

SCRIPTINGS

#12

Exit THE AZTEC
GILES BAILEY

The stage is bare except for two xs on the floor made from coloured adhesive tape. There is a space of approximately three meters between them. On one x stands a male performer in nondescript attire: jeans, shirt, sweater. He begins.

Preliminary choreography for the magic trick:

1)The performer lifts each arm and tugging the cuff of his sweater demonstrates to the audience he has nothing up his sleeves.

2)In a workmanlike fashion he rolls his sleeves.

3) Holding up both hands in the attitude of surrender he rotates his wrists to show his hands back and front.

He stops abruptly and speaks.

He draws a folded piece of paper from a back pocket and unfolding it displays a poster baring the stage direction 'Smoke'.

Actually, I'm going to begin with this, by showing you something.

Maybe it's helpful to get your attention and to help you find me. OK, now that you've had a chance to see that we can start properly.

I wanted to propose an exercise to get us all in a similar place. It's OK, you don't have to do anything, I'm just suggesting that we imagine something together. Please don't feel any obligation to do so, I don't mean to be at all prescriptive. But for those of you interested in participating we can begin.

Paris, 1962. It's a hot and the extras and myself are seated in the set waiting for the technical issues to be resolved and the actors to take their positions. I'm aware that this is never going to be a career defining scene but I'm excited about opportunity non-the-less. Obviously having a speaking role at all is nothing to complain about and being dressed in the period costume does a lot for building anticipation to begin shooting.

(he indicates his attire)

The tension mounts. There is a call for silence, and then action.

He pauses, hands held apart, staring intently at his left palm then claps his hands together.

(immediately)

The three protagonists, two men and a woman, enter the busy café from a door to the left of the screen. It is daylight, maybe mid-afternoon and the camera follows them through a interior architectural screen that divides the room. They emerge into full view chattering loudly, move through the café and take a table next to me in the corner of the room. They sit. The woman smiles at the two men and turns to glance at me. I am seated to her left. I catch her eye and glance down at her bosom. The shot cuts and the faces of the woman and myself are framed tightly, she glances back at her companions who are absorbed in their discussion. The camera follows her. Tugging the sleeve of one of the men she asks for ten centimes for the music. He places it on the table, barely pausing in his conversation, she takes it, rises and glances down at me indicating that I should follow. The camera cuts to me and frames my head before following me as I rise and walk over to join her at the mechanical piano. Beginning to wind it she fixes me with a seductive smile and asks me for a cigarette which I willingly give to her. She takes it, lights it and I tell her that I'm attracted to her. Glancing back at her companions she turns to me conspiratorially, takes the cigarette from her mouth, inverts it and places it between her lips, so that the hot ash is still burning inside the cavity of her mouth. Inflating her cheeks and widening her eyes she blows a thin plume of white smoke out through the filter as if it were the funnel of an engine.

Taking my arm to lead me out of the café she asks if I can give her a bed for the night and tells me her

name. We leave. The camera follows us through the window until we are out of site and I leave the film forever.

Well that is not strictly the case, but this is the last time I appear on screen, I'm sure you get the idea.

Brief pause

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But if it's OK I'll do my part now:

He leave the first x and walks purposefully to the second.

It was a hot summer evening in 1972 or 73 and I was leaving the army recruitment centre in lower Manhattan where I'd been working. There was a beautiful dusty dusk light and you could really smell the city somehow. I'd been in the army since leaving school and had trained for a year and a half in anticipation of going to Vietnam with the special forces, but I didn't want to go. I realised that there was a possible get-out if I were accepted to train and replace the Green Beret chaplains that were leaving for Saigon and Khe Sanh. And I was accepted so I began what became four years of intensive theological training in a Franciscan seminary upstate. This made sense in some respects because I had come from a religious background but as time progressed it became clear that I was facing a number of contradictions and hypocrisies that I couldn't really ignore. I just saw corruption and greed that didn't correspond in the slightest with the teachings of St Francis that I was studying. I was extremely committed to the teaching there, becoming something of a zealot, and to such an extent that I no longer had an interest in the army or in Christ. I left, my training not even finished and ended up recruiting for the special forces in New York City.

So, on these evenings I would leave work and walk home or walk elsewhere to meet my lover at the time and often found myself walking past the space where the performances were happening and gradually became intrigued enough to venture in. And then I began to go every evening. Sometimes alone, sometimes with my lover and he and I would sit together in the darkness together watching the production played out and contorted nightly by the performers.

I was becoming conspicuous by virtue of my nightly presence there and the performers were wondering “who is that marine who keeps coming to see the performance?” and eventually we began talking and they told me I was to be a guest of honour and didn’t have to pay. Really it was my immersion in this performance that provided the queue for me to disentangle myself from the army and I begin working at the theatre as an administrator until, eventually, I stepped onto the stage myself.

