

The EMERGENCY GAZETTE

Thursday, March 30, 2000

No. FOURTEEN

LOVE



In his youth, Charles L. Mee studied playwriting at a university and soon became disillusioned with writing for the theater. He stopped writing plays and, for many years, wrote history books instead.

Legend has it that, one day, Charles Mee was writing a book. It was going badly, and so he took the manuscript (the only existing copy!) and threw it in the trash. A few hours later, he remembered a few short parts he liked and wanted to keep, but when he went out to find it in the trash, of course, it was gone. Mee went back into the house and quickly tried to reconstruct the bits of text from memory. Surprisingly, his notes came out as dialogue. Hmmm, Mee might have said to himself, I must be thinking in dialogue. And, after many years of fruitful detour, he began writing plays again.

Mee's plays are a particular kind of PHILOSOPHICAL THEATER. The narrative is always peripheral to the meditation at the center. The meditative question is always returned to, either through the speech of a character or the silence after an event.

The characters in Mee's plays speak plainly, but are clearly personifications of a certain perception and way of life. He follows Brecht's precedent in constructing points-of-view paradoxically based in COMPASSION and DISTANCE:

1. A character's monologue will be charming. It will have an infallible logic, assumptions you can recognize as your own.
2. Suddenly, you find that the character is saying something reprehensible, violent, amoral, and,
3. these despicable ideas were seemingly continuous consequences of the logic you had, just a moment before, accepted as true and familiar. All the characters speak from morally complicated points-of-view, and this CONUNDRUM is not untangled by Mee, but left as a knot in your stomach.

In the past few weeks, I saw two of Charles Mee's plays. One, FULL CIRCLE, was directed by Robert Woodruff at Boston's American Repertory Theater. The other, BIG LOVE, was directed by Les Waters at the Actor's Theater of Louisville, for the Humana Festival.

FULL CIRCLE follows the scene structure of Brecht's CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE very closely, but sets the story in 1989 Berlin, and splits the Grusha character into two:

a wealthy lady from America and an East German teenager. The play ends with a trial, but here, instead of awarding the baby to the mother who doesn't pull the baby, Heiner Müller (the Azdak character) awards the baby to the American woman who just grabs the baby and runs because "We live in a new age now... And the new rule is the real mother is the one who grabs the child and holds on for dear life..."

BIG LOVE, adapted from Aeschylus' THE SUPPLIANTS, is about 50 brides who escape from their prearranged mass wedding. The grooms come after them, forcing the marriage. The brides, cornered, agree to marry the men and, on their wedding night, kill them. The play ends with a trial to determine whether the one bride who, after falling in love with her husband and sparing his life, is guilty of treason.

It was interesting that both plays had, at their center, a trial; on some level, the trial is at the center of Mee's thought. In his plays, Mee sets up philosophical paradigms (like internal trials), all around a central question of HOW TO LIVE. Shockingly, he ends the plays, i.e. he actually articulates a "solution". A solution like the one in BIG LOVE (that "love conquers all") is seemingly trite, to the point of being not a conclusion but a DEFAULT RESPONSE; amazingly it is not trite but true and, for an instant, viable.

Partially, my belief in a statement about love can happen because of the enormous EFFORT in getting there (the actors, who have literally been throwing themselves at walls and floors, are, at the end of BIG LOVE, dripping with sweat & fake blood & cake). In FULL CIRCLE, the production ends the moment BEFORE a solution (with the baby, i.e. the future, on stage). Classically, this is "Brechtian": to delay the complacent gratification of a resolution. In fact, to posit a solution that is problematic but that you can believe (for an instant) creates a greater sense of unsettling than does a solution withheld.

The climactic moment, therefore, seems viable and yet PAINFUL; this, perhaps, because of the TRANSCIENCE of that moment, and of the thought. At the end of BIG LOVE, you are gripped with a lucid understanding of what it means for love to be the tantamount human value, and even in the moment of grasping it, you feel it slipping away.

There are plays you do to show virtuosity, ones you do to extract some seed that is precious and forgotten, and plays like Mee's, which you do to live with the words and ideas, to enter the possibility of changing your life, or the way you live. And, always in these kinds of projects is the danger of losing everything: all the stability that allows you to move

from one day to the next, to enjoy conversations with friends, walking along deserted streets, writing and reading.

When you watch plays like this, even without going through months of living with them, you feel wrenched, shaky. You want to drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes and do ANYTHING to regain your balance and, at the same time, to prolong the feeling of imbalance.

