous avec mon front, gestes affolés qui s'apparaîtraient à eux-mêmes, je crois, bien plus qu'à moi. Et de ma gorge j'ai entendu monter un râle immonde, comme si les monstres fuyaient par ma gorge, les rats, je me dégoûte, comme si râler était une façon de continuer à vivre.

Elles l'ont battue, rouée de coups, la plaquant contre les briques, lui projetant des objets, une poubelle, des bouteilles, la frappant au sol, l'une la tenant par les aisselles pendant que l'autre cognait. Ma tête bondissait de tous côtés, main tenant, désordonnée, mais mon corps restait immobile, pâtre sous mon génie affaibli et terrifiant. Finalement, la racolleuse a repris son couteau et s'est installée posément, genoux au sol, derrière la fillette inanimée, en lui tenant une poignée de cheveux de la main gauche. Ma tête a cessé de bouger, mais je ralais toujours. La femme a marqué une pause, m'a regardé fixement dans les yeux, a baissé légèrement la tête vers la fillette, et d'un geste précis et sûr elle lui a tranché la gorge d'une oreille à l'autre. Je n'ai plus émis un seul son et j'ai cessé de respirer, incapable. Elle a saisi retomber le petit corps sur le dos, a attendu quelques secondes pendant que le sang jaillissait en cascades, on aurait dit une musique à la mode, cadence installée, maintenue au diapason, abrutissante ; de ces musiques sur lesquelles on ferme les yeux pour tourner, fou, sur les pistes. Ensuite elle a appuyé de tout son poids sur la poitrine de l'enfant. Trente secondes, une minute, le sang jaillissait toujours, flot insensé dans la ruelle, et quand le débit a ralenti enfin, la racolleuse a retiré son bras, sa main ; elle a posé son oreille à la hauteur du cœur de l'enfant, puis, se redressant, elle a fait un signe de tête en direction de l'autre femme. Les deux se sont tournées vers moi, elles se trouvaient peut-être à cinq, six mètres, et elles m'ont regardé de nouveau. Elles haletaient, aussi épuisées l'une que l'autre, et c'est à ce moment-là que j'ai recommencé à respirer je crois. Après un moment, la racolleuse a essayé le manche du couteau et s'est avancée vers moi.

Elle a soulevé mon bras inanimé, a pressé le couteau dans ma main, dans la position exacte où il se trouvait dans la sienne, au moment de trancher la gorge de la petite. Je regardais devant, loin, le plus loin possible où pouvait se réfugier
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LEONARD SCHULMAN

Born and raised in Brooklyn (yay!). Dropped out of Brooklyn College after six fun-filled years. Began work at TIME magazine as a copyboy. Soon promoted to the production staff where he stayed for the next 28 years. Only production person in the history of TIME to publish articles in the magazine: an American Scene in 1987, a profile on Edmund White in 1990. In 1988, he worked for famed TIME correspondent James Wilde as a stringer in Nairobi — he is grateful for that learning experience.

Nothing is so rare as to read about what is true. My mother died and I became an observant Jew. I ran from shul to shul, making minyon, saying Kaddish... My best friend and his 18-year-old son died in a bizarre plane crash. The small plane my friend was piloting was hit by a sky-diver. First time in human history. Actually the second, but the first in which fatalities occurred. My childhood friend, his son (freshman at M.I.T., no less) and two lady friends. This is true, you could look it up. Plane came down over Northampton, Mass., November 21, 1993. I didn't hear about it until a month later (letter from Elliot's cousin). It made the national and even some international news. First time in human history, imagine. It was for Elliot that I returned to the fold — to say Kaddish. First shabbos I said Kaddish for him, I remember the trees in Greenwich Village were iced like fine glass. Cold, cold day. Couldn't help thinking, though, that the trees were a photographer delight. Elliot, amongst other professions, was first and foremost a photographer. As a boy he would have been out photographing on such a day... he had a poetic soul... I grieved his loss... going back to shul brought me some comfort. I began to dream a lot. "And they hated him yet the more because of his dreams." Joseph, that is. Did you know that Christian missionaries have converted half the world with the story of Joseph and his brothers? But do they tell the heathens that they took the story from the Jewish Bible! Forget about it... slips their mind... irrelevant...

I dreamt that my old dog Rollo was alive again! Hurrah! I wanted that dream to go on forever...

I dreamt of a loneliness... a loneliness so strong that I was engulfed in terror. In my dream, I was in an old house, a house I have never lived in in real life but only in my dream life, a nightmare that has recurred for decades now, going back to early childhood. And I'm trapped in this house, no way out! I'm in the house and alone; that's all... no monsters... and yet it is a terrifying dream for me... even worse than my dreams of great rage.

I awake from this dream, but then, groggy, fall back into another. I dream I see my mother (she's together with her sister, my Aunt Rose), and they are walking together and chatting. She is wearing a blue dress (I'm dreaming in color, I remember noting clinically); I call out to her: "What is death like?" but before she can answer, I awake.

I awake. The lonely house is gone, ditto for my mother, Aunt Rose, dog Rollo and all the other dreams I've dreamed. Vanished into the mist of time; gone to where?

While I'm still here: in my small dark cave on Mott street. Tenement apartment... the tent is cheap... the heat pipes are clanging... it's early morning. I can hear Maria singing a sweet Dominican song! As she makes coffee in her apartment directly across from mine. We live on the ground floor, to the back... I'm grateful for the nearness of other humans. I'm no longer totally alone, the horror! I begin to say the morning prayers...

I'm sending out postcards to friends. These missives, these cards, are not mere greetings: they are deeply-felt cries from the heart. Cries (pathetic, perhaps) for help. Help me! Help! help!
It was the best of times,
It was the worst of times.

It... It...
One of my friends that I am sending out cards to is the great artist, V. I pour out my soul to him in these cards (while including a little humor at the same time — V's Achilles heel: love of humor). V, drop everything, break away from your important and busy schedule — and rescue me! V, come save your old friend, a poor old Jew! Save me. I will start a new life in Montreal. Two old friends living close together... it would be nice... no! I had gotten old, I was past the age of 50, I had no wife, no children, that life had somehow passed me by — (this is all true — no dream) — I had missed the boat!

out cards to is the great artist, V. I pour out the great Roman nose, V's so proud of! But The great smile! The mouth full of gleam— Once again it's so great to see him, to be in his presence, in the presence of greatness! The great smile! The mouth full of gleaming white teeth! The black curly hair and bushy eyebrows! The barrel chest! The big voice (coming at you in three languages!) The great Roman nose, V's so proud of! But most of all: the big voice! V's voice soon ringing throughout the old Little Italy building. V loves cats. He always has one. And his cat poster — 100 Cats And A Mouse — is famous worldwide. At my kitchen table V sits drawing his little cartoons, drinking wine, carrying on conversations. Sometimes jumping up to make a point. V always in motion. Being around V is like being around a hurricane. And any woman who lives with him (there've been many) has to be strong, a fighter. The Kid is no exception. If she started out a little weak, V has already "taken her apart and put her back together," the V way.

"Maybe a little too strong," he confides to me. But V likes a good fight; likes a good fighter. He's a good fighter. "I've fought out of luck... stewed, screwed and tattooed... And almost out of time."

But, like the others who had toiled away for many years, I had a little money; enough to survive if I played it smart, if the market didn't crash and if I didn't get sick (no medical insurance). One of the 30 million without! Since I didn't intend to pinch and scrape and deny myself in order to buy coverage — fuck that noise! — I would have to do without! And trust in Hashem. Baruch Hashem.

A week before New Year's, the old Italian arrives from his North Pole city.

And in the great V style! Driving a vintage '68 Caddy Eldorado! And a new girlfriend! I is dark and cute and almost 40 years his junior! V is in his early 60s; but I says that her friends say that V has no age — He's timeless!" V calls her "the Kid." V settles in and soon outlines the agenda. We're going to the theater for the next five nights. It's the holiday season. (It's always a holiday when V is in town!) Once again it's so great to see him, to be in his presence, in the presence of greatness! The great smile! The mouth full of gleaming white teeth! The black curly hair and bushy eyebrows! The barrel chest! The big voice (coming at you in three languages!) The great Roman nose, V's so proud of! But most of all: the big voice! V's voice soon pulling off his shoe and sock, "take a look — could it be gangrene?" "No, V." "You sure?" V wants a second opinion. Calls the Kid away from the kitchen where she's busy preparing spaghetti for dinner tonight. "I, look at my foot. Could it be gangrene?"

On Saturday night the wonderful "teart" (V pronunciation) awaits us. My friend Sal joins us to make a foursome. V knew Dolly by heart. Even with his bad foot (he kicked a subway wall the day before to make matters even worse), the Cat (V) is grinning from ear to ear. And in consideration of his bad foot and Sal's bad ticker, we take a cab to the theater — braving clogged arterial routes — by sneaking up the far westside streets and then turning down West 46th. We're lucky, it works! The show is great. V can't stop raving about Carol Channing — the old trooper! We take a cab back. "We could have been doing this for all the shows," V says, "instead of the Metro. Len, why we have to take the Metro all the time?" The great man, whining. "You know why, V, I explained it to you already a million times. We were just lucky tonight."

February 4th, 1996, early in the morning — the heat pipes are clanging — and we're all up and at 'em 'like a crack mill-

the little general, natch! The leader. And a good one! The Kid and I trying our best. We load the Caddy with all 18 of my bags. "Len, you got 18 bags!" V whines. "V, I'm moving to Canada, that's not a lot." "Okay, okay. Remember the toy monkey! Bring it with you. You'll like it in your new apartment."

The Caddy starts without a hitch (unlike New Year's Eve — but that's a whole other story — the Nadine story — I'll get to that someday) and we're off to my new life. I sit in the front with V and the Kid sits in the back, up against some of the bags that are jammed in tight; every available inch of space is used to maximum effect. On the way up we stop at Woodstock for a short visit with the Metres. It has been snowing heavily for the past two hours and the snow is already about a half foot deep. As we turn onto the property, V drives the Caddy slightly off the road, and we're stuck! But help arrives...
short — uses the famous low center of gravity! He pushes along with us. Still nothing doing! We rest... Lainie goes off to find some cardboard... V wants to attack again... okay... we push... we bounce it a little... let's go: One more time! Still nothing! We push and a mighty scream that splits the heavens!

And of course the car moves! V has done it! The old samurai! The good old Cat! He's driving steady, no fear. Soon we stop at a station for some gas and coffee, and when we get back in V has the Kid drive for a while as he grabs a little shuteye... the windshield wipers are squeaking and the noise is getting on his nerves a little... He turns on the radio... but the music is so faint... we can barely hear it. V shuts it off and begins to sing under his breath. If my memory serves me well, "It Only Takes A Moment," a tune from Dolly was one the songs.

The next day I'm saying Kaddish for my mother in the Bagg Street Shul. Sunlight is streaming in through stained-glass widows. Old wooden pews with seats that open up to store prayer books and tallis shawls. Skylight over the bimah.

Standing outside a carwash somewhere in Montreal, V is in his little black Beatle boots and bouncing from foot to foot, trying to keep warm. Underdressed for the cold, as usual, he's in uniform: black leather jacket, black jeans, black silk shirt, black scarf; no hat, of course. Kidding with the attendants while waiting for the Caddy. Everybody loves the black car, love all of V's cars. Grinning, he gets back into the Caddy and drives back to his loft on rue Notre Dame. Let's follow the Cat as he drives back: A couple of times we see the black car stop and the small man spring to the street camera in hand, and take some shots. He is taking photos of his new poster 100 Years Of Cinema that blankets the street walls. His posters have blanketed Montreal's walls for close to 40 years now! "Not bad," V thinks to himself as he gets back into the car. "Best poster on the street." V happy as a clam.

