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## Our Times: On the Street Where I Live

by CHARLES L. MEE

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Dawn.

Music!

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

And we can see in the windows of the second floors  
of all these stores  
that there are apartments on the second floors.  
And during the course of the play,  
people will sometimes appear in these windows,  
but just to look out,  
not to have songs or scenes out the window.



while

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

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

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

Another guy brings in a chair,  
finds a place to put it down,  
sits in the chair,  
and relaxes.



as the singing continues  
[or this whole performance could be done by one of the guys  
having a phone conversation]

and finally she begins to speak into her cell phone:

Hello

Hello

Hi

Hello

hi

hello hello

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

hello

hello hello

[hangs up  
crosses opposite leg]

Hello

Hello hello

hello

Hi

hello hello

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

singing opera

singing opera

singing opera

singing opera

singing opera

singing opera

singing opera  
singing opera  
singing opera  
singing opera

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

And now the guy sitting in the chair speaks.

THE GUY SITTING IN THE CHAIR

I remember dingle berries.

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

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

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

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

I remember white bread  
and tearing off the crust  
and rolling the middle part up into a ball and eating it.

I remember stories about what goes on in restaurant kitchens.  
Like spitting in the soup.  
And jerking off in the salad.

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

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

I remember loafers with pennies in them.

I remember my father's collection of arrow heads.

I remember potato salad.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I remember picnics.

[The dali woman with the loaf of frenchbread on her head  
comes in.

There is an inkwell on top of the breadloaf,  
and a tiny man and woman, standing on the loaf,  
and around her neck a necklace of two ears of corn.]

#### THE DALI WOMAN

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

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

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

Nikki de Saint Phalle monsters  
big plaster heads  
with open mouths and big round eyes

painted bright blue and crimson red  
and a hand with all five fingers for hair  
rise out of the stage floor  
or come in from the sides

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

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

#### THE ARTIST'S MODEL

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

Most people are stupid boring too much fire inflammations result  
I'd rather be alone shut the door shut the bedroom door  
I live in furs under a black bear blanket  
I swathe myself in velvets.

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

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

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

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

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

A woman enters on her hands and knees  
with a glass coffee table on her back  
and someone sets a coffee cup down on it,  
and she exits

three decker hamburger  
with tubes of paint instead of burger in the bun  
was this brought in on the glass coffee table?

the white pig covered in tattoos

5 foot tall upright silver thumb

#### NICK, THE TREE BRANCH POET

For my part,

I don't understand.

I pay a babysitter so that I can go to Naidre's café  
to write my poetry.

It's, you know, an expensive way to write poetry,  
but with the baby at home

I don't get anything done

so all I know to do is pay the babysitter  
and go to Naidre's café.

And there is this guy there named Bob,  
a nice guy,

I've known him for years

and there's nothing uncomfortable in our relationship  
he never made a pass at me

I never had a thing for him

but he sees me in the café  
and he starts a conversation

I mean because we're neighbors

and he's a nice guy

and it's all very friendly

and he tells me what he's been up to

and all about his wife and his kids

and what he thinks about politics and the budget

and what plays he's seen recently

or: have you seen any movies?

and even he wants to talk about the production he saw at the Met  
of Orpheus and Eurydice

and what he thought

and how he took voice lessons when he was a kid

and he's talking to me  
and I'm thinking:  
I'm paying a babysitter!  
I'm paying a babysitter!  
I don't think this conversation is worth \$18 an hour  
and I'm not writing any poetry!  
and I'm paying \$18 an hour,  
and I can't go home yet  
because the babysitter and I have a deal  
and I can't mess up our deal  
and run the risk of losing my babysitter!

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

then music

and they all sing  
they all sing





a couple dances tenderly  
to a heartbreaking piano solo  
and they finally leave

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

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

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

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

An electric wheelchair—  
a man driving,  
a woman sitting on the handlebars,

she running her fingers through his hair over and over and over—  
enters and leaves.

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

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

A homeless guy with cart of stuff  
enters and leaves.

