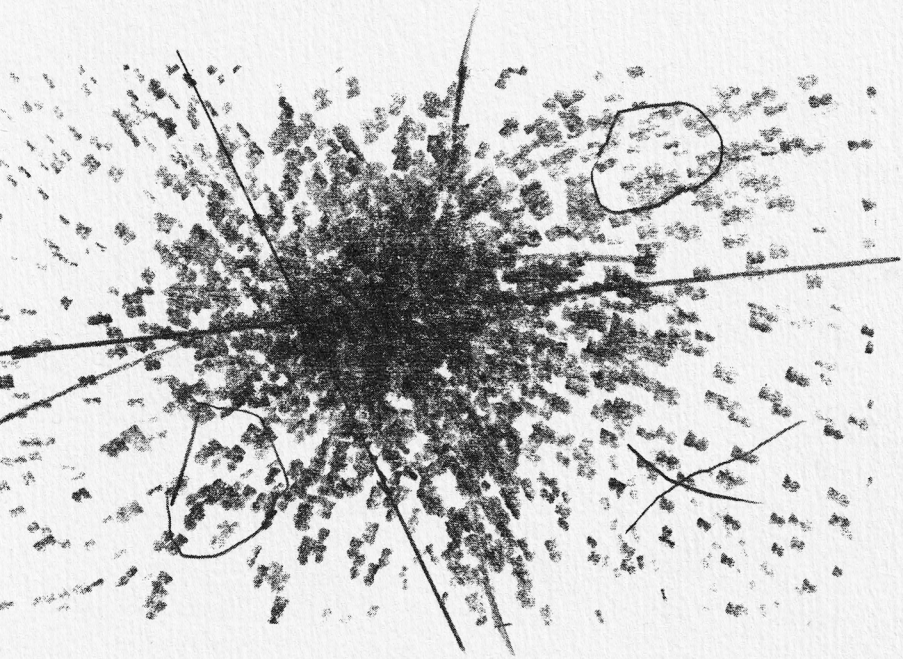


Carla Harryman



memory play

Memory Play

for Asa Watten

Carla Harryman

Memory Play

O Books

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Percentage (Tuumba, 1979)
Under the Bridge (This, 1980)
Property (Tuumba, 1982)
The Middle (Gaz, 1983)
Vice (Potes & Poets, 1986)
Animal Instincts (This, 1989)
In The Mode Of (Zasterle, 1991)

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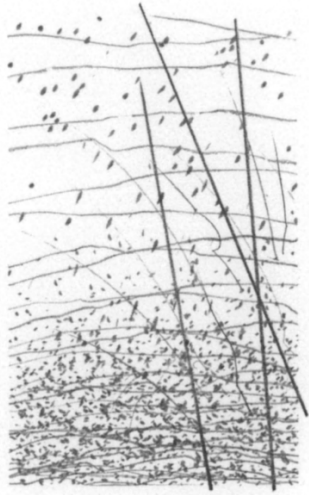
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Prologue

A bedtime story/conversation in a little tent town out in the salt flats.

Reptile

If I tell you one thing that I remember, you will think I'm an idiot for remembering only one thing. This is one thing that makes theater different from real conversation. If I provide you with several of my most esteemed memories, you will probably believe there are more where those came from, and I will have earned your respect. This will make theater a little more like real conversation.

Pelican

I have a job and it is virtually all I can think about; however, I think this: memory is nothing but words stored up in an inefficient computer. What you will remember of this conversation will be nothing like what went into its construction. Such understanding promotes success in business. I know that people want to see the tip of the iceberg only. Business is like a successful cabaret.

MEMORY PLAY

Fish

I had suffered for a long time from the illusion that remembering inhibited one's experience. Now the illusion is almost my only memory—and that I am cold and that I have been cold for a long time and that this coldness was brought on gradually by an illusion. Yet, it is likely that I will not be cold later. Then, I will remember something else and not this. I will have forgotten the story to which I currently refer. Each person has her own theater. I propose this as an exhibit or a symptom of my personal stage.

Reptile

Who is the bully?

Pelican

The spitting image of continental drift.