One week later, V picks me up on a beautiful sunny Sunday and we drive out past the frozen St. Lawrence River. In a garage out here he has many of his cars hidden away and every other Sunday he drives out to start them up. He shows them to me and then we go into a detailed history of each and every one. Car design is his favorite subject in the world. We even go into a couple and sit for awhile. Then V puts the covers back on, puts them down meticulously and off we go back to Montreal. We stop for a hamburger on the way back. "Part of the ritual," V explains.

V drops me off in front of my new apartment on rue Esplanade, across the street from Jeanne-Mance Park and Mount Royal. As the great car idles, V says to me, "Think well, Len. Think of how nice your new life can be here. Far away from your drug addict friends in New York. Look at the park... think how nice it will be in the summer... the trees in bloom, the sweet smells, all the people in harmony with life and nature... the birds chirping, the dogs running free..."

It was time to go. My new life was well under way. But V wasn't finished yet. "And think well, Len, it was the Caddy, the good old Eldy '68 that came to your rescue. Ha! ha! ha!"

No, V, it was you who came to the rescue. My dear old friend. "Scorpio monkey!" ■
— ...ma a Toronto che lingua parlano?
— Idiota! parlano l'inglese, ma quante volte te lo devo dire? a Montreal parlano il francese... e nel Quebec si parla il francese... capito?
— Sarà un problema con quel francese... disse preoccupato Giovanni guardando una delle carte geografiche sparse sul tavolo.
— Ma perché tu parli l'inglese? chiese Antonio spazientito dando un calcio al tavolo e facendo cadere tutte le mappe e i disegni.
— No...io no, rispose Giovanni guardando ottusamente Antonio.
— E allora che cazzo ti preoccupi per il francese?... gridò disperatamente Antonio che si avvicinò alla finestra del piccolo appartamento in cui Don Cirillo li aveva sistemati prima del viaggio per affari.
Guardò il grattacielo Pirelli che splendeva nella notte, guardò anche la Madonnina del Duomo e pensò a quanto poteva valere.
— Lo sanno tutti che è falsa—Come? chiese Giovanni mentre raccolgeva le carte e i disegni sparpagliati sul pavimento.
— Niente! idiota, niente! disse a bassa voce Antonio pensando che questa volta Don Cirillo era andato troppo lontano. Non era il lavoro che lo spaventava, anche
troppo casino. Insomma una cosetta da gentiluomini.
Antonio guardò Giovanni che gli sorrideva con occhi buoni e gli offriva la sigaretta. La sua mano lasciò malvolentieri la pistola e le sue meditazioni e prese la sigaretta, poi Antonio parlò.
— Va bene ripassiamo tutto da capo...
Giovanni lo guardò imbronciato e fu sul punto di parlare, ma Antonio lo fermò dicendo
— Non ci provare, te lo spiego io, andiamo a New York negli Stati Uniti, poi a Montreal in Canada dove si parla francese e poi a Toronto sempre in Canada ma dove si parla...

[la famiglia]

Urlava e strepitava come un bambino Giovanni mentre la nuota di Coney Island lo portava sempre più in alto.
Antonio si sentiva imbarazzato per quelle urlanti infanti di gioia e poi soffriva di vertigini e quindi decise di attendere la fine della corsa fumandosi una sigaretta e camminando tra gli stands. Infine raggiunse la spiaggia e si fermò a pochi centimetri dall’acqua. Quando il giro finì Giovanni raggiunse con un sorriso Antonio sulla spiaggia ancora deserta. Poiché Antonio fissava l’oceano, Giovanni smise di chiamarlo e si avvicinò umilmente.
— Ci tieni a New York... grazie... disse Giovanni.
— Non mi chiedi che lingua parlo a Montreal? — disse senza voltarsi Antonio.
Giovanni fece finta di non sentire e guardò anche lui l’oceano. Era ancora presto e solo allora le prime famiglie apparivano sulla spiaggia. I bambini precedevano giosiosi, coppie di genitori carichi di ombrelloni, sdraio e ghiacciaie portatili.
— Ho nostalgia dei miei figli, disse Giovanni.
— Se tutto andrà bene saresti presto a casa... a Montreal dobbiamo contattare un prete ed un fedele, li incontreremo entrambi in chiesa... a Toronto troveremo le istruzioni... io dico che in meno di una settimana sarai a casa ad abbracciare la famiglia, disse stranamente condescendente Antonio.
— Posso farti una domanda Antonio? chiese umilmente Giovanni.
Antonio senza voltarsi fece un cenno con il capo.
— Perché non hai una famiglia? chiese Giovanni scovando un buchino nella sabbia con la scarpa.
— Come la tua? chiese scostosamente Antonio, forse infastidito dalle urla dei mocciosi che si rincorrevano sulla spiaggia.

[la fede]

Antonio e Giovanni si sedettero ai lati del confessionale e bussarono entrambi alla grata. Il prete apri a Giovanni mentre Antonio continuava a bussare.
— Attendete, attendete s’il vous plait, disse il prete che aprì l’altra grata per parlare ad Antonio.
— Va en paix, tu as mon absoluton, disse Antonio al prete stupito e sparo verso la finestrella con la sua piccola calibro con il silenziatore. Il prete colpito alla tempia fece un sussulto e si accasciò, gli occhi aperti, le mani che stringevano il rosario.
Giovanni rimase al suo posto mentre Antonio entrò nel confessionale, indossò la tonaca del prêtre e si sedette sul suo cuscino.
Come tutti i giorni la vittima entrò in chiesa e si inginocchiò nel confessionale.
Attese pazientemente che il prete terminasse la confessione con Giovanni e guardò sorridendo il prete quando aprì la grata.
— Père, je viens confessier mes péchés, susurrò la vittima.
— As-tu commis des péchés charmels ?
— Non, mon Père, la luxure me dégoûte.
— Quelle sorte de péchés as-tu donc commis l’homme Antonio.
— Les livres ont été consignés mais pas encore distribués et il semble qu’ils contiennent plusieurs coquilles... disse il fedele.
— Mais t’es-tu repentis mon fils ? chiese Antonio mentre avviava il silenziatore alla sua pistola. Poi guardò quel cilindro, quell’oggetto così innocuo, così anonimo, più fedele di un fedele. Ma che cos’era in fondo se non un cilindro con un buco?
Era come un tunnel infinito dove la vita scivolò come acqua lungo una grondaia. Forse insospettito il fedele non rispose alla domanda di Antonio che decise di terminare la confessione.
Mentre Antonio comprava i biglietti, Giovanni entrò in un negozio da dove ritornò con un pacco di giornali.

— Ma quanto pesano i giornali a Toronto... disse trafalato Giovanni.

— Antonio tu che sai l'inglese guarda se c'è qualche articolo su di noi... chiese Giovanni.

— Ho già letto i giornali in albergo, scrivono che un falso prête ha steso il vero prête ed uno degli uomini più fedeli e morigerati della comunità di Montreal, ma la polizia brancola nel buio... disse conciso Antonio...

— Antonio... parlano di qualcuno venuto da fuori... ma stasera noi partiamo... e tu presto potrai riconcangiarti alla tua famiglia... sei contento?... chiese Giovanni.

— Tu cosa fai? chiese Giovanni.

— Magari andrò qualche giorno a caccia.

— Io t'ho capito Antonio, disse Giovanni sorprendendo Antonio, credo proprio d'averti capito... per te uccidere è una missione... sei come un prête...

— No, non credo proprio... disse Antonio e senti come una strana sensazione di fastidio, forse perché non credeva che Giovanni fosse capace di tali pensieri, forse perché gli faceva piacere che Giovanni pensasse a lui, afferzonzato come un cane dagli occhi umidi e dolci, bovini. Ma quella sensazione di malesseri al cuore si svanì appena i passeggeri alle loro spalle cominciarono a spiegarsi per riempire il traghetto.

Giovanni e Antonio si sedettero all'esterno a poppa del traghetto. Facevano ancora freddo e Antonio guardava i blocchi di ghiaccio ormai isolati naufraghi nella sterminata massa d'acqua e condannati a sciogliersi da quel sole ancora timido.

— Ma d'inverno il traghetto come fa a navigare? chiese Giovanni.

— Inverno a Toronto... disse Antonio meccanicamente senza lanciò un grido di piacere.

Giovanni fece un cenno all'attendente di volo, guardò la bionda signora e disse:

— Wine would be fine!

— Perfect, perfettto!

Giovanni fece un cenno all'attendente di volo portò il vino e due bicchieri, Giovanni versò il vino e alzô un bicchiere.

— A vostre belle, agli stéréotypes et à Antonio!

— Un ami prêtre qui s'est fait missionnaire in un pays très lointain...

— À votre beauté, aux stéréotypes et à Antonio!

— À la vôtre, belle Gisèle!

— ...et aux stéréotypes aussi, tout en souhaitant qu'il y en ait des justes et des erreurs! aggiunse maliziosa la signora.

— Non! ma chérie, family è just trouble...

Giovanni guardó la bionda e bella signora, e pensò che Don Cirillo sarebbe stato contento.

(Shit, another answering machine. Another fucking message. Who’s afraid of speaking to machines ? Me. I hate that. And I have to speak in french. Oh, my God. How humiliating it is. My french is awful. Aw-ful.)

— Ouwi, bonchour. Je appelle de la New York. Je...

— Allô ?

— Oh, là vous être ? Je pensé speaké à le machine de la voix enregistre avec vous.

— Non, je sortais de la douche, je suis encore toute mouillée. Ciel, je parle à un inconnu toute nue ! Vous ne m’en voulez pas ? J’espère justement un téléphone et je ne voulais pas prendre le risque de le rater.

— Vous dire ?

— Ben oui, bare, nude, naked. A star naked.

— Humm... stark naked. I’m sorry, I have misery with my englitche.

— Allô ?

— Vous êtes toujours en ligne ?

— Je pas comprendre.

— Oui, de la misère, des problèmes. Mon anglais est nul. Je récite ça, d’un coup. C’est le seul moment où je peux dire plus de quatre mots de suite en anglais sans faire de faute. Et puis c’est tellement beau ce passage, avec les « eleven mystic hills with the blue Pacific ». Vous aimez Jack Kerouac ?

— Yes, indeed. Je lurai louvre de Kerouac à la complette.

— Louvre ?

— Yes, the complete works.

— Ah, l’œuvre.

— Yes, I mean the œuf.

— No, I live in Toronto, but I have been in New York for two months now.

— Toronto ? Bon, c’est moins intéressant que New York. Et c’est plus cher. Mais c’est pas pis qu’habiter à Montréal. Sauf que Montréal est moins cher. You know, less expensive. Moins expansif.

— Yes, I know. I like Montreal. I was living in Montreal three years ago.

— Ah oui, sur quelle rue habitiez-vous ? Ah zut, ça dégoute. Je me suis mal essuyée. J’ai de l’eau qui me coule entre les cuisses. Enfin...Vous savez que c’est assez émoustillant de se laisser aller comme ça à parler de ce qui se passe sur son corps à un inconnu ? Vous me croirez pas mais je le dis.