I have seen two of Charles Mee's plays, one directed by Robert Woodruff and the other by Les Waters. Two different plays (and two completely different directorial extractions, aesthetics, senses of humor) but both with this wrenching quality. And I realize that Mee's work, like Beckett's, cannot be taken apart. His work is not about writing a play (as almost all plays are) but about the act of perception, followed immediately by a meditative curiosity.

Yelena Gluzman

EMERGENCY WANTS:

WRITING TO ACT WRITING TO REACT

SEVEN LEARS

Maestro playwright Howard Barker's contortion of Shakespeare. Dir by Rod McLucas. Thru Apr 8, Thu-Sat at 8, Sun at 7. Metro Playhouse, 220 E.4th St, 462-9279. \$12.

THE CHILDREN

B-musical p-opera based on the 1980 horror film of the same name. Mar 31-Apr 29, Fri&Sat at 10:30. HERE, 145 6th Avenue, 647-0202. \$12.

BONES IN WHISPERS

Brooklyn-based Raw Materials for The Theatre presents a genre-mixing, dance-theatrical murder-mystery based on the poetry of T.S. Eliot - all within the constraints of a 7-foot cube. Thursdays April 6 & 13, Sundays April 9 & 16 at 8pm. Collective: Unconscious, 145 Ludlow, 254-5277. \$10/\$7 stds.

LISTINGS

THE PASSION

Gad's Hill presents a new telling by Christopher Cartmill based on the Four Gospels, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the commentaries of Raymond E. Brown. Mar 22 thru Apr 8, Wednesdays thru Saturdays, at 8pm. Calvary Episcopal Church, 21st & Park Avenue So, 462-9474. \$20.

SAD CLOWNS ON VELVET

Three Chekhov vaudevilles performed by Peter Brown, Ian Hill, and Peter Swander. Thru Apr 1 (Thu & Fri) at 8pm. NADA, 167 Ludlow St., 420-1466. \$10.

CIRCLE

Siberian Buryat performance styles and Mongolian throat singing. Ukranian punk band Gogol Bordello accompanies. Thru Apr 9, Thu-Sat at 8, Sun 3:30 & 8. La Mama, 74 E.4th St, 475-7710. \$15-20.

FRACTURED LIGHT

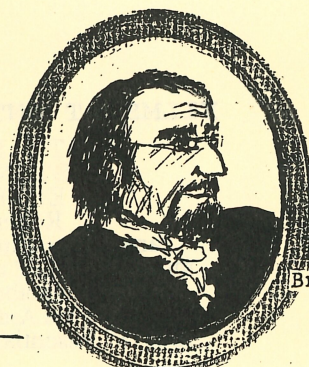
A new solo by Stefa Zaverucha in collaboration with lighting designer David Fritz. Based upon one on one interviews with lighting designers Roma Flowers, David Fritz, Carol Mullins, Michael Mazzolla, Philip Sandstrom and Jennifer Tipton. Apr 13-23 at 7:30. PS 122, 150 1st Ave, 477-5288. \$15.

TWO BROTHERS

In this diptych of poems by Ai (1999 National Book Award winner), Jack Kennedy and Joseph McCarthy each talk to their dead brothers. Performed by Richard Nash. Apr 13, 7-9pm, performed on continuous loop. Tate Gallery, 413 W. 14th Street, 242-9888. FREE!!

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR ON SEX, ART & FEMINISM

Written and performed by Emily Blake. Mar 24 - Apr 23, Fri & Sat at 8pm, Sun at 3pm. St. Marks Theater, 94 St. Marks Place, 726-8524.

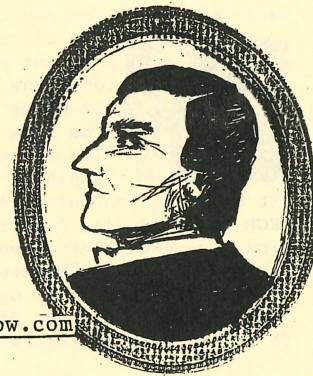


Send all post, submissions, listings, reviews and requests to:

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Bros. Lumiere, eds.

emergency@notnow.com



Secret Theater

As long as no Stalin breathes down our necks, why not make some art in the service of ... an insurrection?

Never mind if it's "impossible." What else can we hope to attain but the "impossible"? Should we wait for SOMEONE else to reveal our true desires?