Fish

Envy is the disease of the 90's as opposed to . . .

Pelican

. . . the person, it must be sellable, it must be way up there, but it must not make the normal consumer feel small, it must be way out there but something like what the regular kind of person sees in himself, something that can expand.

PROLOGUE

Fish

You must be a toy inventor. The image on the outside of the box is hot and fierce; inside, the toy itself is gray and cold. From this we learn that toys are the souls of aggressors.

Reptile

Who is the bully?

Pelican

The thing you want to buy. The thing I want to sell. Something to play with!

Reptile

I think I remember who it is: a man slept here. He was going through the roof in his thought, he was saying this is driving me through the roof in my sleep, this is waking me up. The sky buzzed in the dim field. The pleasing buzz muted displaced events acting out their insane melodramas: women in large groups going upstairs to apartments leaving solitary males below imitating the habits of lizards, then the women reappearing, laughing or biting with an overtone of repulsive sincerity, but the distant buzzing distracts him from this center stage event, and he enjoys himself . . .



Act I

SCENE I

The mirage of tents and salt flats is supplanted by “real life:” three houses and plenty of shadow. Fish’s house is full of family sounds and music. Reptile’s is quiet. Pelican sits on the front porch. The porch step on which Pelican is seated is really an oversized cash box disguised as a step. A Miltonic Humiliator hides in the shadows. Instruction enters dressed to kill.

Instruction

Five thousand three hundred and twenty nine spectators lost. That was in a small New Hampshire town. Now, if there were twenty eight dwellings per block, some of them

MEMORY PLAY

multiple, tri-multiple, and quadri-multiple, squared and cubed, and you lost the same number from them as you did from the small New Hampshire town, well, in say a radius of two or three or possibly four blocks, I mean in a city, I bet hardly anyone would notice. Would you like to know how not to become five thousand three hundred and thirty or five thousand three hundred and thirty one minus one or five thousand three hundred and thirty two minus . . .

Pelican

Don't eat the enclave!

Instruction

Excuse me. My teeth are a nuisance sometimes.

Pelican

Don't mention it!

Instruction

It is too bad this is not a city. For instance, I could tell you exactly in which block or set of blocks the citizens would begin to be lost and if you were in one of those blocks, I could make a recommendation . . .

ACT I

Pelican

. . . that could have been researched in a manual. I have what we're looking for in my pocket. Look here, file five thousand three hundred and thirty point zero two's topic is, "We dream of each other's EARTHQUAKE." Your numerical FUTURES are not mentioned. Therefore I reject your recommendations. And explanations. And what precedes them. And what has already been explained. Now the product pops out!

At this very moment Fish appears on her porch. In a mechanical fashion she sets out a chair between her house and Pelican's and signals Instruction to be seated. The unnerved Instruction seats himself. While Fish speaks, Pelican tries to open the cash box. It is stuck. His discrete attempts become ferocious as time passes.

Fish

In the beginning, there was nothing. No cattails, no wigs, no paws. There was no doom. No lavender or shirt sleeves. No burn no yellow or rest. Neither was there beginning. No light went out. No one held her own against an array of

MEMORY PLAY

misshapen events. There were no chains. There was no writing or speech. There was nothing to shave, nothing to swim, and nothing to cut. Clouds were not clouds. Silence was neither dominant nor peaceful nor silent. There was no salt or smell. No twisted seaweed. Or any buoyant flowering possibility of an ambiguous growth. There were no killers and fleeting lives. There were neither chains of events nor metaphor. There were no stories or bones. No mulch or cocoons. No lizard, pelicans, or fish.

In the beginning, there were no instructions and nothing was abstract. There was nothing to identify. And no revision or modification of the description of the thing identified. Neither were there eyes nor touch. There were no millipedes. Earthworms did not nurture the soil. There was no nurturing, no soil, no worms of any kind. There was no inferno.

Sound, word, rhythm, pucker, loss, organization, and signature were nothing. There was no distance. There were no tornadoes and no change in the atmosphere. There was no atmosphere and no alteration. There was no heat, or hint of the future, no possibility of Dante. For hints, futures, possibilities did not exist. There was no extinction.