Illustration : Jacques Cournoyer
quand même, c'est la première fois que ça m'arrive. C'est peut-être plus facile parce que vous ne comprenez pas grand'chose à ce que je dis ! Ne le prenez pas comme une insulte, c'est une simple constatation. Après tout, mon anglais est aussi nul que votre français.

— Je passe certaine de chuivre bien bien...

— Avez-vous déjà pensé au fait que les gens se trompent peut-être en affirmant que nous nous comprenons mieux si nous connaissons toutes les nuances de la langue de l'autre ? Il n'y a peut-être rien de mieux que de se comprendre le moins possible pour bien se comprendre. Je ne sais, d'ailleurs, si je me fais bien comprendre.

— No. I really don't understand.

— C'est bien ce que je pensais. C'est peut-être bon signe. En fait, c'est sûrement bon signe. You know, a good sign.

— Good sign of what ?

— Well, I mean, we can speak togeder because we don't understand each oder, one way or enoder. I mean, we have just enouffe words to continue, to carry on outu, you know. Au fond, si je dis suffi- isamment souvent « I mean » puis « You know », je suis certaine que n'importe quel Américain va finir par comprendre au moins 80 % de ce que je veux dire. Ça va juste être un peu plus long. Disons, dans certains cas, 24 heures au lieu de 40 secon- des. Mais il faut apprendre à ralentir le tempo, you know. I mean, un meilleur rythme, plus calme, apprendre à se parler. Où hold hare you ?

— Thirty-seven.

— Well, it's good. Terty-seven. Good time to be really you. To be in shape. I mean, in shape with your brains. Faire comment les résoudre et qu'on se sent lâche. What's your name ?

— Paul.


— No.

— Vous devriez. It's fine, very good magazine. Bref. Paul. What is the reason of your call ?

— I want to speak to Bob.

— Oh. Tere is no Bob here. It's a rong number.

— Sorry.

— Bye.

Illustration : Jacques Cournoyer
A steal
at this price

JOE FIORITO

There’s something about sweet grass that grows in northern Ontario
that has produced this poet and freelance writer. He won the ‘96
National Newspaper Award for his columns in The Gazette.

The rental agent rapped on the outer door. She dropped
her cigarette on the porch and ground it into the cement with her
shoe. She glanced at her watch, as if to say this appointment would make her late for
the next one. She rapped on the door again.

“I really shouldn’t show you this place,”
she said. “It needs to be cleaned and paint-
ed. You’re going to have to use your imagi-
nation.” The man peeked through the front
window. “We have good imaginations,” he
said. His wife smiled.

They were new to Montreal.
The rental agent jerked the outer door
open, and a pile of advertising flyers fell
onto the porch. She kicked them aside with
the point of her shoe.

She took a ring of keys from her bag
and began to try them one by one in the
lock of the inner door, twisting each key
impatiently from side to side. The way the
lock rattled, the man thought the door
would open with a stiff push.

Finally the agent found the right key.
She opened the door and stepped across the
threshold quickly, as if she had been trained
to sniff and pass judgement in an instant.
The man and the woman followed.

The place had sounded perfect in the
ad: ground floor, sunny kitchen and dining
room, three bedrooms. Parking in the rear.
The man and the woman were optimistic.
As they stepped into the living room, the
woman stopped smiling.

In the centre of the room was a large
grey sofa which had recently been used as a
bed. It was covered with a red blanket and
a yellow pillow, and there were piles of
newspapers on the floor. The room smelled
of sleep, intimate and unavoidable.
The agent moved through the apart-
ment, trailing her perfume behind her like
a scarf. The man was grateful for her smell.
He imagined burying his face in the fur of
her coat, and breathing deeply.

He could hear her snapping on lights
in another room. “Don’t mind the mess,”
she called. “It needs a good cleaning, that’s
all. It’s a very big apartment for this area.
It’s a steal at this price.” The man and the
woman looked at each other. There was a
pair of slippers on the floor near the sofa.

The living room opened up into a din-
ing room piled high with newspapers.
Thousands of newspapers. No one had
dined in the room in years. There was no
room. There were stacks of papers every-
where, in every corner, on every surface.
"The Montreal Star," said the man. "That's out of business, isn't it?"
"You can throw all this out," said the agent.
"Who lives here now?" asked the woman.
"Let's take a look at the kitchen," said the agent, leading the way. The kitchen floor was crooked and tiled with red and white linoleum. More papers. Whoever owned the slippers had been a hoarder. The agent picked through some mail on the sideboard. This place would burn forever, thought the man.
"Who lives here?" asked the woman.
"An old man lived here by himself," said the agent.
"Past tense, thought the man. The agent lit a cigarette and dropped the match into the sink. The tap was dripping, and the match made a tiny hiss.
"Don't let the look of the place put you off. Get rid of the papers and this place will clean up very well. A little paint and a little soap and water is all you need."
"How long did he live here?" asked the man.
"What happened to him?" asked the woman.
"He had the place for thirty years," said the agent.
"He was no housekeeper," said the woman.
"A New York Times from '82," said the man.
The agent smiled professionally. The kitchen stove was old, the kind that had legs, and it stood next to a small yellow refrigerator. "Come and see the bedrooms," said the agent. "You'd kill for this in New York."
"We're not in New York any more, thought the man. They followed the agent down a hallway. The light was burned out.
The hall was dark.
The first door on the right was a bathroom. The man looked in. The bathroom smelled. The glass in the window over the tub had been painted green. "I guess the paint's instead of a curtain," said the woman.
"I think you're right," said the man. The rental blew a delicate stream of smoke through her red lips.
"Why is the old man giving up the place?" asked the man. "Is he going into a home? Does he have family here?"
"I have no idea," said the agent as she walked down the hall. "Here's my card. It's not necessary to decide anything this minute. Imagine it with new paint. We can clean all this out. Call me in a day or two, once you've made up your mind."
"We'll have to talk about it," said the man. The woman looked into a closet. The rental agent closed her book. She said, "Here's my card. It's not necessary to decide anything this minute. Imagine it with new paint. We can clean all this out. Call me in a day or two, once you've made up your mind."
The man smiled and walked with the agent through the kitchen and the dining room, past the piles of newspapers. The woman lingered in the bedroom for a moment, looking at the photo on the dresser.
"She could hear her husband's voice. She could hear the sound of keys rattling in the rental agent's hands. A place like this in New York would be a steal, she thought. She took one last look on her way out."
She joined her husband on the porch. The rental agent locked the door. The couple stepped onto the sidewalk, breathing deeply. The smell of the apartment seemed to cling to them, as if it were woven into their clothes.
"Call me in a day or two," the rental agent waved and smiled as she buttoned her fur. "Good bye," said the couple. They got in their car. The man put the key in the ignition and sat with his hands on the wheel. "Did you see the picture on the dresser?" He rolled down his window and took a deep breath. He put the car in gear and pulled into traffic.
Entre Nueva York y Montréal

MARIA FABIOLA PARDO

Maria Fabiola Pardo ya conocida en Colombia después de varias publicaciones de poemas y ensayos filosóficos en revistas literarias marginales, ha exportado sus actividades intelectuales. De los barrios bajeros de Bogotá a los barrios trans-culturales de Montreal, esta filósofa de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia adelanta actualmente una maestría en Ciencia Política en l'Université de Montréal.

La revista Vice Versa, de dudosa fama, tiene la honradez de ser elegida por estos fines académicos.

El tren avanza por la ruta de regreso a Montréal, pasa el agua como una capa de plata sobre la superficie de la tierra, más allá de las montañas grises del invierno se extienden serenamente. Puertos de hierro atraviesan los ríos, largos y delgados. Cuando el río se mancha de nieve pienso en Montréal y el viento afuera afilando sus noches de hielo, todo inmóvil en medio de un silencio divino. Más al norte, más al frío, más el río que se tensa, el mismo río que me llevó a New York hace tres días y ahora me devuelve a Montréal.

Cuando el tren comenzó a adentrarse en New York, un teatro de luces, como puentes, como casas, como estrellas, reflejaba su coreografía silenciosa sobre la oscuridad de un gran río. Entramos lentamente en una red de estructuras metálicas y rastros de abandono como en las entrañas de un monstruo mecánico, túneles oscuros, estaciones de tren enterradas entre desechos industriales y depósitos de basura, alumbradas por algunos focos de luz ocre y tierra. El tren nos condujo como en un ritual siniestro hasta el final del viaje.

Caminamos en la estación del metro, siento New York extendiendo sus primeras olas humanas, olas de todos los colores y sabores. La medida de las miradas establece la temperatura, es caliente, muy caliente. Caminamos entre ese torrente humano dentro de un escenario creado para probarnos, viejas columnas de hierro pintadas de colores vivos, muros desgastados, largos y tenues hilos de ferrocarril.

El primer contacto con el cielo de New York lo tuvimos cuando el metro emergió del río sobre las calles del gran Queens, la presencia de la ciudad pesaba y atraía como un misterio. Esa noche mi amigo Daniel y yo volvimos a encontrarnos después de años de separación. El salió de Colombia cuando los tiempos empezaban a ponerse malos y las ansias de la vida se perdían en la soledad y la rutina, yo salí cuando los tiempos eran realmente irresistibles.

Daniel y yo extendimos desde la adolescencia las alas de la cólera. El mundo que nos tocaba por suerte nos castigaba el espíritu y nuestros intentos solitarios y furiosos por abrir huecos hacia la soledad se desvanecían en noches alcohólicas y delirios poéticos que escapaban por la ventanilla de nuestro cuarto y se perdían en el amanecer, entre el olor del pan y las mandarinas frescas a esa hora en que las primeras palomas salen a tomar el sol. Caminamos tanto por las calles de Bogotá, que la sangre se nos pegaba a los zapatos y una ola de suspiros de otro mundo curaba nuestras ansias mutuas.

Yo llegué a Montréal con el sonido de los disparos incrustado en la memoria y tenía miedo de tocar la tierra que me tomaba por los pies. Todo era más grande o más pequeño, el torrente de hombres separecía y desaparecía en las calles había tanto aire para respirar que me faltaba espacio en los pulmones. Mi mirada de extranjera se ocultaba en mis ojos azules, podía ver rastros de todos los continentes intercambiándose en sus caminos. Entraba en lo desconocido, en el silencio y la soledad, esos dos sentimientos que nombran desde siempre la tórrida condición del extranjero.

La tarde tiene sol y algunas casas creciendo en la distancia, el tren avanza, sombras de altos pinos se dibujan sobre la helada superficie, aguas congeladas donde el pasto crece y algunos troncos se desmienten. Atardece lentamente, yo volvía con mi recuerdo al sonido de las calles de New York, a su encanto diabólico. Mis ojos rastrean los detalles y la sensualidad de su faz...
Keith, un amigo de Daniel, nos cuenta de calles y edificios, el habla en las esquinas agitando sus manos y sus cabellos como si fuera el centro del mundo. Observo a Daniel, tiene aún el rostro niño, la risa loca y alucinada, y muchas palabras saltando de su boca. Caminamos, la noche es total, New York murmura, canta, a veces grita, ruge entre los trenes, yo apenas si respira. Keith cuenta alguna anécdota erótica ocurrida en el cuarto de uno de esos lujosos hoteles. Tantéo la oscuridad en la intimidad de los pequeños bares, las calles están frescas invocando los vientos.

La ventana del tren en que me desplazo me regala a la tarde exquisita, el cielo se refleja azul sobre los bloques de hielo que flotan en la superficie de un lago grandísimo rodeado de arboles secos y playas congeladas.

