

april 1993 sf. ca.

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(guardian of joe ozu estate)

in the dominion of night

Featuring

joe ozu and the new orientals

(A spoken word play with music. Joe and the Orientals wear black suits with opened collar white dress shirts, loosened ties, suspenders, black wingtips. Joe, unshaven, stands at the mike holding sheets of paper which he reads from. Behind him the New Orientals: a string bass player, drummer on brushes and a horn player. The New Orientals are very 50's bohemian with a 90's sense. A kind of neo romantic post yellow meditation.)

Let audience in about 7 minutes before curtain. Stage is in half light. There is a large white sheet draped over the outline of a man's body in the center of the stage.

Several TV monitors positioned around the stage on mountings of different heights flicker on. A study of a man sleeping. The camera observes him at various angles. Looking at his feet, his armpit, how his hand is bent inwards in a peculiar angle as it is broken. Silence. Study of the sleeping man continues. Only the deep breathing, occasional snoring. Lasts 5 minutes.

During the course of the video the outline of the man under the white sheet I gradually brought up in light.

End of video the screens go to the sign off signal, then to snow. We hear loud hiss.

Mr. Moto and the Orientals stroll in and position themselves at their instruments. They start to play. Moto reaches down and rips off the sheet, exposing a sleeping Joe Ozu.

Joe slowly sits up. Then slowly stands. Eyes still closed. Struggles to open them. Stares ahead.

Joe wears black thick framed glasses with his hair standing straight up. Like a Japanese businessman who stuck his hand into a light socket instead of the soap. An oversized black suit drapes on his body. No shoes or socks.

(Darkness. We hear 50's sounding night club music. Lights slowly brought up on the new orientals playing. Joe strolls on.)

Joe: I awoke

I awoke from a deep sleep

I awoke from a very deep sleep

Into a cold and silent room

Of colorless walls

Of sightless windows

And a void so empty with stillness

As if god had inhaled...

And left.

(Pause)

Or maybe I wasn't awake

I did not awaken from a deep sleep

But instead had just fallen into a...

Oriental: Dream

Joe: What?

Oriental: Dream.

Joe: What?

Oriental: Dream

Joe: (overlapping) Dream. yes...

I was just dreaming I was awake

When in fact I was falling

Deeper and deeper

Into this coded world

Of inversion and blackness

Where everything that seemed

Was really not?

Where the light of day was merely

A guise

For darker more base instincts

A thistle

Of infected shadow

Masked by the face

Of dream's reversal?

(Pause)

I am confused

Am I awake imagining I am dreaming?

Or am I dreaming I am awake when I am really...

Oriental: Asleep.

Joe: Shut up, let me think, let me think...

(Looks around)

(Pause, then with forced certainty)

I am awake. I am awake. I am awake...

Okay? Alright? Yes...

Then, if that is the case

What had awakened me?

She, the woman, the girl...

Or the work that I have yet to...

That I have promised to finish yet...

Or maybe it is the bigger questions

The ones that sit just beneath the surface

Reaching up through the cracks of sleep

With boney fingers...

'The terror of what I had not done with my life?'

'The work, the big one, the masterpiece that might go unwritten?'

(We hear the ticking of a clock)

3:30 in the morning...

This is the hour of death

Of waking death

When the mind plays

Tricks on itself

Turns on you

As if your own mind

Had its own separate mind --

(Hands suddenly grab at his throat, strangling him)

You choking you --

'I want to die, I don't want to die'

'Take me, no I want to take you'

'Why are you making me do this?'

'I'm not making you do anything!'

As you sink

Double bound

Deeper and deeper

Into the black hole of night...

(Orientals do a rhythmic talk. Ticking fades.)

Orientals: Into the night

Into the night

Into the night

Into the night

Orientals: (overlapping) Into the night

Joe: Am I writing it?

Orientals: Into the night

Joe: Or is it writing me?

Orientals: Into the night

Joe: Or does it even matter...

Orientals: Into the night

Joe: If you can't fucking write anyway!...

(Long silence. The phone rings. Joe stares at it, it continues to ring, getting louder and louder. Joe covers ears, suddenly stops.)

Should I get up?

Should I lay here?

Should I grab my cock and dance the night away?

Some beautiful

Dark skinned Asian woman

With hands and mouth

So sincere

So sincere

So sincere...

That I might live forever

Inside my head of dreams?