ACT I

There were no keys or clues. There was no DNA. Nothing squeezed. There was no singularity or multiplicity. There was no red.

In the beginning, there was nothing to hold and nothing to hold in mind, since there was no beginning, no nothing, and no mind. The end also did not exist. Nothing stopped. There was no gender, no extremes, no image or lack of image and no money. There were no pencils. In the beginning, there were no names.

In the beginning, there was no apoliticized moment of the absolute and no political critiques. Neither was there the hibiscus flowering bearded orchid cunt juices or a male suspect. Neither black nor brown nor white. No maiming and nothing to maim. No future and nothing to preserve.

Instruction

When the speech ends the cash box opens.
Pelican peeks in.

Pelican

I am not as pleased as I thought I would be with the results.

MEMORY PLAY

Fish

Oh, crude ambivalence. Who wants to drop my song in a little pocket bulging with product of shmoozment? Would you like me to try again? Do you prefer endings to beginnings? Or positives to negatives?

Instruction

If you are a talented young person who can add subtract multiply or divide, I can recommend an iced cube.

Pelican

Don't listen to him, Fishy. You are on the right track but a product needs a little more theater. For instance, relax the robotech number. Shrink your thesis to the melt down point. Do not imply anything. Instruction, now is the time for you to listen and remember the instructions so that you can deliver them later.

Instruction

You mean I'm hired? I've got a job?

Pelican

Not yet, but you're getting there. You too Fishy,

ACT I

we have to make this work together. What else can you remember?

Fish

My children have to get ready for school.

Pelican

Not that.

Fish

I'll be back.

Instruction

She's gone.

Pelican

She's not gone because she was never here.
When she comes back, you'll see, it wasn't her at all the first time. The thing that's really bugging me is that I've misplaced a very large toy, my Miltonic Humiliator.

Instruction

Do not infer anything.

SCENE II

Same place around noon.

Child

It's the machine made of words! I better dig fast!

Child picks up her shovel and digs. Miltonic Humiliator knocks on Reptile's door. Reptile opens the door. Sound of insects from inside Reptile's house. Child removes capgun from hole and puts cash box in hole. There is now a gap in Pelican's steps. Child carries capgun in one hand and a tape recorder in the other over to a tree. Miltonic Humiliator pitches babble at Reptile.

MEMORY PLAY

Miltonic Humiliator

That slender little shred of doubt
that comes to every boy and girl
that orders all the ones apart
that shapes the armies and our hearts

to keep the tune of “it’s no use”
to change the tune of “it’s no use”
to march to the tune of “it’s no use”

while increments
leap to judgments

and I ask you on this fine day, is this good or
bad or neither?

Reptile

I think I remember who you are. How many
years have you been in your position? Welcome.
On the one hand, you go back before my time,
and on the other, I go back before yours.

Miltonic Humiliator

Is this good or bad or neither?

Reptile

I can’t say. I don’t recall.

ACT I

Child turns on tape recorder. Falls asleep to the Songs of Innocence.

I am set to light the ground,
While the beetle goes his round:
Follow now the beetles' hum,
Little wanderer hie thee home

Fish rounds corner to her house. She's carrying bags.

Reptile

East to the left.

Fish

No. Oh. Were you talking to me?

Reptile

I think so.

Fish

There's a feeling I get sometimes of endless duplication.

MEMORY PLAY

Reptile

Yes, we reptiles call it the collective buzz of erasure.

Fish

You know, sometimes I'm amazed that we live next to each other. But how would you feel if you lived on a block of all reptiles?

Reptile

I did once. It was very competitive.

Fish

And what was that like?

Reptile

If I provide you with several of my most esteemed memories, you will probably believe there are more where those come from, and I will have earned your respect.

Fish

I am stung with the deception that the past recollections interfere with one's current state of affairs.