If art has died, or the audience has withered away, then we find ourselves free of two dead weights. Potentially every audience has regained its innocence, its ability to BECOME the art that it experiences.

Provided we can escape from the museums we carry around us, provided we can stop selling ourselves tickets to the galleries in our own skulls, we can begin to contemplate an art which re-creates the goal of the sorcerer: changing the structure of reality by the manipulation of living symbols (in this case, the images we've been "given" by the organizers [Sharon Gannon] of this salon ["Salon Apocalypse" July 1986]—murder, war, famine greed.)

We might now contemplate aesthetic actions which possess some of the resonance of terrorism (or "cruelty," as Artaud put it) aimed at the destruction of abstractions rather than people, at liberation rather than power, pleasure rather than profit, joy rather than fear. "Poetic Terrorism."

Our chosen images have the potency of darkness—but all images are masks, & behind these masks lie energies we can turn toward light & pleasure.

For example, the man who invented aikido was a samurai who became a pacifist & refused to fight for Japanese imperialism. He became a hermit, lived on a mountain sitting under a tree. One day a former fellow-officer came to visit him & accused him of betrayal, cowardice, etc. The hermit said nothing, but kept on sitting—and the officer fell into a rage, drew his sword & struck. Spontaneously the unarmed master disarmed the officer & returned his sword. Again & again the officer tried to kill, using every subtle KATA in his repertoire—but out of his empty mind the hermit each time invented a new way to disarm him.

The officer of course became his first disciple. Later, they learned how to DODGE BULLETS.

We might contemplate some form of metadrama meant to capture a taste of this performance, which gave rise to a wholly new art, a totally non-violent way of fighting—war without murder, "the sword of life" rather than death.

A conspiracy of artists, anonymous as any mad bombers, but aimed toward an act of gratuitous generosity rather than violence—at the millennium rather than the apocalypse—or rather, aimed at a PRESENT MOMENT of aesthetic shock in the service of realization & liberation.

Art tells gorgeous lies that come true.

Is it possible to create a SECRET THEATER in which both artist & audience have completely disappeared—only to re-appear on another plane where life & art have become the same thing, the pure giving of gifts?

Hakim Bey

from Communiqué #6.
Reprinted from the book T.A.Z.
anti-© Autonomedia, 1985, 1991.

Yes! It's true! You can find EMERGENCY

free of cost at many pleasant participating locations in NEW YORK:

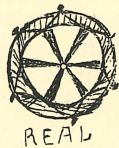
• St Marks Bookstore
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• The Piano Store
• Applause Bookstore
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• KGB Lounge/Kraime Theatre HERE
• Incommunicado Books (Tonic) • La Mama
• Labyrinth Books • Present Company
IN BOSTON: • Zeitgeist Gallery
• MOBIUS • The Garment District
IN PHILADELPHIA: • The Painted Bride

IMPOSSIBLE THEATER

A Treatise More or Less After Emerson

I. On Gifts

The following kinds of gifts are imperfect gifts: for example: we give the birthday boy a lid for an inkwell. But where is the inkwell itself? Or we give the inkwell together with the lid. But where is the desk on which the inkwell must sit? If the birthday boy already has a desk then the inkwell would be the perfect gift. Then, if the birthday boy has an inkwell, one may give him only the lid and that would be a perfect gift as well. Decorations of the naked body, such as rings, bracelets, necklaces, etc. are always perfect gifts (if, of course, the birthday celebrant is not a cripple), or such presents as a stick, for instance, to the end of which has been attached a wooden sphere and to the other end a wooden cube. Such a stick can be held in the hand or, if one puts it down then it doesn't matter at all where. Such a stick is no use for anything else.



HOW TO MAKE SENTENCES THAT CHANGE THE WORLD

(for an indeterminate number of writers)

1. String together the words of your sentence as required by (in decreasing order of weight) the flux of time, the transience of meaning, the necessity of syntax.
2. Let the beginning of your sentence open up possibilities. Let the middle rummage among them. Let the end consummate possibilities not anticipated in the beginning.
3. Know that the meaning of the same word is different in different sentences. Assume that the measure of the propriety of a word in your sentence is the clarity with which you can hear its unique meaning there.
4. Let no word in your sentence be determined beyond doubt by its predecessors. Let every word explore new ground. Assume that your sentence has not been spoken or written before, and will not be spoken or written again.
5. Remove unnecessary words. (An unnecessary word is one doing a job being done by another word.) Remove NECESSARY words if, by so doing, you increase your sentence's significance more than its ambiguity.
6. Read your sentence aloud with one part of your mind while listening to it with another part. Let your ear correct the errors committed by your hand, your mouth the errors invisible to your eye.
7. Notate your sentence so as to express gratitude for the beauty of the alphabet and the purity of the paper. Pray that you have used the former to destroy the latter to good purpose.