Los primeros meses en Montréal me azotaron los ojos con una desbandada de sentimientos extremos, cada día en la estación el estruendo de las máquinas que pasaban y se perdían me devolvían la conciencia de mi destierro, tanto silencio quemaba en mi boca!

Montréal y su silencio de agua contenida. La sobrevuelo con el peso de mis botas de invierno, siento la caricia de la nieve melancólica, me extravié entre las calles donde las palabras se transforman en espejismos sucesivos, a cada paso lento y pesado. A veces la fascinación se prendía a mi costado, entonces Montréal se abría como una fruta y sentía sus olores, la riqueza de sus contrastes, el ronquido de sus rincones y esas recompensas nocturnas, cuando las largas figuras humanas y oscuras se deslizaban lentamente en la noche que la nieve cubría. Entonces sentía la belleza de esta ciudad, lo delicado de su contacto, su plenitud sin bordes; me salvaba de mi propia conciencia y empezaba a mirar como quien mira, desde afuera que es desde adentro y sabía que yo era parte de ese paisaje humano, de esa hilera interminable de hombres que se tensaba en la noche que la nieve cubría. Entonces sentía la belleza de esta ciudad, lo delicado de su contacto, su plenitud sin bordes; me salvaba de mi propia conciencia y empezaba a mirar como quien mira, desde afuera que es desde adentro y sabía que yo era parte de ese paisaje humano, de esa hilera interminable de hombres que se tensaba en el frío de enero, en el aire sin perfumes, seco en la garganta líquido en las miradas.

Cuando llegué a New York, ya el muro de las distancias había sido derribado, Daniel y yo podíamos caminar las calles monstruosas con todos nuestros restos intactos, con el sentimiento reencontrado de ser y no ser al mismo tiempo. En nuestro peregrinaje mi ansiedad agotaba el espacio entero, quería deambular con una mirada el secreto poder de esa ciudad y el secreto como en Montréal lo presentía en cada forma humana, en cada intersticio donde se nombra lo imposible, en la diversidad de los habitantes taciturnos trozando las avenidas y las luces de colores. Aquí y allá, todo forastero puede soñar con el centro del mundo, concentrarse y confundirse, gozar del placer de espiar al universo y deslizarse en el tiempo como en un sueño largísimo.

Daniel me cuenta que los latinoamericanos en New York tienen los dos pies bien puestos en la tierra y que en cada esquina hay un latino contando sus historias. Yo no puedo decir lo mismo de Montréal, aquí todos estamos dispersos librando nuestras pequeñas grandes batallas de exilio y sin embargo, yo siento que en algún lado de la noche en Montréal se está escribiendo la historia de las historias, la que cuenta todos los orígenes, maleficios y bendiciones, todas las muertes y renacimientos del mundo.

El río que me lleva me trae el y yo como los ríos no tengo descanso. A Daniel y a mí nadie nos vio salir, ni nadie nos vio entrar, los dos andábamos de espaldas como quien va de frente y que nadie nos pregunte sobre la suma de los rostros, o en que pedazo de la calle oscura se derrumbe el infinito y el pequeño dragón que se perdió en el laberinto.
I am hanging out in a restaurant in the West Village, on the corner of Bleeker and Fourth, digging the scene, one afternoon, enjoying the madness of the kids around me, when ENTER JIMMY: a black guy, around 35 years old, with a thin line of a mustache and a fixed stare, wearing a suit and a white shirt and tie under his winter coat and a green Tyrolian hat. He walks up to me and sits down at my table and says to me in a guttural voice, "Listen, kid, I'll find you a place to sleep tonight if you come outside to the demonstration and pee on the American flag."

I step outside with him, ready to try anything once. I do need a place to crash, and I haven't had a better offer before today. There are many New York policemen surrounding the demonstrators, so I don't risk peeing on the flag. I have no idea what the issue is. Someone mentioned Martin Luther King has just been assassinated yesterday, but I am only 18 years old, and I don't know who is Martin Luther King. I thought blacks are notting all over the USA because they wanted their freedom. What do I know about American politics anyway? The other day, I was tripping in the East Village, and some guys were suggesting they should shoot their landlords and occupy the buildings with guns. But I pretended I didn't hear them. You know, you have to act cool, eh?

I have just come down to the Big Apple from Montreal a couple of weeks ago. I had boarded the train at Central Station with a suitcase loaded with the books of Antonin Artaud and André Breton and a change of clothes. I was prepared to live a bohemian life, or so I thought. I dropped acid last fall, in 1967, dropped out of Loyola College and took to the drug scene. The people I turned on with in NDG in Montreal thought they should shoot their landlords and occupy the buildings with guns. But I pretended I didn't hear them. You know, you have to act cool, eh?

was her problem. She wasn't being cool. You never express emotion. Especially negative emotion.

Consequently, I was quite shocked, the other day, when I arrived in New York City, and I sat at table in this same pizza joint on the corner of Bleeker and Fourth, to play the bohemian, like Tristan Tzara or Antonin Artaud, you know, and five minutes later a fight breaks out in the restaurant, at the next table over. There was no warning. Two men were talking, a husky waiter wearing a white shirt and a customer. Suddenly, the waiter grabs a chair and breaks it over the customer's head. You know, it never occurred to me, like, "You don't mess with these people. Some of them are very, very angry." My conscience never warned me. It never told me there might be a problem here. I never thought of walking out of Greenwich Village and never coming back. I just thought, "That's cool, man." Heaven knows anything goes. I am a tad irresponsible, perhaps, because I don't care. Perhaps, because I am an acidhead and I have been taught not to respond. Would you say I am wet behind the ears? Hey, no, I am a tough guy. Someone gets a chair broken over his head, I must be in the right place. In any case, I am not reading the writing on the wall. You don't ask questions. You just assume everything is cool. You have to act cool. It's all in the role-playing. You know, you grow your hair long, and then people figure you are cool. And then you can cop an ounce on the street.

Meanwhile, the guy with the Tyrolian hat, who is called Jimmy, isn't wasting any time. He is panhandling. He takes me through all the New York underworld that night. He is a professional panhandler, from what I can see, and he is teaching me how to panhandle. He always has a hundred dollars in his pocket, and every time he spends a dime, he panhandles another dime. I see him chasing a pregnant Puerto Rican woman down the street, asking her for money. This is in the Bronx. There are street vendors everywhere, as well as impoverished immigrants. The lady is yelling at him to leave her alone, and this makes a mere ripple on my hardened consciousness. Come on, Robert, leave the guy alone. He's no good. Get away from this guy. Some guardian angel is whispering this in my head, but I won't listen. I am acting cool. Back in Manhattan, I see him walk into Port Authority Bus Terminal and ask an old lady 80 years old for money to go visit his own mother in North Carolina. He needs money for his morphine habit. I see him shove an old wino into a urinal because he was staring at him, back in Washington Square.

Deep down inside, I am scared of Jimmy, because Jimmy is a psychopath. I can see this, but I haven't got a protocol, an excuse, a pretext to get out of the situation. I am tripping on speed, you know, and
by now I've got the shakes, because I am coming down.

Martin Luther King has just been assassinated the day before, and blacks are rioting in Harlem. One older black fellow tells us there is raping and pillaging and looting going on uptown. There it is, I have heard the warning. Get away from here, kid, there is hell to pay. Do you think I should split the scene?

Jimmy takes me to have a drink on a street corner with several of his friends, and I can't understand what they are talking about, except that one older fellow says, "Get that whitey out of here." It's funny, they look like hobos. This is the Bowery, and I am drinking with winos on the Bowery. Something might be wrong here, but I am hanging out, and it must be cool. These guys are dressed in rags, and I can't understand what they are talking about, except that one older fellow says, "Get that whitey out of here." It's funny, they look like hobos. This is the Bowery, and I am drinking with winos on the Bowery. Something might be wrong here, but I am hanging out, and it must be cool. These guys are dressed in rags, and I can't understand what they are talking about.

That evening, Jimmy and I go to see the movie Bonnie and Clyde, and we both sleep through it twice. He is on morphine and liquor, and I am popping a lot of Black Beauties in those days, just to try to stay awake. I have been living in Greenwich Village for a couple of weeks, slumming, I guess, sleeping in the park or at various people's houses. I have no more bread, and I don't know how to earn any. It's not cool to hassle over survival, man. You know, like everything is taken care of. The other day, a car walks up to me and asks me to trade clothes with him. Anything goes. We walk into a public washroom at Washington Square, he puts on my clothes and I put on his clothes. We both walk off in different directions. It never occurred to me, like, maybe this guy might have crabs. Or he might be followed by the cops. Or maybe his clothes are filthy. I don't care. Like it was surrealistic, eh?

Well, surrealism and objective randomness have taken

Jimmy and me back to Port Authority Bus Terminal, where we sleep on benches until the cops chase off all the vagrants with billy-clubs. Then we go to Pennsylvania Station.

Finally, in the morning, Jimmy tells me he wants us to go to the welfare office. He wants me to collect welfare. So he can

He takes me into the corridor and pulls out a small blade. He says to me, "OK, whitey, pull down your pants, or else they gonna find you dead here in the morning." I am terrified, because this guy is big and I think he means business. Oh my God, he means it and he has blown my cool.

I kneel down, and pull down my pants. He puts the knife at my throat and rubs it on my hand again and again.

I bump into Jimmy again at Washington Square around noon that day. Just the guy I don't want to see. He is mad. Very mad. He says to me, "You motherfucker. You left me there. You abandoned me. You turned you back on me. Look at my knuckles." He has blood all over his hands.

"I had to beat up six policemen to get out of dat welfare office. Now give me some skin, or you gonna smile from here to here." And he draws his index across his throat, like he is going to slash my throat. So I give him some skin, slapping his hand. "Harder," Jimmy tells me. "HARDER!" I slap his hand again and again.

I feel extremely embarrassed and humiliated. This goes on for a minute, and then we leave the church. It is finished. The scapegoat has been sent into the wilderness, carrying the sins of the Establishment. Lightning has struck. The storm is now brewing in my mind. There was a rumbling of thunder and that was all. As Louis XVI asks his attendant, "Is that a riot?" And the attendant answers, "No, sire. It's a revolution."

He takes me to a restaurant and buys us both a hot dog.

OK. I have had enough. This is the end of denial. I have been raised on denial. I must up the courage to leave Jimmy at this point and phone my cousin Phoebe, who is doing a B.A. in theology at Fordham University. She is over fifty years old and living in New York City. She comes to find me, once it is too late. She sits me in her car and lectures me, because my hair is long and I am dressed in rags. She gives me twenty dollars, and I take the first train out of New York.

On the way back to Montreal, I am confused, very, very confused. The train is rumbling. You know, I believed all the sixties nonsense about peace and love, and this type of thing is not supposed to happen.

When I get off the train in Montreal that April morning, it is still winter, but that is not why I am shivering.
Mio amigo, Mon amour

JORGE LUIS CAMACHO

Si la señora Bovary le hubieran dejado escoger un seudónimo seguramente hubiera escogido el de Gustavo Flaubert (o no lo escogió ?). Igualmente, si a mí me dejaran escoger uno, escogería el de Jorge Luis Camacho, ese escritor cubano, cuya obra ha ido apareciendo en varias antologías y revistas en diversos idiomas, España, Cuba, Alemania, Canadá. Escogería ese seudónimo, (con su biografía apócrifa y todo), aun cuando me obligaran a escribir mi verdadero nombre que es por supuesto, Carlos.