He returns to the first x.

Again I would like to propose something that we could imagine together.

The performance is based upon an image from a very early example of narrative cinema. This image either opens or concludes the feature depending on the whim of the projectionist. It is not inserted in accordance with the linearity of the narrative, rather it proposes an emblem to arch over what we are about to see or what we have just beheld. So we see a mustachioed man in a broad-brimmed hat, standing motionless before camera. He raises his revolver, levels it at the lens (and the audience), pulls the trigger and fires.

He pauses, again starring at the left of his parted hands before clapping them together. He lets the sound of the clap reverberate before continuing.

I knew I wasn’t dead because immediately I recalled that you never hear the bullet that kills you because it travels faster than the sound of the explosion in the chamber of the weapon. But a searing white agony spread across my gut and the world began to fog. My knees buckled as my head swam and my hands felt wet.

Breaking off and indicating each.

Knees, head, hands.

He shows the audience his hands.

Coiled on the floor in excruciating pain it felt very, very cold.

He walks to the second x.

And when I get up and the director says to me:
“wow this is really great work, you could teach
classes on how to take a bullet”

*Stepping forwards so that he stands between and
slightly down stage of the two xs.*

But a challenge comes from the audience and
derisive voice is heard passing scornful comment
on my accent. So naturally I respond, “well I don’t
have an accent and even if I do my pronunciation is
perfect”

*While speaking he reaches into his breast pocket and
withdraws a small, black dictaphone. He presses
play and we hear a distorted recording of his voice
intoning the Marseillaise in his strong English
accent.*

Allons enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!
Contre nous de la tyrannie
L’étendard sanglant est levé,
(A pause)

*Placing the dictaphone on the ground before his
feet he raises his hands to perform 3) of his opening
choreography.*

Entendez-vous dans nos campagnes
Mugir ces féroces soldats?
Ils viennent jusque dans nos bras
Égorger nos fils et nos compagnes!

*4) With his left palm held before the audience he
moves his hand in front of his body then meeting it
with his right hand continues its motion right. He
repeats this action until the song is complete.*

Aux armes, citoyens,
Formez vos bataillons,
Marchons, Marchons!
Qu’un sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons!
Nous enterons dans la carrière...

Picking up the dictaphone he returns to the second x.

On one occasion we were performing in Philadelphia and I fell off the back of the high platform. During the last section, the destruction of the records, my chair went over and I fell over backwards and there was this wild moment when I was in midair. It was dark, black, so I couldn't even tell how I was going to land. And as I was flipping through the air saw the other performer on top of his record player. It looked like he was sitting on it. And that was a very vivid moment of knowing what we were doing and the nature of the records and recording and memory. When I landed, I broke my arm, and the director stood right up and she said, "Obviously the play is over now." The other performer didn't even stop performing. He told me later that he looked around and he couldn't believe that his eyes were giving him the correct information. 'Cause that's not how it's supposed to happen. And it turned out there was a doctor in the house and he took me to hospital.

He pauses and walks to the first x.

Enter a woman. She takes the lit cigarette from her mouth, inverts it and places it between her lips, so that the hot ash is still burning inside the cavity of her mouth. Inflating her cheeks she blows a thin plume of white smoke out through the filter as if it were the funnel of an engine.

We ask her how she is. "And how is...?"

Feigning forgetfulness he clicks his fingers to fill a pause.

It was fine for two weeks. But I deceived him so I could buy him a great big Meerschaum pipe carved with the head of Vercingétorix... His dream! He found out. Jealous, didn't trust me. Locked me up for three weeks, they called me the prisoner of Cholet. I was flattered at first, then got fed up. So I hopped it through the window with a ladder belonging to a house-painter - who I seduced. We set up house together, but I got the fidgets.

A fellow promised me a fortune. i followed him, went of with him, got as far as Cairo where I found myself in an establishment... yes, an establishment where I acted the virgin. The place got raided by the police, and seeing my age, they put me in the care

of some nuns. I met an English man who wanted to save me. I lived with him in a villa on the Red Sea, with a tennis court and horses. There I got a letter from my village: my cousin was going to marry a girl from the neighboring town.

I remembered the cousin. I liked him. So suddenly, wham! Delayed action, I'm head over heels in love. I dropped everything and went back to the village to break up the marriage. I married him. After three months, I was fed up... so I came back to Paris. I met an undertaker, nice man. I chased him but he didn't want to know. My husband divorced me for desertion. So finally the undertaker married me, convinced at last. We make a perfect couple but we've no children. He's the only man I can't deceive... because he doesn't leave me the time or energy.

Finally I'm writing my memoirs for the European edition of the Sunday Times Magazine... and there we are!

Again he withdraws the dictaphone from his breast pocket, presses play and we hear Jeanne Moreau sing "Le Tourbillon". He places the dictaphone on the ground between the xs and exits.