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

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

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

#### THE BOOK SPEAKS

In a language,  
any language,  
we see that  
saying and said are correlative of one another,  
and the saying is subordinated to its theme.  
It can be shown that even the distinction between Being and entities

is borne by the amphibology of the said,  
though this distinction  
and this amphibology  
are not thereby reducible to verbal artifices.

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

### THE BOOK

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

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

The bearded man wears an iron pot upside down on his head,  
and with one hand he holds a small human figure,  
whose head is stuck in the bearded man's mouth  
as birds fly out of its anus.]

## THE BOOK CONTINUES SPEAKING

Language permits us to utter,  
be it by betrayal,  
this outside of being,  
this ex-ception to being,  
as though being's other were an event of being.  
Being,  
its cognition and the said in which it shows itself  
signify in a saying which,  
relative to being,  
forms an exception;  
but it is in the said  
that both this exception and the birth of cognition  
[la naissance de la connaissance]  
show themselves.  
But the fact that the ex-ception shows itself  
and becomes truth in the said  
can not serve as a pretext to take as an absolute  
the apophantic variant of the saying,  
which is ancillary or angelic.

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

## THE BEARDED MAN

I can give you Vanilla  
or Chocolate any time  
Strawberry if you prefer  
or Butter Pecan  
Broccoli swirl  
Almond Crunch  
Coffee  
Coffee Mocha Fudge  
Coconut Chip  
Alumni Swirl

Apple Cobbler Crunch  
I've got Arboretum Breeze  
Bananas Foster  
Black Cow  
Beet fantasia  
Booger Banana  
Caramel Critters  
Cotton Candy  
Canned pea souffle  
Crunchy gravel  
Dulce De Leche  
Earwax Appeal  
Escargot Ecstasy  
Fresh mowed dandelion with grass clippings  
Goo Goo Cluster  
Happy Happy Joy Joy  
Infidel Fried Chicken  
I Scream Ice Cream  
Keeney Beany Chocolate  
Kitty Litter crunch  
Lichen candy  
Lemon Slime  
Monster Mash  
Mossnificent  
Ravishing radish  
Rutabaga-turnip-parsnip Crunch  
Squash sherbet  
Tofu custard  
Toad-drool  
Termite Crumble  
Orange Shitbert  
Seymour's Hickory Smoked  
Semen  
Rocky Roadkill  
Micecream Supreme  
Vomit Comet

Excrement  
Hemp Hemp Hooray  
Nitrous Oxide  
Tempered Fiberglass Pink Insulation Sensation

[And,  
while the bearded man is speaking,  
another random guy brings in a wooden beam  
from which six slender four foot tall poles stick up.  
On each pole is a painted cardboard cutout of a human figure—  
a guy in a swimming suit, a guy in a business suit,  
a woman in a fashionable dress,  
a guy in work clothes wearing boxing gloves, etc.  
And atop each of these figures is a head—  
one head is a bunch of bananas,  
one is a cluster of dark storm clouds,  
one is a television set with a human face on the screen,  
one is a thick, u-shaped, wooden block, etc.

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

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

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

A Perfect Day

Good Morning, Mister Zip-Zip-Zip

Are You From Dixie, 'Cause I'm From Dixie Too

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

How'd You Like to Spoon With Me

Ma! He's Making Eyes at Me

My Sunny Tennessee

My Hero

My Wonderful One

My Lovin, Honey Man

Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life Be My Little Baby Bumblebee

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

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

I'm Falling in Love with Someone

Everybody's Doing It Now

Let Me Call You Sweetheart

Please Come and Play in My Yard

Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes

Where Do We Go From Here

Music.

Deafening music.

Brutes with plastic garden chairs—  
sit to deafening music, looking straight out—  
then stand and do unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance

unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance  
unison kicking dance

a woman walks among the brutes, yelling, but the deafening music drowns her out

#### THE WOMAN SCREAMING

[repeating what the book said,  
but screaming in disbelief and rage]

In a language,  
any language,  
we see that

saying and said are correlative of one another,  
and the saying is subordinated to its theme.

It can be shown that even the distinction between Being and entities  
is borne by the amphibology of the said,  
though this distinction  
and this amphibology  
are not thereby reducible to verbal artifices.