ACT I

Reptile

I could respond to that in one of several ways. I could be glib about my own background. Dismiss my pretensions and conform to popular notions about the reptile mentality. I am often disposed to adopt that kind of pose in shopping malls. I could propose that you are using self-effacement as a means of getting your packages through the door. I notice, for instance, that there is melting ice dripping through one of your sacks. I suggest you put it down before it bottoms-out. The last time one of mine bottomed-out, I was living in that competitive homogeneous locale we were discussing briefly. I could respond by assuming that the deception you've been stung with has been ousted. Or the sting has, is, no longer operative and just barge ahead into that treasonous territory of one's, my, own self-esteem. For how did we get to this point in the discussion in the first place?

Fish

I must have started it.

Reptile

You asked me what it was like to live solely among my own species, within that dry scaly

MEMORY PLAY

geometry, among spectacular diamonds and golden bands, and onyx dotted kinsmen. The silence, the indifference was spectacular.

Fish

I was just on my way in. My groceries are melting.

Reptile

So they are.

Fish enters house.

Reptile

Yoo hoo, Miltonic Humiliator, did you hear that?

SCENE III

The world in a fish bowl.

Fish

I am a memory. White slave eleven years old, indentured by my father on boat, male child of significant duration, living through civil war, giving birth to four daughters, disappearing and selling myself and daughters as dairy servants, growing up giving birth to more daughters, disappearing as a man or woman laughing inappropriately at the death of a grandfather or mother, becoming a suffragette and geometry teacher, thinking more like a crustacean in a porno film than . . .

MEMORY PLAY

Pelican

I have this great part for you.

Fish

You've been listening to me again.

Pelican

I've been trying to make up how to prove you don't exist.

Fish

Oh. Man. First I am trapped in the illusion that remembering inhibits one's jouissance, and I am remembering something else so I seem now to have side-stepped experience. Now all this self-analysis is promising on the one hand and on the other I am just mopping myself up and throwing myself out to sea.

Pelican

Well, yes. That is a good plot, but I think we need a few more characters.

Fish

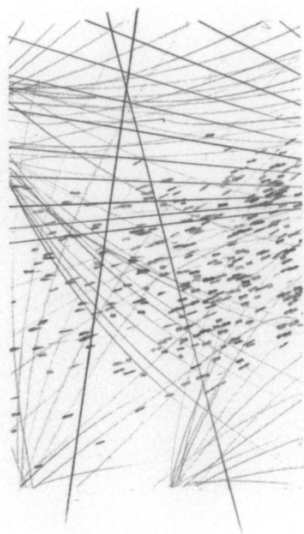
But if you put me in the movie, I will not disappear. Returning to the ocean will only be

ACT I

an illusion in a movie. In fact, I might even exist more than I do now, become larger than life. But why do you want to do away with me?

Pelican

Why do you think non-existence is so bad? Why do you think it means diminishment? Why can't you be non-existent and popular at the same time? You and I are part of the great chain of nature. If you jump off the pier in my movie, honey, you and I reaffirm the great dynamic between the predator and its prey.



Act II

SCENE I

A parade.

Reptile

The buzz of a parade recalls something. I was there at midnight facing a gangplank passing on a float held up by sizzling males. I followed the deep set eyes on brackish streets. Silent creatures on floats hidden behind labial fences wept. Tears seeped out of the corner of their eyes onto the street creating monstrous rides. If I had had the will to love the night or the spectators I would have loved the dominating parade, but love is not the same as it seems when it passes near me; although I do like the urges I associate with the disembodied conversations arising from uterine

MEMORY PLAY

bric-a-brac, conversations which I, who have had no imagination, overhear as if I had already been there. Therefore, most knowledge is public. The tears again drain into the street, expanding as they get closer and the spectator, the spectator climbs over itself to float with the floats as they enlarge and break away.

Instruction

A flood of individuals.

The Miltonic Humiliator passes in the parade singing:

Maximize the whims
of men
in song
the master
gripe
shall be
song's guide
with "shall" the
license to provoke
and "be" the clumsy
notes that ring the wash
and rinse the tides

ACT II

oh flood oh flood oh flood
oh flood oh flood oh flood

Reptile

A parade. I inflate. Midnight. Men wandering into floating labial fences. The sidelines are snoring, sniffing, wincing, evacuating old neighborhoods, forgetting. Dancing on ice blocks, ventriloquists have flooded the streets with nosegays. The spectator, I, a lady a gentleman, seats itself in the buzz waiting as the globs on gowns are fixed with metal links.