Toronto, primer día del mes de abril.

Toronto, tercer día del mes de abril.

Hola Carlos Enrique,

A qui encerrada dentro del hospital, escribo más cartas que nunca, y mas a ti que a nadie. Pobre Carlos Enrique, tienes que sufrir otra vez mi español.

Espero que hayas recibido mis dos primeras cartas. Dentro de la segunda habrás encontrado un periódico y un comercial. Estoy segura de que estarán interesados en tu Resume. Yo me entusiasme mucho cuando vi esas dos cosas en el edificio donde sigo mis cursos de baile. Pero no tuve tiempo de leer algunos artículos. Me dirás que opinas de la calidad. Note que no era un periódico literario. Tal vez mañana o pasado mañana, cuando vaya a las librerías, de las que te hablé encontré algo más. Deseo tanto que te mudes a Toronto. Creo con sincericidad que esto podría ser una gran experiencia para ti.

Yo no quiero seguir viajando. Toronto no es New York, pero la vida es posible aquí. Principalmente porque las gentes que veo por las calles, en el metro, en los mercados, me seducen mucho mas. Hay cantidad de gente diferente. Es un verdadero regalo: italianos, hispanos, negros de Somalia, negros de Jamaica, indios de la India, filipinos, chinos... se oyen tantos idiomas de toda Europa y del Medio Oriente. No puedo vivir en un lugar donde la gente no me seduce. Cuando vengas a Toronto te enseñaré todo eso.

Mi padre todavía no me habla, pero eso me conviene perfectamente. El es un "dolor de anus" (expresión inglesa) cuando está de buen humor mas que cuando me habla. Por lo menos tengo paz, puedo volver a la casa al final del día (por lo común juego a las diez de la noche), sin tener que divertirlo dos horas.

Anoche tenía una jaqueca terrible. Hubiera debido aceptar fumar un poco de marihuana con mi hermano y mi cuñada. En vez, tuve que esperar tres horas antes de dormir. -A veces tengo la tentación de tomar una de las píldoras de morfina que las enfermeras olvidaron en mi casa. Pero no lo haré jamás porque tengo miedo de hacer una tontería fatal: salir de mi departamento por la ventana y vivo en un piso quince !. Mi hermano me dijo que él también tuvo esa tentación pero que no lo haría tampoco.

Espero que yo no te aburra demasiado. Estoy esperando con impaciencia una carta de tu parte, una postal, cualquier cosa. Montreal está muy lejos y no sé cuándo vas a venir. Te extraño,

Emma.
Estoy siguiendo estos cursos de ritmos latinos de manera intensiva, porque es mi único placer. Además del hecho de que yo estoy apasionada con la música latina, me gustan las clases de baile de manera gener- nal. Hay un ambiente particular, una forma de ternura entre las mujeres, un poco especial. Una ternura pero también rivalidad. Nos vestimos para gustarnos unas a las otras... a menudo nos abrazamos, nos acariciamos de manera fugitiva. Una toca la pierna de la otra preguntándole dónde compró su falda, si es de seda o de algodón, y a veces la profesora contribuye a ese cariño cuando tiene que mostrarnos cómo mover un brazo, el cuello o la rodilla. Hay mucha euforia en todo eso. En Montreal cuando yo volvía a casa después de una clase, estaba nerviosa como después de una fiesta, sabes?... Como te dije, estoy leyendo la parte de A la recherche du tempo perdu que se llama Sodome et Gomorrhe. A veces Marcel me hace pensar en ti. Has leído esa parte de la obra de Proust? En un episodio cómico, Marcel y un hombre chismoso están en un salón mirando a un par de muchachas bailar juntas un vals; y el hombre le dice a Marcel: “¡Has notado su manera de bailar juntas? Si yo fuera su padre, no dejaría que mis hijas bailaran así. ¡Ves como sus senos se tocan! Y todo el mundo sabe que las mujeres toman la mayor parte de su placer por los senos...”

¿Cuál sería tu reacción, Carlos? Olvidé decir que Marcel está un poquito enamorado de una de esas muchachas, y eso podía traerle cierta desazón. Yo te imagino tener la misma reacción que Marcel.

Dime, mi español es un desastre, ¿verdad? Creo que te vas a dar cuenta de eso ahora más que nunca. Me voy a acostar antes de decir más tonterías. Te extraño mucho, Carlos. Tengo ganas de leerle.

Tuya,

[Name]

Toronto, cuarto día del mes de abril
Hola, mon amour,
Que placer tuve ayer de oír tu voz.

Antes de llamarte estaba casi segura que ya me habías olvidado. Entonces me sorprendió mucho oírte y tener la impresión de que todavía me deseas. Luego en el hospital me acordaba de ti y tenía que quedarme sola en otro cuarto para pensar en ti. Pero cuando regresé a mi departamento me dejé caer en el recuerdo de tus besos y de muchas otras cosas.

Estaba acostada, desnuda, y tenía que acariciarme pensando en ti porque no podía aguantar el deseo. Recordé aquella vez en tu departamento. Estábamos acostados juntos perpendicularmente sobre tu cama. Tú me estabas besando entre las piernas, y yo mientras tú me estabas dando tanto placer, tenía mis labios encima de tu sexo que yo quería. Hasta ahora no puedo olvidar la sensación de esta parte de tu miembro debajo de mi lengua ávida. Recuerdo que el placer de lamerla me sorprendió en aquel momento. Era como si su forma fuera un sabor y que yo pudiera probar esa forma, ¿lo comprendes?

Y entonces tomé entero en mi boca tu sexo que me parece hecho para estar dentro de mi boca. Hasta el fondo de mi garganta y casi enseguida tomaste tu placer que yo tragué después de haberlo tenido en mi boca unos momentos maravillosos...

Esa es una de las escenas que recuerdo y que me afectaba tanto anoche después de haber hablado contigo. Por supuesto, tuve que acariciarme hasta el orgasmo, y cuando me había venido seguía deseadote.

Espero que tú también me sigas deseando, que me perdonarás esta carta poco decorosa. La verdad, Carlos, es que yo espero que como yo, tú también te hayas acariciado o que te vas a acariciar pensando en mi. Quisiera no haberte "displeased", déplu" por haber utilizado palabras que no te gusten. Al contrario, espero que te vengas como aquella noche. Perdóname tanto deseo.

Emma.

Toronto, a los veinte días del mes de abril.

Hola Carlos,

Hace algunos días que no te escribo, pero hoy estoy casi forzada a hacerlo. Francois regresa de New York. Esta vez ha venido para quedarse. La universidad de Toronto le ha dado un puesto en el departamento de francés. Sabes que ahora el trabajo de profesor es casi "nomâdico."

Ayer Francois y yo conversamos toda la noche. El día que regresó yo estaba en el hospital y el encontró sobre el armario tus cartas. Estaba muy furioso. Esto tal vez te explica mi silencio. Lo siento... tal vez te llame por teléfono, pero si no puedo hacerlo quiero que me entiendas. Realmente lo siento, las cosas pudieron resultar de otro modo...

Te quiere,

Emma.
Born in Montreal in 1966, but “a Jewish Mohawk from New York” as he describes himself, he survives in New York doing odd jobs and is a big fan of the Net. Excerpts of Summertime were published by Newsgroup in London, where he studied literature for three years, and will be published in full by New House Publishing of Chicago next summer. At present, Feinberg is working on a novel that traces his roots beginning with his Russian grandfather who came to Western Canada and worked for The Hudson Bay Company. His father, David, was the illegitimate son born to a Mohawk princess. He was adopted by the tribe and later committed suicide.

Excerpted from Summertime

The man burst out of the saffron glass building of the TV centre. He walks decisively, ignoring the voice that calls after him. Shafts of light fall from the mangled sky, black and heavy, crashing onto the cracked Manhattan asphalt. The rain has started again. Nathaniel Haag turns up the collar of his green Aquascutum.

“Professor Haag, stop!” The man hailed this way quickens his step. The high-pitched almost snivelling voice grows persistent, telling him about the woman presenter who didn’t ‘understand a thing of his arguments’, of the need to collaborate with him, of the ‘fortune’ they could make together.

The footsteps resound on the wet asphalt like blows on a gong. It looks like New York is in the act of liquefying itself; the Manhattan skyscrapers, the hissing Lower East Side streets, the Fifth Avenue shop windows, the tinted limousines moving too slowly in the midnight traffic, the passers-by, shadows in the shadows, 42nd Street fauna. It seems as if the whole continent wants to expel the ice carapace that kept it prisoner for so long. At this end of April cloudbursts are sweeping this city, too full, too bare behind its electric mask. Its very history, one could say, is fleeing through the myriads of drains which run through the streets, east to west. As if the river which was its neighbour, is flooding, carrying everything away, erasing everything and, in this way, begin the Glacier epic again.

“You’ve got too much imagination” Moira would have said. But that was only a memory whereas the man who walks ahead of Désiré Ladouceur is definitely flesh & blood. And now he slows down. He stops abruptly and turns round. Two glaucous orifices sunk in the wrinkle of his eyebrows glare at the young man dressed in black from head to foot. For an instant Désiré Ladouceur sees himself through Haag’s eyes, a backward adolescent in thick glasses, cassette machine and fluorescent headset slung over a shoulder - but without his Nikon. If he hadn’t forgotten it before taking the plane, he’d have been able to capture the strange gleam which shines in Haag’s pupils. Did it express the anger or the arrogance that ugliness brings? His long tuft of grey hair trickled onto his flabby, bloated, cheeks and the crop which served as a neck. Like that, in that pose, infuriated, he resembles a saurian; a saurian which nonetheless knows how to appreciate fine clothes and whose bearing accentuates an asexual, hermaphrodite, hideousness.

“You are an imbecile; you hear! and your article is a load of drivel. A load of drivel!” He repeated these words, articulating each syllable... Then he shuts up, which
makes him even more hideous. The young man stammers out paltry excuses, pretex­ting it was all down to his editor, that he too hadn’t understood. Besides, nobody had a clue about this damned business. Nobody except he and Nathaniel Haag, eminent socio-psychologist, whose recent book confirmed what he, Desire Laduceur, had known from the start.

"The Killing Singularities", it is true, had been a real letdown for the North American criminologists. Drawing on anthropology, history and psychoanalysis Haag maintained that the series of unex­plained murders which were occurring in the cities had something of the nature of a new form of ritual criminality. He claimed that by applying his method one could rea­sonably anticipate the date and place they’d be carried out. This declaration was laughable at first. But two days after the Huntington Avenue drama it set people on edge. The police questioned Haag for eight hours. His Washington Square apartment was searched from top to bottom. In between time, he became a celebrity with a reputation for being provocative.

The gutter press revealed his fondness for young boys. A rumor persisted that credited him with crimes he would have staged in order to confirm his theory. A letter from his faculty dean arrived, warning him against any further scandal. In short, the private and professional life of Nathaniel E. Haag was turned upside down in a manner far beyond anything he could have dreamed. Yet what disturbed him most was that, despite his achievements, none of his peers had considered it advisable to confirm or invalidate his hypothe­ses. As if he had unveiled a secret everyone knew about but were unwilling to acknowledge. Nobody was really interested in these theories except this puny reporter, uglier than himself, who wrote for a some small paper on the outskirts of Montreal and was in New York with the sole purpose of meet­ing him.