The correlation of the saying and the said,  
that is, the subordination of the saying to the said,  
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At this moment language is serving a research  
conducted in view of disengaging the otherwise than being



football play  
football play  
football play  
football play  
football play  
football play

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yesterday,  
Love was such an easy game to play,

Now I need a place to hide away,  
Oh, I believe in yesterday.

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

#### THE GUY SITTING IN THE CHAIR

I remember when, in high school, I used to stuff a sock in my underwear.

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

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

I remember liver.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I remember dreams of walking down the street and suddenly realizing that I have no clothes on.

## THE ARTIST'S MODEL

I wake up and I'm in my bedroom,  
as usual all dark  
even though it's well into the morning,  
but the window in front of me  
huge in sections  
isn't curtained.

Out of it I see the house from the outside,  
oh that's why they've been scraping,  
they're about to paint.

As if I'm seeing the future,  
a newly painted white surface on the stucco.

To my left,  
the next room,  
which is the kitchen,  
a boy and girl are doing the painting.

I can't go into the kitchen cause they'll see me through that huge window.

I hear them talking about me.

"Bloody hell she's 50 years old."

Probably drinks all the time, whiskey bottles everywhere."

"Actually as far as I know she doesn't touch the stuff."

"She's mad you know. Never goes out."

Their voices are so loud, they must be in the house.

Should I be scared?

No, they can't be.

When I wake up, I realize I've been dreaming.

## THE DALI WOMAN

When I came to America, I knew hardly anyone, only a second cousin who was a locksmith, so I worked for him. If he'd been a shoemaker, I would have been a shoemaker; if he had shovelled shit, I, too, would have shovelled. But he was a locksmith, he taught me the trade, and that's what I became. We had a little business together, and then one year he got TB. They had to cut his liver out, and he got a 106 temperature and died, so I took it over. I went on sending his wife half the profits, even after she married a doctor and moved to Bayside. I stayed in the business for more than fifty years. It's not what I would have imagined for myself. And yet. The truth is I came to like it. I helped in those who were locked out; others I helped keep out what shouldn't be let in, so that they could sleep without nightmares.

Then one day I was looking out the window. Maybe I was contemplating the sky. Put even a fool in front of the window and you'll get a Spinoza; in the end life makes window-watchers of us all. The afternoon went by; little grains of darkness sifted down. I reached for the chain on the bulb and suddenly it was as if an elephant had stepped on my heart. I fell to my knees. I thought, I didn't live forever. A minute passed. Another minute. Another. I clawed at the floor, pulling myself along toward the phone.

Twenty-five per cent of my heart muscle died. It took time to recover, and I never went back to work. I stared out the window. I watched fall turn into winter, winter into spring.

[A woman comes 'downstage'  
which is to say, center, and close to the audience  
sits at a dinner table  
is given two finger bowls, one for each hand  
by tall serving men

BIG MUSIC  
BIG MUSIC

and she begins to wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail

wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail  
wail and wail

she continues to wail as she eats  
an elegant, rich, spoiled woman  
in anguish over what' life itself'  
even she does not escape the pain of life  
so is this a monologue or a dialogue with someone trying to cheer her up?

BIG DARK MUSIC CONTINUES THROUGHOUT THIS?  
BIG DARK MUSIC CONTINUES THROUGHOUT THIS?

a woman in a beautiful black dress enters  
and paces while she smokes  
paces while she smokes

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

are the opera singers accompanying this?

singing?  
singing?

she returns, dragging a guy by the hand  
he is naked from the waist up

she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over  
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over  
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she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over  
she shoves him to the ground roughly over and over

the sleek old Mafioso in the chair puts on dark sunglasses

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

deafening classical music (Mozart?)

another woman in an elegant black dress

with a blood red face

does a wild wild dance

and smears red lipstick all over her face

in time with the crashing Mozart music

and then throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

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throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

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throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

throws herself to the ground on her back over and over and over

she becomes covered with dust

as she kicks and writhes wildly on the ground on her back

like a cockroach frantic on its back





falls over to the side  
and struggles to get up again

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

someone to the side drowns in a tank of water

the black burned cripple writhes on the ground

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

the charcoal crip staggers out

the downs boy comes down center

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

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

And now,  
several random guys come in,  
and look around  
and finally speak.