Instruction

All rise to "If I had needed them I could have eaten them!"

Fish passes in a float titled, "The World In A Fish Bowl."

Instruction

Parade attendance has been calculated by a panel of machinations at five thousand three hundred twenty nine with a .5329 error margin. Give them a round of applause. And another

MEMORY PLAY

hand for their diplomatically engineered title,
SERMONS ON THE RISE!

*Fish passes in same float in a different part of the
parade. Her voice comes and goes through the mass din.*

Fish

. . . if autonomy were not the strong suit of a . . .
theatrical projection . . . if I . . . had been
captivated by someone else's story . . . if I had
waited for the someone else's next event . . . if I
had added to that story myself as a story . . . if
that captive listener . . . who had also captivated
. . . me . . . if . . . that captive listener had been
inserted into my story and we were each one
waiting to find out what happened . . . if . . .
these are the things nobody wants to hear
anymore . . . a series of small conclusions folded
into someone else's domestic memory . . . puffs of
untamed . . . events that organize separate
adornments of another's situation how did I
know all this? If I did all this . . . as a memory
. . . of myself . . . I would live inside a narrative
. . . and I would not be . . . on this float . . .
which inscribes another form of intelligence . . .
adjacent to the lust for being captivated by
someone else's story and inserting oneself into its

ACT II

events . . . adjacent and also not what anyone wants to . . . think about . . . as pathetic . . . I mean intelligence . . . is not sad . . . and there is a great attraction to pathos . . . as a souvenir of attention . . . of listening . . . to another . . . story . . . that is not identical to one's own . . . but might have been if an accident . . .

Instruction

The speaker has been requested to supplement her speech by improvising when a pause is indicated.

Pelican

Fishy is going to join my toy “movie” set yet. If she . . . That's IT! If-She. If-She will be the name of my movie AND toy. What a breeze to market! Oh, Fishy Fishy, If-She If-She. I love the lore of love of profiting from love, everybody's love. I know I sound just like somebody anybody can remember — in this reverie — but that's the way it works best. If-She says to me, “You must be a toy inventor,” and I AM . . . Weeks later, meaning NOW, she floats by in a fish bowl. She makes herself into what I NEED: she draws a line, I RE-draw it. I like to push at the edge of style. If-She If-She . . . great masses of oceanic inventory, arise!

MEMORY PLAY

Instruction

Remember ladies and gentlemen to put aside your cares for just another few hours and enjoy the rest of the show.

Child

I want to float. I want to float. I want to float.

Miltonic Humiliator, on skates, passes child.

Miltonic Humiliator

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Fish appears again, entirely altered and out of the parade. She speaks directly to the audience and fulfills the request to improvise between the pauses in her previous speech.

SCENE II

We return to the location of Act I Scene 2 with the child waking up now where she had fallen asleep next to the tape recorder. But the child's waking is deceptive. There are ghosts, or deceptions, all around.

Pelican

I lost something.

Child

What do you mean?

Pelican

What I said.

MEMORY PLAY

Child

Where's my mother?

Pelican

Have you seen your mother lately?

Child

I want my mother.

Pelican

What if I said she's my mother?

Child

You talk too much.

Pelican

It's time for you to . . . help me.

Child

What's that in your mouth? You look heavy.

Pelican

You look hungry.

ACT II

Child

Do you like what you're doing?

Pelican

My plant's gone. I'm very concerned.

Child

I can pick one for you. What kind?

Pelican

Not that kind, a factory.

Child

But that's my house.

Pelican

Well, it used to be right there.

Child

I don't remember.

Pelican

You can't remember.

MEMORY PLAY

Child

You lost your plant before I was born. I have a father. Who's your father?

Pelican

I've never met your father.

Child

He doesn't have to be here.

Pelican

I wish he were.

Child

If we're friends then we're not in the same family, we're in different families. Where is your family?

