

THE NINETEEN SIXTIES: STORIES WITH ELEMENTS

The performer stands, illuminated by a projected image. This image depicts the photographed page of a book. The black square of an illustration is partially obscured by a hand, but a smaller rectangle within the black one, in its top left corner, depicts an African landscape and a herd of Thompson Gazelle running away from the camera in the direction of the horizon. The performer stands so that the area of the image occupied by fingers plays across the upper portion of his body.

This is a performance about the nineteen sixties and it's called "The Nineteen Sixties: Stories with Elements".

It begins: He has stayed up working late, distracted by the computer. Not drinking.

When he wakes he is startled by how alert he feels – no foggy head. There is daylight falling through the windows above him on to the bed, his body and duvet.

He thinks of how the birds would now be audible outside – in the park, the garden, the streets around the houses.

He rises and stretches. Seated on the wide, flat expanse of the wooden floor he grips one foot then the other, arcs his spine rolls his neck and thinks:

Antimony, arsenic, aluminium, selenium,
hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, rhenium,
nickel, neodymium, neptunium, germanium,
iron, americium, ruthenium, uranium,

Then there's breakfast which he drinks and eats. He pauses, reflecting. Insecurity rises within him and he pushes it down like a rubber ball beneath the surface of a pond. He knows an antidote to this would be more stretching. He can prepare for this evening – he likes the protocol and he knows it. He can do a half rehearsal, reiterating patterns and listen to the radio at the same time.

He thinks that she says "no" to everything and

bend knees, head to the left, Swingball™ arms, turn and walk and outstretch arms and fingertip circles. Back, crossing legs walk, turning right, leg comes round, hunch shoulders and down, chest out. Leg out behind, back of hand to forehead, point down and forehead to ground. Up and prayer hands, right knee up, down, horizon hands. Back of hand to lower back, elbow up reach round and touch.

europium, zirconium, lutetium, vanadium,
lanthanum, osmium, astatine, radium,
gold, protactinium, indium, gallium,
iodine, thorium, thulium, thallium,

Hand on elbow and do all the bit with the hand on the elbow. Hand on elbow hand on elbow. "S" ankle wiggle, toe twist, tip toes, ballet arms, ankles together, facing the back. Arms up together, down together, lean left. Arms out, aeroplane, zombie, pulsing left. Crouching, pulsing, standing, right leg and grip shin.

He was always impressed by her and particularly when she instructed him to do this - this action in particular. It is more taxing to execute than it might appear. Palm applies pressure to trouser leg and beneath trouser leg, beneath palm there is a scar that is the product of horseplay.

On the island in the Summer. This was momentary respite from the busy, foreign city he was visiting, the festival there, all the art and the high anxiety interactions with people who don't speak his language. They had crept beyond the bounds of the park which they had paid to enter, scrambled down to the water, made a careful balanced circumnavigation of railings set in concrete with the late afternoon sun on the sea and the few distant bathers visible on the expensive resort beach on the other side of the little bay. They swam, lolled on rocks, felt exhilaration.

When they are dried and dressed he's full of beans. The sun has begun its descent.

Back in the park, for a wager, from a friend, he jumps from standing onto a picnic table. Though his toes make their mark the soles of his pumps slide (perhaps they're wet on the underside) and he crashes down with his shins against the wooden edge. It's a shock and he feels pain but mainly he smarts from the wound to his pride (He always liked the parts in her work where the action is as if she holds a limb like its wounded - Hand on elbow) and doesn't look down. His friends gather to check on him, concerned, and he laughs and says he's alright. But one friend looks down, points her finger and says "oh my god!"

There is a perfect rectangle of white shin bone exposed - four centimetres by one point five - with an angry scarlet edge, just a little window into his leg. No blood. It really stops him in his tracks thinking that for the first time he has seen part of his inside that should manifestly not be on the outside. If he imagines touching it, placing his finger on the bone, it his brain begins to retreat from the world and shut it down so he concludes that it's probably not a good idea to think about that anymore. He also remembers that sometimes when a machine breaks down it exposes its mechanics.

yttrium, ytterbium, actinium, rubidium,

boron, gadolinium, niobium, iridium,

strontium, silicon, silver, samarium,

bismuth, bromine, lithium, beryllium, barium,

They ride down in a horse and cart like Mennonites in pious silent shock to the little island hospital. Here he is stitched up and it takes ten minutes. The zealous doctor back home takes the stitches out too soon and his leg scars.

During the show that night (the whole piece lasts for an hour and a quarter this part, where the focus is truly his, is just ten minutes or less) - crouching, pulsing, standing, raise right leg and grip shin.

She is smart. He thinks "I like these moments where I'm made to think about and find meaning in something totally unfamiliar very much. All the organising principles that I had been unconsciously subscribing to are thrown into question"

Such as earlier when above the dancers this image was projected.

He indicates the upper left portion of the image on the page of the scanned book on the wall behind him

holmium, helium, hafnium, erbium,

phosphorus, francium, fluorine, terbium,

manganese, mercury, molybdenum, magnesium,

dysprosium, scandium, cerium, cesium,

Africa. The photographer had tumbled from the jeep just to see. It's all grass, not sand like you'd expect, and the gazelle are just distant forms thundering toward the horizon. But the photographs have been taken and are later developed.

The photographs are great. One in particular. A great expanse of land with three trees in dark silhouette that look like umbrellas blown inside out. One Thompson gazelle at the bottom of the frame, its body arched, the others fleeing. It seems like there are two options in terms of how to read this image – either the photographer is among them, charging at the flanks of the beasts and one of the herd or equally, or in fact more probably, he is hunting them, in pursuit. The camera snaps at their heels. He is living vicariously through the eyes of a lion. With every electrical impulse of instinct the gazelle turned their backs and flee. He captures them. Reality does not explain itself.

This turning away causes a memory to take shape from the radio that morning during the stretching. A voice explaining:

“I was watching all the people running around and, you know, people would do things and she would pat them on the back and everybody's eyes were aglow and they were all trying together to make art and being very turned on by that which of course is classically the definition of this collaborative effort that is making theatre or making film. And I realised, sitting there in the grass watching them work, oh my god I turn totally against this. What popped into my head was, and I spoke to them about this, you know we've all seen cartoons where the little cartoon character is singing and dancing and he's so happy and all the little houses on the street develop smiling faces and sort of turn and look down at him and dance along with him and I thought, you know, when I've learned things, when I've been opened to the truth it seems to me: imagine that cartoon and here I am and all of a sudden all the houses on the street and the trees, instead of turning and smiling to me, they turn away from me and they bend away from me and somehow that is the personification of the kind of inside experience that I have found most valuable in my life.”

lead, praseodymium, platinum, plutonium,
palladium, promethium, potassium, polonium,
tantalum, technetium, titanium, tellurium,
cadmium, calcium, chromium, curium,

During the show that night – crouching, pulsing, standing, right leg up and grip shin – He is illuminated for an instant by the flash of a camera.

And at the end,

sulphur, californium, fermium, berkelium,
mendelevium, einsteinium, nobelium,
argon, krypton, neon, radon, xenon, zinc, rhodium,
chlorine, carbon, cobalt, copper, tungsten, tin, sodium.

Lie flat, sweep arm round head. Knees up, work round, onto feet, ballet arms round, point toe, walk looking down, sweep arms overhead, round to hip. Stop. Right foot back onto the ball. Hold. The end.

The projected image behind the performer changes as he steps out of the beam of light. The words “The Nineteen Sixties”, appears and the music of the Beach Boys fills the room. It plays out.