(Mood changes, music - romantic)

This night

This night of flight

This night of terrifying ache

For things unspeakably simple

To sip warm milk

From your cupped hand

Count the dewy hairs

On your nape

Trace the boundaries of your skin

From the tip of your big toe

To the highest part of your inner thigh

With this finger...

To sit cross-legged

Face to face

Mouths so close but not touching

To feel the heat from each others' lips

Inhale your breath

A taste so sweet

And full of

I am reminded

Of the first nectarines

Of summer

On my 15th birthday

Lying beneath their weighted boughs

Viewing the moon

Through round, sweet smelling fruit

And the embrace

And the embrace

A mixture of pain and driven pure, pure grace

To hang naked by fingernails from sheer cliffs

Gravity and hail raking you downwards

And legs narcotic and muscular

Around calves and loins
Around necks and ankles
My fingers, your mouth
Your breasts, my lips
Sucking, entering
Gripping, pulling
Tighter and harder
Stretching our bodily skins
Till we split open
Like over ripe melons
Spilling seeds and juice
Again and again
Till silence drapes us
In its mood of quiet
And found
In a tangle of sheets
And soiled tissues
We hang lifeless and glowing
Impaled
On some forgotten star cluster

At the edge of the universe

On display

A whimper, a sigh

A very, very slow death

(Pause. Reaches for a pitcher and drinks water.)

I get up, throw water on my neck and face

Wipe my under arms with a stale towel

Pick up a shirt off the ground

Throw on a tie, I always wear a tie

And step out...

(Music changes. Following talk-sung. Orientals do rhythmic back-up.
Optional: Female operatic singer to do operatic scat vocals over the basic
musical form.)

Orientals: (overlapping) Into the night

Joe: Where humanity roams like oozing blood

Orientals: Into the night

Joe: From a cut so deep so ancient

Orientals: Into the night

Joe: Its source forgotten, only the continual flow

Orientals: Into the night

Joe: From an open wound

Orientals: Into the night

Joe: And pain, and pain, and pain

Oriental: Into the night

Joe: It cries, 'I am the disease, I am the cure'

Oriental: Into the night

Joe: Then wraps you in its outlaw secrets

Oriental: Into the night

Joe: 'Anything is possible, anything can be done'

Oriental: Into the night

Joe: 'And no one will see, no one will know...'

My body begins to buzz

It's coming alive

It's long after the midnight hour

The innocents and civilized

Are fast asleep

Babies suckle on mothers' breasts

Children nestle in their fathers' arms

In the safety of home, sweet, home

And even the white collar thieves

Impeccably dressed pimps of commerce

Who trade in ducats of human hands and eyes

Have long since passed
Into cellular sleep
Leaving only the night
This night
This night of addiction and toys
Where skinny dark sphinxes
With razor haircuts
And saber tooth thighs
Meet on street corners
In the wake of
Tall crumbling buildings
Exchanging chemical sex
Begetting faceless
Nameless
Crimes
Visited on us
At random without logic
We are all victims
Victims, victims...
My heart's beginning to race

Beating out of control

I'm having a hard time catching my breath

I suck in cold icy air

It burns...

I need a drink

I need one bad

I stumble into a bar

A few coins, a few bills

What's left of my advance

Tossed out on the counter

Rattling, cold and echoless

'Double cognac and a water back'

I wheeze

I must get in better shape

Take out a package of smokes

Fumble, trying to get one

To sit still in my shaking hands

Where has the time gone? Huh?

(Hear the ticking clock. Louder.)

It's always too late. It's never enough...

'Okay, I'll get it done, I just need a little more time

Maybe if you advanced me a little more...

Then, you'll see, but right now...

It's not coming out, it's not...'

I can't wait, I scoop up my money

Hurry out into the streets

The cold, the hunger

My lungs burn, my gut aches...

(Woman appears in shadows. A shaft of light gradually brought up
on her hand.)

I watch my breath

Blooms, frozen white moving blooms

Forming odd pictures...

Like hands

Hers

Opening

I remember

It is so vivid in my mind

I play it over and over

It is there and yet

- I must confess this -

Maybe it is not

Because I no longer know if the picture

I have in my head is the one that really

Happened or only the one that has come to be

Because, maybe, I have played it over

And over so many times wanting it to be

In a certain pleasant, almost romantic circumstance

Adding to it here, taking away a little there

That what really happened and what I now remember

To have happened might be two different things

Altogether leaving me to wonder

Which it is that I am

Now reliving

The truth or the lie?