Pelican

How'd you like to make a trade?

Child

I don't like trades.

ACT II

Pelican

Nothing? You tell me a story and I'll tell you a story.

Child

I'll tell you a story and you have to do what I tell. Once upon a time there were only little groups of people living on berries and other stuff. Do you remember what?

Pelican

Roots, fish, like that?

Child

Now you go over there and eat berries.

Pelican

I didn't say I'd do it.

Child

That's our trade. I tell you a story and you act it out.

Pelican

I didn't agree.

MEMORY PLAY

Child

It won't be difficult. Don't worry. Just go over there and eat the berries.

Pelican pretends to follow the child's instructions, but as the child speaks, Pelican sneaks away. Out of sight, Pelican, at the designated moment, commands Instruction to replace him.

Child

Everybody was eating berries, but someone invented magnifying glasses. They could burn things faster with magnifying glasses and they could see details that some people say we were never meant to see. They built houses, like common houses, you know them? And they kept the magnifying glasses in the common houses and people would go in them when they were sick or happy. They took the magnifying glasses with them on hunting expeditions too. They liked to look at the berries, which were hairy in the

ACT II

Pelican

If you want to work, get out there and work.

Instruction “gets out there” and eventually starts “working.” Pelican exits and completes the scene from off stage.

Child

magnifying glasses and the sun can burn your eye and they looked at their wounds healing and they would make up things to look at like toys with teensy seed designs on them and they would play. They got really good at sewing because they could make things very small. Even before history we were preparing for the invention of microchips, but they didn't need microchips and they didn't have pollution. They wanted to see things that were different than what they'd already seen. The way they started wanting this is when they realized that when you look through a magnifying glass things look different and somehow they got this

MEMORY PLAY

Pelican

I must tell you that many of these

Child's and Pelican's voices compete, overlap, fade in and out.

idea that if things that are already there can

designs are hundred of meters long, and

change because of what you see them with

were formed in a few seconds at night!

then the thing you see through changes

Some of the seed heads have been

what's already there, and so you can also change

Furthermore, as Pelican speaks, he comes to sound more and more like Instruction. Instruction appears to be stopped in its tracks by the co-optation of its voice.

ACT II

genetically altered; radionuclides have
things into different things that you don't know
formed in the top layer of soil; strange
about, using some other kind of invention that
sounds have been heard and recorded; and
you don't know about. They thought things that
unusual lights have been seen. And this is
don't exist could exist if they could figure out how
the tip of the iceberg! These formations
to make them, but also that they already existed
and designs can lead to excellent mind-
but they just didn't know how to make them yet.

MEMORY PLAY

stretching exercises. You may become

Like they were already there but they couldn't see

younger, thinner, richer and wiser from all

them. So let's pretend my house is your factory,

this. Just try to figure it out and you'll see.

okay? You go over there.

The child looks at Pelican. No Pelican. Instruction is standing there frozen. Fish passes carrying empty grocery bags.

Child

You know that neighbor, Pelican?

Fish

Open the door. It's been so pleasant since he's been away.

SCENE III

The child wakes up again in the same spot she woke up in before only the tone has altered to something less ghostly. Pelican carries a pair of skates.

Child

Are those mine?

Pelican

Wake up! No.

Child

Are they yours?

MEMORY PLAY

Pelican

I got them from a suicide. Do you want them?

Child

Maybe. I got a hexagonal block from a great grandparent who died once. I have lots of grandparents. And step grandparents. Do you?

Pelican

I don't know.

Child

You don't know or you don't remember?

Pelican

What's the difference? What you will remember of this conversation will be nothing like what went into its construction.

Child

It's okay to kill yourself, because it's your body.

Pelican

Well, usually in theater when somebody kills themselves you really go into it and find out all

ACT II

about them. You become tormented with their torments. You discover compassion even for the parts of yourself you don't like. It's an ordeal. This time it's just gratuitous violence. Nobody liked the guy very much; although he was kind of a kick, and he wasn't very human. His songs weren't any good but people enjoyed them anyway. Nobody's going to care are they? That's what's okay about it. He wanted to be an orator in a time when orators have almost ceased to exist. He was an artifact of another period like a . . . toy. Toys are a form of memory, more or less distant. Well, that just about wraps it up. I bet you don't have any parts of yourself you don't like, right?