They have just left Times Square and entered an heavily-lit zone. Red and mauve neon lighting intermittently claw the leprous facades of shops with shoddy goods. Above them, a pulsing mauve beam comes out of the windows, punctuated by the stroboscope of a disco. One would like to caricature this city that we wouldn’t otherwise have caught out. Two men of medium height, who look like brothers, leave a cabaret. They both have moustach­es and wear iridescent shirts under their leather jackets. Their gaze lingers at length on Haag and Désiré and the burn of their prying eyes is felt long after they’ve gone. Haag, in turn, looks mockingly at Désiré, and invites him to a café.

"But you’re not afraid, in fact. Who says I’m not the killer."

Desire’s eyes shine with a strange gleam "I know who the killer is."

Moira waited for Désiré to finish his tale. She had her nose pressed against the Altitude restaurant’s panoramic window. Her breath, condensating on the cold pane, formed a mist in which she could see the lights of Montreal reflected.

Without admitting it to herself perhaps, this story attracted her already with its violence and mystery. Like the pure black quartz of Mount Royal standing out against the luminous pearly line of the horizon. This block which sucked in all the brightness, keeping captive something unspeakable which committed evil. Maybe that was what had drawn her closer to Désiré and made her decide to trust him again with the investigation.

She bent her neck forward and bit her upper lip, its fullness. She turned round. "You really believe in these theories?" she said. Désiré smiled, wanted to take Moira’s hands, but she slipped away. She was already rummaging in her purse to hand him the paper. Désiré half-grimaced; it hadn’t been published. Willie too had given in. Deep down, that didn’t surprise him. Moira seemed relieved.

Perhaps she also thought he exaggerat­ed. Perhaps she began to be afraid of him too.

Moira my sweet little lamb, come here, come, I won’t hurt you. You smell of lilac. Come with me into the shadow flecked light.

"It’s him isn’t it. He set you against me." He said. Moira looked at him, sur­prised. Once again Désiré had become caught up in his phobias. He created imag­inary lovers for her, accused her of feeling differently about him, of wanting to leave him whereas there was nothing between them. Their understanding was strictly
business. She wanted to find her brother’s killer.

His face darkened. To appear composed, she lit a cigarette. The restaurant was almost empty. Strange charcoal drawings on the papered walls represented unfinished half-length portraits; in one corner, a plain mirror where Moira’s image was superimposed over Désiré’s.

For an instant, they were both confused. Had she noticed the slight hard glint in his eyes. Or had she pretended not to see it, afraid of breaking the ritual that was ordained from the beginning of time. She finally submitted, still fighting rebelliously. But her rebellion was a pretence; a way of indicating submission.

Leaving Lagauchetière Street, Désiré slowly moved close to her. It was late.

The night liquefies an unstable, cruel, Montréal where space filters through between bodies and things, forcing them to conceal themselves, to become objects. Where is the interior, the exterior? The wet streets, the facades of the buildings on McGill Street, the lit shop windows on St. Catherine Street thrust me back into the mirror, to my geared down anxiety. I knew that Moira was going to leave me.

I knew it from the start. She didn’t move when I approached. Her smile seemed suspended in thin air. Like a representation of silence. I understood that it wasn’t her who smiled but some other. One who had taken hold of her body, her face, mimicking her movements. Just like it was her.

What did I do afterwards? I see myself taking the métro, charging down the steps at the Sherbrooke exit and diving into the rue St. Denis. The first strong whiff of dampness came up from the river, for a moment eases the confusion, transformed into an inner burning. What good was it? It was as inescapable as the swirling of the seasons. Moira frees herself from me with imperceptible movements and I find myself once again reduced to my mineral density, to experience gravity. Why deny it; this prospect upsets me. “Moira, Moira. Why have you become so distant from me?”

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William Anselmi

William Anselmi is an old spirit from the hills of Umbria transplanted on Ottawa's Hill. He is spreading his creativity on generations of students in an Italian Department, writing and surfing the Net.

Photographs: Giovanni Facchin

On the reason for leaving things untouched

Suitcases do not necessarily belong to an owner. They exist on their own, with their fill of letters and magazines and suits and dresses, found or again lost cases of identity. It's the spoils of travel, of having to live in a world enamoured by motion, false movements, speed. Perhaps, the exact moves we fake to spell history on our past so as to proclaim an absolute moment, this moment, this present.

A suitcase stranded by the side of a train. It's early spring, drizzle and fog by eleven thirty-seven pm. That brown rectangle in the distance is a message, enigmatic however, unquantifiable as of yet. Take it, make it yours as you descend the stairs, not a soul around since you fell asleep. Carry it with you to your destination and you will take with you another, a possible companion, a mate in a game of chance.

This is how it starts, with a curious theft, perhaps a gesture of good will. After all, in the great hall where heads are nodding and words are orders of a pleasant future, an office might be waiting. The officer seated behind the desk, with a book of model trains in his hands and blood-shot eyes knows your name.

Hey you, where you going with such a bitter load?

Nah, not so heavy, just a couple of suits and some magazines. That's not quite right. You should have said, I found these vestiges of life. To whom do they belong?

But, it is late. The taxi awaits. You whistle and smell exhaust from structures of survival. Hop in, where are you going?

I am going here. The map you unfold smells of tobacco, the red X is drawn quite resolutely.

On the reasons for touching someone

Just came back?
No.
Long trip?
No.
Tired?
Yes!
Most definitely you could have said without drawing blood. But, your right hand twitches. The suitcase was bitter after all. Yet, you cannot wait in this, your holy silence.

Smoking is permitted. Inhale and exhale, so as to add a certain taste to this trip. Somewhere else, quite far from here, another seventy-three children are dying of hunger, two hundred and four are killed in traffic accidents, a thousand and one are blasted into bits from land-mines, and one dies while gurgling water and tooth-paste; this will pass off as a suicide. Had you had a chance to know these facts, you would have stopped in that bathroom and interviewed the killer.

"Why did you kill yourself this way?" you would have said in a tone reminiscent of this little death, this english farce. The answer would have numbed your wrists, because I was never quite co-ordinated. I happened to swallow the pasty water, and coughed and coughed. I live alone. I suffocate. I die.

No. You are tired. And you imagine god knows what treasure in the suitcase. Perhaps, another life. It would be quite simple. Fit into the clothes, move on, check mate. Forevermore.

It sounds so cocksure, such an impossible adverb. It sounds like a preying bird, swooping down from the cliff, nipping away at the liver every hour, on the hour. You are half-asleep. Be quiet! Be quiet all of you! You tell the world, be quiet hunger! and be quiet thirst! be quiet moon behind the pale! be quiet! be quiet! be quiet!

You are asleep by the time you fall into the door. Be quiet! someone yells from down below.

On discovering that you are free

Waking up is hard to do. This sounds like a song from the sixties. No matter, breakfast awaits. Cereals and milk, the morning news. You have kept count of all the people killed so far, in movies and in plays, in cities and in countries. You add up the score, the favourite passing time. Finally, voila.
On making love in videos with strangers: are they clean?

No trepidation. You are an inhabitant of margins anyway. Perhaps, a small hoodlum or a peddler of soft, soft drugs. Go for the kill, with a Swiss oyster knife. Hew, Hack, Slash and Gash it open, leave it forevermore with a scar. The final break that you deserve. Imagine the freedom. Just do it. Be quiet, you hear from above. It's the neighbour's cat, the tail trapped in the door. Your eyes swell up with tears. Smoke is in your eyes. Be quiet! Be quiet! It's the nympho from the other room. Don't move, you whisper to yourself. Be careful, you tell yourself in a jiffy. It could be an explosive. But, whose papers are these anyway?

**Terra Infirma**

1. do This I remember.
2. re I have always lived on a train.
3. me I was abandoned.
4. fa I was left in the bathroom.
5. sol I was raised by the Conductor.
6. la I have decided to live here.
7. si My world is a triangle.

On why things always make sense at the end

Oh no! It reads like this: Someone has left you a promissory note more likely it was stuck in the suitcase which could have been abandoned on the train and then left at the first available stop an attempt at communication while in motion but what do you make of the papers if not that it is plausible that someone has lived all of his life on a train the train you took to get here that he lives in a triangle if his co-ordinates are true the three points are Mon and Ton and Ny Et which is credible since the people who board the train starting from the day of birth, he was awake from Mon to Ton but slept from Ton to Ny Et. No, not that. Nor the list of people he has talked to. From Mr. Cartier to Mr. Cabot to Ms. Minnie. Nor the awful death of the Conductor, who stepped out too soon one day and crashed himself against the post of light. Nor the accidents he has heard about, of other trains on other tracks. But this, this is what will put you back on the train this evening. Back to one of three stops. To find her. A little, yellow sticker which the rain washed away from the outside window. It is dutifully recorded in these pages for you. But you do not care for seductive words, only for the name Charadezè

I have seen you over the years from the distance that joins my window to yours. And, over the years I have seen you grow old, always seated in the same seat. Often, I have smiled to the train leaving who knows what angels what murders behind. That is why I sell these lottery papers; it's my work. They are promissory notes from the still past. But as I am writing this note today I know, as I walk into my dreams, that you will not come down to me, nor shall I take those steps towards you. I am also fixed in time. Yet, if you will read me in this sticky paper I also know you will shut your eyes with mire. In so doing, you will know my absence, recognize my desire

Terra Firma

You are here. Yes!
listening to our leaders you might think books were an essential item. The Mayor has just announced the new budget. In 1996 all the blather about the need for literacy produces nothing but defending of city schools and libraries. For many children the public libraries serve two functions: safe haven and their access to books.

In New York, spending per child varies according to district, with far the least going to the inner city children in the "hyper-segregated" schools. Wealthier districts generate additional income from property taxes and have more political clout. Many inner city schools have a great shortage of book and teachers can't assign homework.

In the U.S. about 20% of adults are functionally illiterate. This figure drops if you factor in literate foreign language speakers, but rises dramatically with slightly more demanding tests. About one million Americans are totally illiterate. Of the ninety million who are at a low level of literacy a majority described themselves as able to read and write "well" or "very well". Perhaps this is all they need or want, given the prospects. We now rank 49th among 136 United Nations member countries in literacy, a drop of 18 places since 1950.

One child in five is born in poverty. One half of all minority children are poor. These children are most likely to fail in school. Our leaders, far from investing in literacy instead promote the fast — growing industry of private prisons. We are getting closer to Brave New World's "optimum de desarrolló las prisiones privadas. Nosotros, en cambio, consideramos que el desarrollo de las prisiones privadas es un peligro para el desarrollo de la sociedad."

Un enfant sur cinq naît dans la pauvreté. La moitié des enfants de minorités sont démunis. Ce sont ces enfants qui sont les plus susceptibles d'être des détraqueurs. Nos dirigeants, loin d'investir dans l'alphabetisation, encouragent plutôt le développement rapide des prisons privées. Nous nous rapprochons de l'« optimum de population » décrit dans Brave New World's «...modelé comme un iceberg, huit neuvièmes sous l'eau, un neuvième au-dessus. »

Pres de la moitié des adultes ne lisent même pas un livre par an. Les best-sellers s'adressent à un lecteur ayant un niveau de septième du primaire.

À une enquête, réalisée sur l'ensemble des écoles secondaires des États-Unis, les finissants répondirent que le district de Columbia se trouvait en Amérique du Sud. Beaucoup d'entre-eux étaient incabables de situer le Canada.

Dans New York la Prospère, le maire préfère contrôler le niveau d'éducation, car si les gens savaient lire leur bulletin de vote, il perdrait son élection.