## A RANDOM GUY

When I first moved onto the block,  
I was standing on the sidewalk  
before the movers even got the first chair into the house  
this guy came out of his house a couple doors away  
and came up to me  
and said  
Hi, welcome to the neighborhood.  
My name is Vinny.  
I live just there.  
Some people think of me as the mayor of the block.  
Anything you want:  
you ask me.  
And then  
a couple of days later,  
I was parking my car on the block  
and this guy came strolling slowly across the street  
and said  
Is that your parking place?  
And I said: well, it is now.  
And he said: oh? You live on this block?  
And I said: Yes. I just moved in. Down there. Number 20.  
Oh, he said: are you Italian?  
I said: of course I am.  
And he said: when I say Italian, I mean: from Sicily.  
And I said:  
what else would I mean?  
And he said: OK then.  
And it has been OK. I'd even say great.  
Although most of the old Italian families have sold their houses  
and moved to Florida.  
But I find it reassuring  
at Christmas time for instance  
when you might see Dennis out on the street  
throwing snowballs at his daughter.  
And then you know everything is OK.

### A RANDOM GUY

There was a time,  
like, not a hundred but like maybe twenty or thirty years ago  
these yellow robes moved into the brownstone  
and the brownstone had been, before that, a nunnery  
and when the nuns moved out  
they left a lot of stuff behind  
like statues of Jesus and the Virgin Mary  
and some pictures of the saints  
and some of their own robes  
and so  
when the yellow robes moved in  
they just took all the old nuns' things  
and put them out on the street  
for the garbage guys to pick up and take away  
and so  
years later  
when the yellow robes moved out  
the local Italian neighbors came into the brownstone  
with cans of gasoline  
and they poured the gasoline all through the brownstone  
from the top floor down into the basement  
and just lit it on fire.

### ANOTHER RANDOM GUY

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

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

There should be a way out for rational people  
who've decided they're in the negative,  
like they have Alzheimer's.  
That should be available, and it should be quite easy.

I can't think it would be too hard to establish some sort of test  
that shows that you understand.

Would I kill myself?

There's a certain point where your life slips into the negative.

YET ANOTHER RANDOM GUY

And then, think about Walter.

The point is—about Walter—

the point is two-fold.

First of all, he shouldn't leave his old ruined cars

just sitting there rotting in the vacant lot

rusting

the hood crunching in

and vines growing over them

cars from I don't know when

like the fifties

with those big swooping fenders

and really long and big and wide

and filled with junk I don't know what

papers and books and coffee pots

and old wooden boxes

setting a bad example for all the kids in the neighborhood

and second of all

he should donate the cars just as they are

to the Smithsonian Museum

because the Smithsonian would love them

and they would be amazing in the museum.

ANOTHER RANDOM GUY

You think

what can you do?

You wish you could do more.

Anything less than devoting your entire life

to easing the suffering of others

is not enough.

It should be your life's work.

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

Because you are selfish.

If you take only five minutes a day for yourself,  
you are selfish.

Because you are so privileged.

You have so much.

Even if you are not in the top 1 percent.

And anything less than giving your whole life to others  
is selfish.

And you negotiate that every day.

Justifying your behavior.

Rationalizing.

Arriving at an understanding deeper and more sophisticated  
than simple regret and self criticism and sorrow.

So that you can go on

with what you want

and even think from time to time

I think I'll have just a little bit more.

AND ANOTHER RANDOM GUY

I'd like to live forever.

I don't mean I have to be magically in my twenties forever.

Just in my current state of health.

And nothing special.

Just more and more daily life.

To see the kids.

To see my wife.

To walk down the block.

To see...you know: the buildings.

The trees.

The sky.

Because I love it.

Maybe once in a while to sit in a cafe.

I wouldn't mind the occasional trip to Paris.