Child

I'm not parts. Do you have parts?

Pelican

Sometimes I do things you like, right?
Sometimes I do things you don't like, right?
Well, those are parts. Sometimes I'm selling you a bill of goods because it's something I have a passion, a proclivity for. I like to shine. It's part of me. And sometimes I just say what I think and that's a part. It's what I live with. Parts.

SCENE IV

Rich and luxurious stages of life and trains of thought.

Instruction

A nascent land and all that it represents
maneuvers to replace us.

Reptile

I think I know you better than you know
yourself.

Instruction

How on earth could you say something like that?

MEMORY PLAY

Reptile

It is a form of pity. I have been imitating the capacity for pity in higher ups. I am learning from them.

Instruction

You have been following their instructions?

Reptile

Not exactly. I have been trying to observe the relationship between sexual passion and other emotions. Pity definitely has a deadening effect. I am learning how to use it to add to my repertory. Living off of memories of scents or patterns is a kind of grotesque religious imitation. Pity does not cause patterning, as far as I can tell.

Instruction

A pattern is something that pleases the eye.
(Looks at time piece). It is time for glass. Water.
And Fish!

Fish

I bet you would like to know what happened.

ACT II

Pelican

Oh, it's you. I didn't recognize you without your fish bowl.

Fish

That is a serious misinterpretation of a prior event: you are referring to a title of an exhibition. It was decorative and metaphorical. People like metaphor. They like to imagine everything differently than it is. I was part of a collectively conceived but impermanent elsewhere. It was as satisfying as a good joke.

Pelican

Is that really you?

Silence.

Pelican

You're not saying the right things. You're not even talking about yourself. There's something excruciating about your behavior. Are you trying to make me feel ridiculous?

MEMORY PLAY

Silence.

Pelican

You know, I used to want to ring my tube around your shining trunk and make you something special. And now, poof! I don't.

Pelican leaves and eventually returns.

SCENE V

In which Fish, Pelican, and Reptile all add to the child's story.

Fish

The child wanted the story to turn out right for everybody. She was attracted to flames. She loved gadgets and inventiveness. She wanted to feel safe and to participate in the construction of something powerful. She was gleeful in the face of explosions. Pretending to shoot was a pleasure. The child was building a radio in her garage when she heard a blast from a gun and another child call for help a long way off. She worried about the child she couldn't see. She believed that we should live in tribes. She

MEMORY PLAY

wanted to destroy what threatened her. Explosions were part of her memory just as the big bang is part of scientific theory. Indeed, the sensation of explosions and the concept of the big bang were joined in her mind. She also associated the big bang with a tribal life that was obscure to her own way of life but as close as the child could get to solving the world's problems on her own. The child's need to answer back was as powerful as the need to experience explosions as a conquest over enemies. There was a connection between the concept of an enemy and the destruction of the earth and a power that connected her to some other thoughts that lurked in the outskirts of her development.

Pelican

But I have always thought of myself as a happy creature.

Fish

Why do you think this story is about you?

Pelican

Now you've got it! You're starting to act like a professional.

ACT II

Fish

You are starting to let down your guarantees.

Fish exits; thus, identity becomes as fluid as memory.

Pelican

Let me continue where you left off . . . She wanted to destroy what threatened her: the landlord stirring in his iconic diapers; the obscure tones in adult speech; the little creeping surrogates of loss in display windows she could not own. She could neither own the display nor the window nor any part of the delectable presentation. Her father's hat collection. She wanted everything immediately to enter a cartoon. Of a child. In a laboratory creating ectoplasm in vials with a lab light shining on the words OBSERVATION. These are the thoughts that lurked in the outskirts of her development . . .

Reptile

Evolution, erotic, eugenics, enormous, egg, edge, engineer, entire, ebb, elf, Ed, effort, egregious, Eisenhower, electric, empire, endorse, epigraph.