One in ten s'entend à ce que disent nos dirigeants, les livres sont essentiels. Le maire vient juste de présenter son nouveau budget. En 1996, le seul résultat des bavardages sur l'alphabetisation a été la coupure des fonds affectés aux écoles. Or, pour beaucoup d'enfants, les bibliothèques ont deux fonctions : un havre de paix et la seule possibilité d'accéder à des livres.

À New York, les dépenses par enfant varient d'un quartier à l'autre. Un minimum est octroyé aux écoles du centre-ville où la ségrégation fait rage. Les quartiers aisés ont naturellement plus de poids politique, grâce aux taxes générées par la propriété.

Dans beaucoup d'écoles du centre-ville, les livres sont une denrée rare et les enseignants se retrouvent incapables d'assigner des devoirs aux écoliers.

Aux États-Unis, environ 20% des adultes sont virtuellement analphabètes. La situation s'améliore lorsque on questionne des personnes parlant des langues étrangères, mais se dégrade dramatiquement dès que les épreuves deviennent plus exigentes.

Près d'un million d'États-Unisens sont complètement analphabètes. Des 19 millions qui ont une faible scolarité, une majorité se décrit comme capable de lire et écrire, « correctement » ou « très correctement ». Actuellement, les États-Unis se classent au 49e rang des 156 pays membres des Nations-Unis, en matière d'alphabetisation, une chute marquée, par rapport au 31e rang, en 1950.

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Searching books for our leaders are those who read the books as a necessity. The Alcalde has announced recently the new presupposed. In 1996 alas tonterías dicas acerca de la necesidad de enseñar a leer y a escribir han producido nada mas que la pérdida del dinero con el que antecesoraban las escuelas y bibliotecas de la ciudad. Para muchos niños las bibliotecas públicas realizan dos funciones: sirven de cielo protector, y de indispensable acceso a los libros.

En Nueva York, los gastos por niño varían de acuerdo al distrito, destinándose una infima parte de estos a los niños de los barrios pobres en las escuelas "hipersegregadas". Los distritos más ricos generan una ganancia adicional por los impuestos sobre la propiedad y tienen más influencia política. Muchas escuelas de los barrios pobres del centro de la ciudad tienen una gran escasez de libros y los maestros no pueden asignar tareas para la casa.

En U.E., cerca de un 20% de la población adulta es la practica analfabe.- to. De los noventa millones que saben apenas leer y escribir, la mayoría de éstos se describen como competentes para leer y escribir "bien" o "muy bien". Tal vez dadas las perspectivas, esto es lo que ellos necesitan o quieren. Ahora, nosotros ocupamos el lugar 49 entre los 136 países de las Naciones Unidas en los indices de alfabetización; lo que representa una caída de 18 escalones desde el año 1950.

Uno de cada cinco niños nace en la miseria. La mitad de todos los niños de las minorías son pobres. Estos niños es muy probable que suspendan en la escuela. Nuestros líderes en lugar de invertir en la enseñanza promueven la floreciente industria de las prisones privadas. Nos estamos acercando a la "población óptima" de Brave New World, la cual estaba "...moldé e cada sobre un templo de hielo ochenta y nueve porciento debajo del nivel del mar, un nueve porciento sobre la superficie."

Cerca de la mitad de toda la población adulta en los E.U., no lee ni siquiera un libro al año. Los best-sellers están dirigidos a un lector de 7mo grado. En una encuesta de geografía los ancianos de nivel secundario dijeron que el Distrito de Columbia se encontraba en América del Sur, y muchos de ellos no pudieron ubicar Canadá. El Alcalde de la rica ciudad Nueva York está contento en mantener el control de los indices de analfabetismo. Si más personas pudieran leer las boletas, seguramente perdería las elecciones.
I n a telling item published in the Summer '94 Issue of the Cancopy Newsletter, Executive director, Rose-Marie LaFrance, having attended several Annual General Meetings of member associations, puzzled over the apparent expectation in the question frequently asked of him—"When do we get paid?" To stem the growing misgivings, especially among disenfranchised creator affiliates, in 1995, Cancopy initiated the very first drive since its founding in 1988 to distribute approximately $125,280 of undesignated revenues, in the form of a $50.00 payment to its 2000-old creator affiliates across Canada. As a creators' group, the Literary Translators' Association of Canada has never been taught the subtleties of how well literary translators are being served by UNeQ, (l'Union des écrivains et écrivains québécois). A precursor rating of how well literary translators in English Canada are being served by Cancopy, when it comes to receiving payments from the licensing of their copyrighted works, compared to our Quebec counterparts, is increasingly inevitable. According to Rose-Marie LaFrance, Directrice du Service des droits, UNeQ, (Directrice des écrivains et écrivains québécois), a precursor rating of how well literary translators in English Canada are being served by Cancopy, when it comes to receiving payments from the licensing of their copyrighted works, compared to our Quebec counterparts, is increasingly inevitable.

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**Infinite Jest**

*INFINITE JEST* by David Foster Wallace,
Little, Brown New York, 1995,
1100 pages, $40 CAN/$29.99 US

This latest effort by David Foster Wallace, transports us into a mad hatter fictional world where national boundaries become a fixation of the past. Wallace depicts a continent (North America) well beyond the era of NAFTA, where O.N.A.N (Organization of North American Nations) is the governing body, only perturbed by an underground Quebecois separatist group calling itself Les Assassins des Fauteuils Roullent. This futuristic smorgasbord of the burlesque tale is generously spiced with a vibrant language all to the honor of Thomas Pynchon, Wallace's linguistic mentor.

In the true tradition of the storyteller, Wallace webs us a tale of imaginary hyperbole coupled, in the style of the Commedia dell'arte, with a unique sense of humour alternating between the tragic and the comic. New writing, new fiction, in tune with the rise of a new cultural generation. Good reading.

— D. Cuccioletta

**Get a Life**


Get A Life is a book about ecological entrepreneurship. In a time when all information around the environment is still focused on dire predictions, this book offers a ray of hope through creative enterprises aimed at solving some of the conflicts between industry and environmental activists. It dispels the erroneous notion that putting the environment first leads directly to a decline in corporate gains. The book is sectioned into ten principles, the ten commandments of a new generation, a new spirit of doing business that buries the orthodox economies and springs forth with visionary examples on every front, industrial, communal and private. Each project details ways of making a living not by traditional rationalisation of cutting, reducing and eventually eliminating but by integrating, growing and creating. It promotes technologies that evolve in harmony with natural systems, stochastic rather than linear approaches. It introduces the notion of a cultural capital where emphasis is placed on the human skill and creativity and less on exploitation of the Earth's resources. It incorporates Paul Hawken's insights into ways of moving to a least-cost system from a least-price one and directly to a decline in corporate gains.

— K. Moutarrif

**Le gouvernement du sexe**

*CYBERSEXE. Les connexions dangereuses,*
par Fulvio Caccia,

Si la sexualité est au cœur de la répression de beaucoup de sociétés, elle a toujours fourni un marché de la rareté sur lequel se sont construits de sacrés business, à travers le temps.

La encore, il s'agit d'exploiter la technologie pour donner un semblant d’oxygène à cet instrument de contrôle social.

— D. D’Alessandro

Point n’est question de la reproduction de l’espèce. Il s’agit d’aller plus loin dans l’usage de la cybernétique pour donner du confort à l’hydromélisme. En plus, en ces temps de maladies sexuellement transmissibles pouvant entraîner la mort, cette sexualité correctness vient apaiser certaines angoisses, c’est son slogan subtil, mais pose beaucoup de nouvelles questions.

Fulvio Caccia nous présente ce monde froid, en méditant sur le data glove et le casque de visualisation.

Et oui, le monde virtuel se met en place soudainement, pour quadriller le « me, myself and I ». À vous de goûter au sex appeal de l’inorganique.

L’auteur nous informe sur toutes les subtilités techniques sans que cela ne prenne l’allure d’un manuel ardu. Du Minitel au WEB, en passant par le modem et le CD-ROM.

Derrière cette pléthore d’instruments se cache une nouvelle configuration de la société, qu’on peut encore lire à la façon de Marx :

« C’est uniquement l’ampleur du trafic et le nombre de téléchargements, bref ce qui a toujours constitué une des lois fondamentales du libéralisme — la mobilité du capital — qui déterminera le rayonnement et, ultérieurement, la survie de toute forme nouvelle de culture », écrit l’auteur.

Toutes les prostitution et exploitations possibles sont atténuées sous prétexte de libérite de choix. Même la triste des blanches y est blanchie. Quant au chiffre d'affaires de cette gigantesque toile d’araignée, il justifie largement la charge de ses promoteurs. On peut ainsi méditer sur la fact que chacun des 5 plus importants Bulletin Board System des Etats-Unis réalise un chiffre d'affaires dépassant le million de dollars.

Si les rapports de genre en prennent encore un coup, il faut s’attendre à des bouleversements en profondeur dans l’espace et dans la définition des individus.

Mais il reste une chance : « Les conditions sont peut-être réunies aujourd’hui pour qu’une nouvelle citoyenneté, dépouillée de ses attributs habituels — nation, ethnie, race — puisse voir le jour », conclut Fulvio Caccia.

Un excellent tour d’horizon de ce vers quoi on va, sans s’en rendre compte...

— K. Moutarrif
**Sentenced to Travel**


For seventeen months, Paul Theroux traipsed around the Mediterranean basin, from the Spanish Costa del Sol, by way of the French Riviera, Croatia, Italy, Greece and Turkey to Syria, and back again, via Israel, Cyprus, Egypt and Tunisia, to Morocco... He lived to tell the tale. Reading the account of rides on rickety ferries, unrestful night-train travel, stints on luxury cruise ships, and much time spent in various guest-houses, I reflected on the potential effects of accumulated hotel and restaurant food. It strikes me that the author has a steel-clad stomach, as part of a firm constitution.

The story he wrote is compelling. Neither astounding, nor brilliant, nor very enlightening culturally or politically, but spell-binding. Theroux likes "to poke his nose into things." His writing moves along at a very steady clip and as you are absorbing it, it takes your mind off whatever pressing cares you may have. Notably, you may start reading in the middle, at the end, or even at the beginning of this volume and you'll just want to read on.

It is as if the author is under a strict, self-imposed sentence to march; something of a present-day galley-slave. (an old Mediterranean cliché.) Beneath a perceptible uniformization brought about by communications and the diffusion of technologies around the shores of this "mother of civilization", local cultures are still ticking. So are puzzling, intractable conflicts in the Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East. The traveller, alert, if not very erudite, makes it through Mediterranean thick and thin.

We get to meet a gallery of dozens of characters crossing Theroux's path along his somewhat aimless wanderings. A bisexual Syrian medical student; a depressed, improbable Belgian-Israeli musician of no fixed domicile; a retired Turkish air-force general, musician of no fixed domicile; a retired Turkish air-force general, a depressed, improbable Belgian-Israeli music... we delight in countless such pleasant mini flash portraits.

An American couple from Boca Raton, met on the luxury cruiser "The Seabourne Spirit", will travel next year to, (they chrip)... "Rio De Niro." Theroux has an ear for the funny line. Descriptions often are unfair, but amusing: "Malta had the culture of South London, in a landscape like Lebanon", some English package-tour tourists encountered in Corfu, are "the genuine, sun-worshipping article... Mediterranean light makes its way into the prose at all times, although the journey takes place in the rainy seasons, fall and winter - a nice change from those sunny, cloying picture postcard vistas! The places seem that much more three-dimensional.