I'd love to stay for a few months,

but even for a few days.  
Or, say, maybe ten days.  
Enough to get over the jet lag  
and then wander around  
go to a couple cafes  
sit in the Luxembourg gardens.  
Then come back  
and then I'm happy.

#### STILL ANOTHER RANDOM GUY

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

A guy sings a love song into a mike  
while wearing a roller blade on only one foot  
going in circles  
while another guy rolls around with yellow high heeled shoes on his hands  
love song  
love song

love song  
love song  
love song  
love song  
love song  
love song  
love song  
love song  
love song

Another guy uses ukelele as a tennis racket  
to 'serve' small stuffed animals

and a man and a woman, both in black underwear, do a lascivious dance  
behind a glass wall  
she takes off her top

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

A guy wearing a big messy wreck of a bright red turban—  
but not a turban of the sort we see these days:  
this is the red turban from Jan van Eyck's self portrait of 1433.

man with tree branch growing out of his head  
with birds in the branches

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

5 foot tall upright silver thumb

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

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

the white pig covered in tattoos

two dice on strings  
going diagonally across the space

#### THE GUY SITTING IN THE CHAIR SPEAKS

##### Imaginary Still Life

I close my eyes. I see pink. And green. And gold. All mixed up together. But now slowly evolving into three distinctive shapes. (. . .) It is a pink kimono, gently discarded upon the corner of a green dressing table, which enters the picture frame at a very sharp angle. Behind it stands a gold screen of three panels. In this particular Japanese still life one gets the impression that something is going on that cannot be seen.

##### Imaginary Still Life

I close my eyes. I see white. Lots of white. And gray. Cool gray. Cool gray fabric shadows. (It is a painting!) With no yellow. By a very old man.

##### Imaginary Still Life

I close my eyes. I see old fruit. Pots and pans. And various and scattered utensils. Brown. Art. Dutch. By nobody in particular. (Museum.) And so, on to the Frans Hals.

##### Imaginary Still Life

I close my eyes. I see a light-green vase. A very pale light-green vase. Right beside it sits something black. Something small. It is a small black ashtray. Getting smaller by the moment. Until—really—it is hardly more than—now—a tiny speck.



dancing the same gestures and moves  
dancing the same gestures and moves

silence

all 12 look straight out at audience

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

NICK, THE TREE BRANCH POET

So I have these poems I've written.

And, um, I'll recite one of them for you.

Because I like them.

This one is called

forgetting something:

Try this—close

your eyes. No, wait, when—if—we see each other  
again the first thing we should do is close our eyes—no,  
first we should tie our hands to something /  
solid—bedpost, doorknob— otherwise they (wild birds)  
might startle us

awake. Are we forgetting something? What about that  
warehouse, the one beside the airport, that room  
of black boxes, a man in each box? I hear  
if you bring this one into the light he will not stop  
crying, if you show this one a photo of his son  
his eyes go dead. Turn up  
the heat, turn up the song. First thing we should do

if we see each other again is to make  
a cage of our bodies—inside we can place  
whatever still shines.

[Silence. He considers his poem.]

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

So here it is:

It's called The Ticking is the Bomb

Here's a secret:  
Everyone,  
if they live long enough,  
will lose their way at some point.  
You will lose your way,  
you will wake up one morning and find yourself lost.  
This is a hard, simple truth.  
If it hasn't happened to you yet, consider yourself lucky.  
When it does,  
when one day you look around and nothing is recognizable,  
when you find yourself alone in a dark wood having lost the way,  
you may find it easier to blame it on someone else—  
an errant lover, a missing father, a bad childhood—  
or it may be easier to blame the map you were given—  
folded too many times, out-of-date, tiny print—  
but mostly,  
if you are honest,  
you will only be able to blame yourself.

One day I'll tell my daughter a story about a dark time,  
the dark days before she was born,  
and how her coming was a ray of light.  
We got lost for a while, the story will begin,  
but then we found our way.

[Everyone turns abruptly and leaves.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the asian woman enters again,  
this time appropriately dressed

and they all gather around the dinner table  
get settled,  
and break bread together

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

freeze photo

THE END

A NOTE:

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

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