

TOM/LUTZ: TWO SCENES IN 1983.

A performer stands before the audience. Behind him is a screen onto which a video or presentation could be projected.

So, I've prepared an action to introduce this performance and, perhaps a little later, we'll try it with some music.

From his pocket he takes a small, white plastic bottle.

These are just ordinary eyedrops and what I do is simply remove the cap and place it in my mouth, tilt my head back and tug the flesh above my cheekbone to expose the eyeball and ease the application of the liquid. The head is tilted forward again, the eyes blink to displace any excess, I remove the cap from my mouth, replace it on the bottle and screw it tightly. I'm aware it might seem a little strange at first but my hope is that through repetition it will become normalised and habitual.

A pause.

So perhaps the best thing to do is just demonstrate that for you now.

As described, very slowly and deliberately, he enacts the application of the eye drops. This is repeated four times in total silence.

Ok so as you have probably grown familiar with that, I will continue. These are two scenes in 1983.

He makes a small, rapid gesture tapping the fingers of his right hand on his chest, brushing them across his chin then curling them into a fist with the thumb extended so that it points to his right.

A young dancer travels from America to begin working on a new directed ensemble piece in Germany.

He makes the same small, rapid gesture, this time with his left hand pointing to his left.

Imagine if you will a room in the *Elysee* hotel on Manhattan – I suspect not many of you will have stayed there, I certainly haven't – but it is occupied by a writer in his seventies, once boyish and handsome now somewhat portly and seedy. He mutters to himself, recalling:

His father taunts him as a sissy and calls him "Miss Nancy." His older sister, an imaginative muse to him, tragically retreats into schizophrenia until a prefrontal lobotomy in 1937 left her immured in a perpetual mental twilight. He reflects on characters for which he has been responsible and their journeys over a landscape that pulses with the strife-torn dualities of human nature.

He draws the great curtains, sits on the bed, stands and opens them again. Struggling with the handle of the balcony door he is finally able to turn it and step out into the night air.

His secretary sleeps in the adjoining room for whom, when he reflects upon him and the tasks and activities they have planned for the coming days, he feels intermittent pangs of lust. However his main preoccupation is his health, which is bad. And though it is bad he is convinced that it is much worse and maintains a good relationship with an unscrupulous doctor who keeps him in regular

supply with pills that sedate and activate him as his whim dictates in reckless disregard of his formal diagnosis of heart disease. In fact, as is routine, only a quarter of an hour earlier he took barbiturates and is feeling the first hints of synthesized well-being twinkling in his body. He wobbles a little as he inhales the night air and steadies himself on the railing as gentle little waves of contentment ripple across him. Returning to his room and closing the door he pours himself a large whiskey and...

He pauses momentarily, his brow furrowed in doubt.

well, let's say there's a record player in his room. I appreciate that this is unlikely given he is in a hotel room but, for the sake of what we're attempting here, let's say he has a record player. Sipping his drink he flicks through the small selection of LPs he asked his secretary to bring, selects one and, with the precision of his coordination lessening with the drink and pharmaceuticals, fumbles at the paper sleeve.

He think of his home in Key West where he spends much of the rest of the year and the rest of his collection is kept.

He performs the small gesture indicating the space to his right.

Let's say that now the dancer is aboard an aeroplane. It lands, they rehearse. His dressing room is waiting. Well, technically it is not his dressing room as he shares it with the rest of the company but it is waiting. It is very improvised, built from cheap, unpainted timber but, in accordance with the archetypes with which we're all familiar, the mirror is ringed with light bulbs burning brightly. The filmmaker is readying her camera and he stands before it. She checks and tests the tape recorder. A man and a woman perform a choreographed tussle in the preceding scene against which he is to be edited, though of course both she and he have no knowledge of that in this moment.

The gesture again to the left.

The record plays and in his swimming imagination he sees a strange image of himself in the future.

He queues a video that plays on the screen behind him. It is a very low quality, digitally compressed extract from Chantal Akerman's Un jour Pina à demandé (1983). Dancers from the Tanztheater Wuppertal stand together performing a solemn, stylized action of alternately wiping away imagined tears and clapping their hands together. This is accompanied by a version of the English folk song Froggy Went a'Courtin' sung in a falsetto. While this plays the performer repeats the eyedrop-applying action with which he opened the performance. This continues until the song finishes and the image of the dancers cuts to one of a man and woman embracing. The video image disappears altogether.

Though this image is familiar it distresses him a great deal and abruptly he lifts the needle from the record and, with his thumbs on the black, roughly removes the disk and replaces it with another. He takes long sip from his glass and lowers the stylus on the record. In his intoxication his attention is atomised. His eyes ache and he rubs them not noticing the the needle jumps impotently and fractionally to and fro in the dusty outer rings of the LP with the song never starting.

Gesture to the right.

In the dressing room he explains how, during the rehearsals, he was asked by the director to show her something he was proud of. He learned the party piece while in the United States and when he showed her it became a dance and she incorporated it in the work. The filmmaker cues the music out of shot and he demonstrates for the camera.

Gesture to the left.

He takes the bottle of eye drops from the writing desk and begins a ritual he enacts twice daily. As he stands staring up at the ceiling he is conscious that he sways and the barbiturates have made him warm and slow and happy. Then, just at the moment that he would tilt his head forward, remove the cap from his mouth his jaw momentarily and involuntarily slackens and the cap falls backwards across his lethargic tongue clogging the entrance to his trachea. He gags, grabs his throat and wheels desperately about the room to the soundtrack of the crackling stylus until he is no longer joined to the living.

Gesture to the right.

He stands in a field of carnations as part of the performance proper. His black suit is barely visible, indistinguishable from the backcloth, leaving his face and hands and collar and cuffs suddenly very visible, and he performs the dance again. I will show you this now and then I'll go and sit down and the performance will be over...

Gesture to the left.

...but first the writer's body falls, now comprehensively asphyxiated and there is a loud thump as a chair topples with him. This sound heard by his secretary though only investigated, too late, the following day when the corpse is discovered. But the impact of the writer's body and the chair on the carpeted floor, I need hardly add, is just enough to jerk the needle of the record player and so that it is in the first groove of the first song on the LP.

The screen behind him is filled with blue light as he queues more music. This time the song is 'The Man I Love' by George Gershwin performed by Sophie Tucker. As the singing begins he accompanies the voice performing the lyrics to the song in American sign language. A male voice can be heard on the recording quietly singing along. The song finishes and the performer is left head bowed, arms crossed over his chest. The song begins again, this time an audience can be heard on the recording laughing and applauding. The performer steps into the beam of blue light from the projector and repeats his sign language accompaniment. The song ends, the recorded audience applaud and he goes and sits down. The performance is over.