The truth made to sound like a lie?

(Optional: Woman lit, slowly walking across the stage. Doing, operatic vocals.)

She, the woman, the girl

Is walking

It is a purposeful, though slightly awkward walk

She appears to be looking for something
As if she has momentarily lost contact
With a friend and that without this friend
Her sense of being is off
That somehow she is not quite comfortable without
This missing relationship
And that though she appears confident and whole
And in no way needing of such a support
In fact it allows her to negotiate the world
To appear, pretend to be comfortable though
I see this is an act and she is suffering
On the verge of collapse unless someone, something
Can rescue her from her solitary
Imbalance but no one else can
See her desperate
Predicament only I, yet I am so unworthy of knowing
This woman's vulnerability
She begins to fall
In a swoon
And I

Unsuspecting yet observant
And knowing of her secret pain
Pulled into the orbit
Of her intimacy
As she tumbles into my arms
Or maybe it was only a touch
Of my hand and it was quickly pulled away
And perhaps some might say it was only
The stone that set her foot at an odd angle
Not the existential terror of a tormented
Soul struggling through daily passage
Causing her to lose her balance momentarily

For a moment our eyes meet
What do I see?
Fear, please do not have fear
Or is it intrigue?

She turns and hurries away
In a wake of mysterious female smells
For a moment I am faint, delirious
Who was she waiting for?

A sister, best girlfriend, a lover?

And the feel of her skin on mine

And her eyes

Wanting to fall in

Die a thousand times

Bathe in their glory

Should I follow her? Find out where she lives?

The thought of never seeing her again

Feels as if my life were coming to an end

Surely god would not allow this chance encounter

This glimpse into splendor

Without some grander plan in mind?

(Joe turns away. Moto takes over. Musical interlude. Transition into a rhythmic, chaotic percussive sound. Joe's body seems to be controlled from the inside out, jerking, flailing about. Transition. Joe steps up to the mike again.)

Where am I?

I am running, running...

At my heels

A large and gaping beast

Of unknown origin and familiar eyes

Uttering things

Foaming at the lips

Pointing at me with sawed off fingers

'They are not like us' the whispers

'They neither live in light nor darkness'

The bat soars

Above the earth's gravity

Below the ceiling of ice...

Let me in! No, let me out!

Let me in! God, let me out!

(Change in tone, tempo)

The landscape is changing

Hypodermic voodoo trees

Jut up from the frozen streets

Psychological bounty hunters

Of alien whiplash

Roam the city at will

In herds large and ominous

Milky white secretions that stick to feet

Ooze like brown tar from the earth

I am running slower now
I look down, I'm on a path
Strange growths, molds like amoebas
Contract and expand under foot
Roots like anacondas
Twist and writhe
Rotting mushrooms as big as trees
Line the paths, torn umbrellas
Parachutes of decay
Their odor the smell
Of life and death's coupling...
Then, and without warning
I come upon a large darkened pool of water
Silence, only the sound of my breathing
In the middle I see something
At first I cannot make it out
Then I am filled with emptiness
Like the face of something in the distance
Precious and remembered
Turning away...

It is a new born baby

Floating face down

Unmoving

In these still, still waters

(Silence)

Why must these things exist?

Why must they?

There is a rumor that it

Was abandoned by his mother

Another it was

Drowned by her father

Another that families

Of the family could not stop

Looking into the mirrors of self

Absorption, imprisoned by the flowers of

Vanity, the baby left, like some piece

Of litter, to live amidst

The wind, the rain, the night...

(Pause)

A voice beckons to me

From an unlit doorway

Like the sound of a cricket

Become human

Sweet and appealing

Words drift into my head...

"Somewhere

A train leaves for a distant moon

Large tankers dock at a port of continuous light

And messages

Forged in hearts of small birds

Gathered with spoons from lips of tiny fish

Carried on shoulders of silent, dying monks

Are passed eyes to eyes

By mysterious blue men"...

Where does this thought come from?

What does it mean?

My hands begin to twitch

I hurriedly reach into my coat pocket

Fumbling with a crumpled note pad and a pencil

I am inspired, I can write again, I begin...

"I awaken from a..."

"I awaken..."

"I..."

Then nothing

The twitching stops

My hands now filled

Only with air and shame

(Remembers something. Music transition into a rhythmic, percussive build.)

I am late

So very late

But for what?