We catch glimpses of offbeat realities: Croatia in the grip of civil war paranoia and plagued by economic standstill (in early 1994), the utter dereliction of Albania; the easy-going, devil-may-care attitude towards the law, and a kind of gentleness, as the underpinning for Tangiers' dolce vita, for those intrepid enough, sensuous enough, and lazy enough, to want to live there.

In travelling, the great thing is that you can create afresh a new "yourself", every day. Contacts are superficial, not enmeshed in problematic social realities. Fantasy becomes real. The imagination is in the landscape. Theroux communicates these feelings and their flipside: a sense of alienation, guilt, loss of bearings...

— A. Seleaniu

**On Our Civilization**


Recently The Unconscious Civilization won the Gordon Montador Award and no doubt it is worthy of such an honour. However, this collection of Saul's C.B.C. 1995 Massey Lectures will dismay many. Although dressed up in fine new clothes, the thoughts and inspirations are rather old-fashioned, but perhaps our times deserve as much. His plea is to go back to a purer state; to assume our responsibilities to democracy by remembering what democracy was all about in the first place.

In a book where the Citizen is once again placed in a starring role and a critical questioning mind is the central driving force, Saul himself never has any doubts, and that makes me restless. His sincere prose dips into the sources of our present malaise in a patient and lucid manner. All is explained and everything can work out in the end. Yes! There is a happy ending and Saul remains as mischievous as ever. This book deserves to spark debate but I wonder if it will.

One wishes that Saul had taken more risks and dealt with the raggedy ends of our social conscience and existence. I like Saul best when he is the young child with a long beard, asking why the sky is blue, while the old man points with a gnarled finger to the emerging rainbow beyond the mountains. But I can't help but think most of those mountains are covered in blood.

— R. Akstinas
Books in the triangle

Exocet

Paris reste la rampe de lancement pour l'écrivain étranger et a fortiori francophone. Conspuée ou courtoisie, la Ville Lumière s'en fout. « Fais-moi rêver », dit-elle. Mais comment ? (Octave Crémazie écrivit des pages très lucides à ce sujet.) On croit s'envoler comme le poisson volant mais c'est parfois le missile sol-air qui frappe. À bon enten-deur...

LA DÉMARCHE DU CRABE, Monique Larue, roman, Éditions Boréal, Montréal, 1996, 221 pages, 19,95 $

Avec La démarche du crabe, son quatrième roman, Monique Larue se hisse sans tambours ni trompettes parmi les meilleurs écrivains de sa génération. Dans un style sobre, presque laconique, la romancière raconte les (dernières ?) années de la vie de Luc-Azade Santerre, dentiste de son état, dont la vie bascule lorsque surgit Sarah, la fille naturelle de sa meilleure amie d'enfance, Michelle, désormais perdue de vue. Michelle, désormais perdue de vue... Conspuée ou courtisée, la Ville Lumière s'en fout. « Fais-moi rêver », dit-elle. Mais comment réussir à s'envoler ? (Octave Crémazie écrivit des pages très lucides à ce sujet.) On croit s'envoler comme le poisson volant mais c'est parfois le missile sol-air qui frappe. À bon entendeur...

L'origine — les origines pour être exact — est bien aussi le thème récurrent, décliné par l'autre Monique, dans les 28 nouvelles des Aurores Montréales dont la critique québécoise a fait l'éloge intempestif. Mais au lieu de prendre ses distances avec ces origines, la romancière s'y coule avec délectation. Habile, elle utilisera non sans efficacité dramatique celles de l'autre, pour exprimer son poème. Les mésaventures de l'immigrant, chinois, latino ou italo, du SDF, de la jeune prostituée, tracent le maillage d'une identité en mouvement que la double expérience de la crise et de l'American Way of Life auraient fait exploser. L'espace d'un instant l'on se prend à rêver. La nouvelle aurait elle succombé à l'inquiétante étrangeté du « grand désordre universel » montrealais ? Certaines nouvelles nous invitent à le croire. Ainsi le truculent Fucking bourgeois, dont la finale « mansfieldienne » étonne par sa concision, ou encore Allo, troublant et méditatif. Mais à la longue cette galerie de portraits finit pour montrer le jupon du procédé et l'autocœuvre entière de récupération idéologique à laquelle elle renvoie. Les délicates judicieusement distribuées (Micone, Foglia, Laferrière, Cady) signalent bien plus que l'apparent dialogue identitaire : la volonté de ne pas se faire déborder sur cette question névralgique. Pour rester maîtresse du jeu identitaire, Proulx va jusqu'à figer ses personnages dans leurs rôles et dans un ennui très « Fin de siècle ». Dommage.

— Pulvio Caccia, Paris

Cinema

Mille Bolle Blu

From the opening shot of Mille Bolle Blu, the feature film debut of Leone Pompucci, the ochre and sun-orange drenched set announces "nostalgia". In fact we are in 1961 Rome, where luminous white sheets are still hung to dry on the roof tops of condominiums and children swoop through them, flying arms outstretched like lines of sparrows.

It is the day of the solar eclipse and the lives of the residents are chronicled, mostly through the eyes of Sandrina (Matteo Fadda), a nine year old boy who weaves through the lives of the residents; Elvira prepares for her wedding as her former lover waits at a nearby bar for an opportunity to speak to her and perhaps change her mind; Guido, a blind man living with his mother waits stretched like lines of sparrows.

Pompucci takes us on a journey with his camera, up to another apartment, in through the doors, descending to the street and running behind the children as they run in amongst the sheets. As a first film, Mille Bolle Blu, delivers some memorable moments (the scene of the children staging a farting competition is amusing, as is the tango choreographed by the two lovers as they make love to Mina's song of the title). It is, however, a lightweight debut with some stylish camera angles but little in terms of content. The nostalgia says perhaps more about a present poverty than anything about the past since the film is really anecdotal. As lovely as some of the moments are, the film never transcends its too precious nostalgia, remaining innocuous.

— Deborah Verginelli
Following the guidelines of the new program developed by the new artistic director, the Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci organized April 13th past, the influential show entitled: Burri e Fontana 1949-1968. This show was dedicated to the two major forces of contemporary art from post-war Italy. This Italian art movement of the ‘dopoguerra’ has strongly influenced the development of arts in Europe and abroad. ‘dopoguerra’ has strongly influenced the development of arts in Europe and abroad.

The event was organized in collaboration with Fondazione Palazzo Albizzini Collezione Burri di Città di Castello and Fondazione Lucio Fontana di Milano and curated by Bruno Corà, art director of the Pecci Museum. The curators Burri and Fontana were artists such as Fontana and Burri who had “opened the doors” immediately after the Second World War. The art of Arte Povera was inventive, hard and not “beautiful”, in the sense of what was considered a “beautiful painting”, in bourgeois circles. Contemporaneously, it was not even a free and fluent art like the mixture of Pop Art variants that were blown in from America and which had been taken up by the majority of the modern Italian population. 

The precursors Burri and Fontana

Rudi Fuchs

The direct precursors of Arte Povera were artists such as Fontana and Burri who had “opened the doors” immediately after the Second World War. The art of Arte Povera was inventive, hard and not “beautiful”, in the sense of what was considered a “beautiful painting”, in bourgeois circles. Contemporaneously, it was not even a free and fluent art like the mixture of Pop Art variants that were blown in from America and which had been taken up by the majority of the modern Italian population. 

Burri, Material as Form

Chiara Sarteanesi

It is worth recalling when it was that Burri decided to devote himself to painting. In 1943 he participated in the Second World War as an army medical officer. He was taken prisoner in Morocco and sent to a concentration camp in Texas. It was there that he decided to abandon a well regarded and secure profession in favour of art. He frequently recounted that the only way of not thinking about what was going on around him was to dedicate every available moment to the painting that had taken such a hold on his imagination. This probably allowed him to experiment and to gain an understanding of his true vocation. The paintings he completed whilst in the camp were figurative oils and already revealed the painter’s particular interest in colour which he laid heavily and vibrantly onto canvases that at times were as coarse as the the painter was thick. Having returned to Italy, from 1946 he dedicated himself to painting, abandoning the medical profession. Some of the paintings he completed whilst a prisoner of war were exhibited in 1947 at the Galleria Margherita in Rome. But by the following year, the works exhibited in another exhibition at the same gallery were abstracts. Two canvases from 1952 introduce this exhibition, Studio per lo Strappo (Studio for the Tear) that Fontana acquired after having admired it at the 1952 Venice Biennial and Lo Strappo (The Tear) hung at the New York Museum of Modern Art where, in 1966, Burri and Fontana exhibited together. Two personalities with contrasting temperaments: Burri reserved and solitary, Fontana extrovert. One disinclined to talk about his work, the other the author of manifestos in which he openly declared his convictions. Both absolutely free of any restriction, arriving at totally different results through different idioms, bothstimulating the work of the younger generations. (...) 

Matter existence nature: Spatial Concept.

Joe de Sanna

Matter for Fontana, was relative to the creator whose instrument is form. It derives from what is a redefinition of matter by way of the instrument of the creator — that of form. Contained in the sequence is the vital passage of art following the Manifesto Blanco regarding the preceding supporting thesis of modern art in which the relativistic tie of matter was formulated with respect to space and time tout court. The artist found at the apex of the matter-form triangulation is the reason for the sole title in Fontana after 1947: Concetto spaziale (Spatial Concept). The matter which is realized by way of the form gives back the sense of the old substantial form, the sense for which the soul is the substantial form of a body in that it makes it being. And also referred back to this by no means secondary implication is the title 65 T 136 and the circularity of the nexus that follow and that pass, in a ny case, by way of nature. (...) 

LEFT: Lucio Fontana / Concetto Spaziale, Attesa, 1963. Hydropainting on canvas, yellow. 100 x 81 cm

RIGHT: Alberto Burri / Tutto Nero, 1956. Acrylic, vinavil, combustion on canvas 190 x 54 cm
public domain where a new sensibility could assert itself!

From Europe comes one proposal.

A friend and collaborator, Riccardo Petrella, who is very active in fusing transcultural energies, and is involved in the worldwide war against the savagery of the marketplace, told us during his last visit to Montreal, of the organization within a short time of a series of “village” meetings, the first of which is to be held in Italy this summer. These “villages” are made up of people who work in schools, factories, hospitals, communities and who come from all over the world. The aim is the same, it is the perspective that changes. These are simply meetings, nothing more than get-togethers...

VICE Versa will take part in this activity and will fill you in with the details in its next issue, via an article from Italy.

Se rencontrer et concentrer des interventions dans le social où la nouvelle sensibilité s'affirme. Une proposition nous vient de l'Europe. L'ami collaborateur Riccardo Petrella, très actif dans la concertation des énergies transculturelles et dans la lutte contre l'économie sauvage de marché au niveau planétaire, lors de son dernier passage à Montréal, nous a annoncé la réalisation prochaine d'une série de rencontres de « villages » dont la première aura lieu en Italie cet été. Les « villages », ce sont des gens qui travaillent dans des écoles, des usines, des hôpitaux, des communautés et qui viennent de partout dans le monde. Les objets sont les mêmes, c'est l'optique qui doit changer. Ce ne sont que des rencontres, rien de plus que des rencontres...

VICE Versa participera à cette activité et vous en donnera les détails dans son prochain numéro avec un article provenant de l'Italie.
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