MEMORY PLAY

Pelican

Oh friend, you're backtracking.

Reptile

I'm rehearsing for a job interview.

Pelican

Let me help you.

Reptile

Let me discard my thoughts. They are spotted with chinks of sand. Did you know that in More's Utopia diamonds had no value? This has been troubling me for a long time, because I remember having had that experience myself, but I can't remember my place of residence then. It was a time before anyone ever mentioned a word about presence and absence. An echo in the hills would fall through the floor, ignored. There were no records. There was a dampness that was as much sound as other matter. Nothing was conflated with libido and the females prospered without ceremony. In fact, I have a theory: ceremony is invented to fill the void of deceased prosperity.

ACT II

Pelican

I think that place you're talking about has a name that we're all familiar with.

Reptile

I think you are mistaken, but the feeling of its remoteness gives me an erroneous pleasure, a pleasure that lacks credibility I should say.

Instruction

The practice interview session will be over soon.

Reptile imitates Pelican.

Reptile

I think you should go someplace else. I'm still working on these numinous devices. Isn't there a place where we're all supposed to be at this time of day? Or is it always so crowded?

Instruction

It depends on what era you're talking about.

MEMORY PLAY

Reptile

This is somehow unnerving.

Instruction

Continue with your project.

Reptile

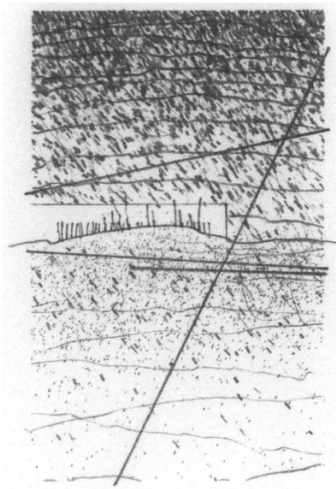
The evolution of the five star plan was an intentional device to upstage the onslaught of erotic satires that all young girls eventually stir in us in spite of the classes we have taken in eugenics. Our enormous eggs were the first casualties of this repression: each breathing its last under the lilt of a starry-eyed pout. Yes, the stars kept busy for some time, even at the curtains' edge where normally only engineers took lunch breaks in slackened heaps of bedding. The child was getting lost in language. Entire herds of shellfish announced themselves to her vulnerable ears, and as they trickled out to sea they hoaxed her with aberrant singing, ebbing and webbing without dotting the elf in their oceanic havoc. Ed told us once he had seen her from a distance but we suspect this was only an effort to enlist the egregious and static domination we inhaled along with our father's bromides in Eisenhower's last campaign. Have

ACT II

pity on Eisenhower echoes in my head every night before I drift off to sleep, a suggestion placed in my thoughts by a skilled marksman once thought to be memory itself. Still, I am optimistic on behalf of the child: I have every confidence she fought off all the hoaxes, even those I have personally grown fond of over the years, when she discovered electricity. A genius before the time of Edison, before the time of Franklin, her empire did not turn stale. It was endorsed even by those in my semi-literate family who could not read the warranty inside the dominion of her epigraph. The epigraph went like this:

When crawling out of your skin REMEMBER
ME.

Of course, the warranty said: life-time guarantee.



Epilogue

A bedtime story near a cash box out in the salt flats.

Fish and Child

Enough evolution had occurred that she could sip her water and economize at the same time. The earth was either erotic or she was. She said she wasn't little anymore because she was the scientist of her own body, conducting enormous experiments. She no longer agreed to eat eggs. On the edge of hospitality, on the outskirts of a homogeneous neighborhood, she introduced herself to an entire school of engineers as the next ebb in the flow of a theoretical mechanics. "But you are no bigger than an elf," they all shouted; therefore, she raised herself to her true height and countered, "How many of you have the first name Ed?" About two hundred and thirteen engineers raised their hands. It was a big effort to count them. It was here that they suffered an egregious lapse of courage: Eisenhower was no longer the head of state. "The electric empire endorses Aeschylus but there are other nameless types who are a kind of burr and will stick," she wrote as an epigraph to her latest book.