These instructions may be used.
Courtesy of Jon Barlow.

KLANGHAUS

German composer and instrument designer Ferdinand Försch shows and performs on his visually stunning, musically versatile sound sculptures. The sculptures are shown Apr 4-6 2-6pm (FREE!). Försch performs on Apr 7&8 at 8pm. Kitchen, 512 W.19th St., 255-5793. \$12.

FILMS AT ANTHOLOGY

FRITZ LANG RESTORED:
DESTINY (1921) April 1, 6pm.
ESSENTIAL CINEMA:
Robert Breer, March 30 at 7.
James Broughton, March 30 at 8:45 & more on April 2 at 10, & April 5 at 9:15.
Clair/Picabia/Bunuel, April 7 at 9.
Anthology Film Archives, 2nd & 2nd, 505-5110
\$8 / *\$7 Essential Cinema / \$5 Students

II. The Correct Way Of Surrounding Oneself With Objects

Let us suppose that one completely naked superintendent decided to settle in and surround himself with objects. If he starts with a chair then he'll need a desk to go with the chair, and a lamp for the desk, then a bed, a blanket, bed sheets, a chest of drawers, underclothes, clothes, a wardrobe, then a room in which to put it all, etc. Now, a small branch-system can arise at each point in this system: On the round table one would want to spread a napkin, on the napkin place a vase, and in the vase one would want to stick a flower. This way of surrounding oneself with objects, whereby one object clings to another is an incorrect one because if there are no flowers in the flower vase then such a vase is rendered meaningless, and if one is to take away the vase then the round table becomes meaningless; of course one can place a carafe of water there, but if there's no water in the carafe then the argument regarding the flower vase remains in force. The negation of a single object

destroys the entire system. Whereas, if the naked superintendent were to dress himself in rings and bracelets and surround himself with spheres and celluloid salamanders, then the loss of one or twenty-seven objects would not change the essence of the thing. Such a system of surrounding oneself with objects is the correct system.

III. The Correct Negation of Surrounding Objects

One as usual mediocre French writer, namely Alphonse Daudet, expounded an uninteresting thought: that objects do not attach themselves to us, rather we attach ourselves to objects. Even the most unselfish person, having lost watch, raincoat and buffet, will regret these losses. But even if one quits one's attachment to objects, any person having lost bed and pillow, ceiling and floor, and even more or less comfortable stones and having become acquainted with insomnia will begin to complain about the loss of objects and the comforts associated with them. Therefore, the negation of objects collected according to an incorrect system of surrounding them around oneself is also the incorrect method of negation of objects around oneself. But the negation of gifts around oneself which are forever perfect—of wooden spheres, celluloid salamanders, etc.—will not present the more or less unselfish person with even the slightest feeling of regret. Negating correctly the objects around ourselves, we lose our taste for acquisition.

IV. On Approaching Immortality

Every person has a striving for pleasure, which always takes the form of either the satisfaction of sexual desire or gastronomical satiation or acquisition. But only that which does not lie on the path toward pleasure will lead us to immortality. In the end, all systems leading to immortality converge on one rule: TO DO CONTINUALLY THAT WHICH ONE DOES NOT WANT, because every person continually wants to either eat or to satisfy his sexual feelings or to acquire something, or all of these more or less at once. It is interesting that immortality is always connected with mortality and is interpreted by various religious systems either as eternal pleasure or eternal suffering, or as the eternal absence of pleasure and suffering.

V. On Immortality

Righteous is he to whom God has given life as a perfect gift.

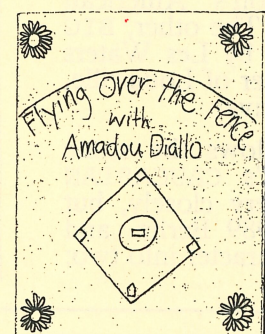
Kharms
Hum. Stupid Article.
February 14, 1939.

Daniil Kharms (1905-1942)
Translated by
Michael Goldman Donally
with Matvei Yankelevich

UNNECESSARILY EMPHATIC

Four women speak sentences.
Directed by Yelena Gluzman.
Apr 7 at 9:30, Apr 8 at
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