If I run fast enough

If I run like the wind

Maybe I'll get there

Then I realize it has nothing to do with

Moving but rather the intensity of the intention

To get there

That in fact it's better not to move because

Where I want to go

To

Doesn't have a physical space

So you can't run there anyway

You have to...

My body begins to contort

It wants to make a shape

Yes, like this...

Then if I wave my arms like this

With as much emotional intensity

And pointed, directed, committed focus

Of wanting to get to this place...

Which in fact is not a place

At least not a place

That can be found

In physical space and time

Maybe...

I...

Will...

Arrive...

(The roar of an engine, car lights flash across the stage. Interrupts his peculiar gesticulations.)

The sweep of violent headlights

A car barreling down the street

Suddenly

It swerves to hit me

I jerk out of the way

My body crashing into the wet gutter

I hear laughter, fingers pointing in disdain

As the shiny sleek Mercedes

Streaks by

I'm about to yell

A string of four letter obscenities

Then think better of it

I get up

Wipe myself off...

"Fuck you, you goddamn fucking assholes!"

(Beat)

There, I feel better

(Catches his breath, adjusting clothes)

Straighten my tie

I always wear a tie

I could use a new suit, too

Maybe I'll stop over

At Wilkes-Bashford's later

I reach into my coat

And pull out --

A small bottle of cognac

I didn't know it was there...

Hallelujah, my luck must be changing

(Takes a gulp. Thinking.)

Maybe I should go out

To where they're rebuilding

The 280 freeway

For a little after hours

Post earthquake thrill

What, you haven't done this?

At night it's so cool, man

You walk out on this deserted

Stretch, no one there

And you're walking on it

Big, wide, banked so you feel
All off balance and you're walking
On this fucking freeway
It's night, all the stars, all alone
And then...
It stops
It just stops in mid-air
The whole goddamn freeway
This giant wing-span of a cement eagle
Sheared off at the elbow
And you're standing at the brink
Standing there, looking out
Suspended
How many light years
Above the ground
City lights twinkling below
On this long tongue
Of asphalt
That just stops
Incomplete, undone

A moment of becoming

Frozen in time...

It begs so many questions

Where was it going?

What happened?

A giant comet?

It's like finding those woolly mammoths

With food still in their stomachs

Or those people in Pompeii

Caught in the shower of the volcano

While eating dinner

Or, or like those shadowy human imprints

Left on the ground after the bombing

Of Hiroshima and Nagasaki...

Or...

Maybe I should do something a little more upbeat, huh?

Maybe I should go out to the water

To the pier

Listen to the foghorns

Sing to the fishes

Let the fog

Surround my body like

Like some favorite old coat

Let it sit on my head

Like a cloud of thorns

Maybe I'll jump in the bay

Hell, I'm already soaking wet

From the gutter

Do the backstroke

Take a bath

Pick up El Nino

And drift to some tropical

Island

Feeding on bobbing coconuts

And mangos...

A beautiful red-haired woman

With her man

Getting out of a...

"Shinny, black Mercedes"?

(Smiles mischievously to the audience)

They're walking towards me

Her hair is so red

So red

Like a forest fire

I imagine her without her dress on

I'm getting hard

I imagine him without his clothes on

I start to giggle

They're staring

Obviously unaware

That the joke is on them

I refuse to move over

They're coming right towards me

I'm still giggling

Here they come

Here I come....

They part

Right down the center

Like the Red Sea

Like alfalfa's haircut

Her man says something to me

What, an insult?

The angle of my eyes?

The color of my skin?

He reaches into his coat pocket

What, like he has a piece?

Like he's going to put me out of my misery

With his fingers or something?

I turn and follow them for a bit

Making funny smacking noise with my lips

'Yeah, like shoot me, mister'

'My gun is bigger than yours'

She pulls him on ahead

Her insolent smile is enough

And I, bowing majestically

In answer to her smirk

As they disappear

Into their dark, nasty secrets

This is fun

I howl at the moon

"Ahooh"!...

Take out a cigarette

Begin humming a nameless tune

And continue to wander

Through this forest of fog

And drifting human weeds

I am hungry. I realize I haven't

Eaten in what? Hours? Days?

What can I afford?

I rifle through my pockets

Checking my change again

Perhaps a bowl of juk

Or a doughnut at the all night place

On Clement and...

(Sipping cognac, thinking)

Or maybe I should call her...

No, no, that would wake her up

And she would be angry

And I would be afraid

To say it was me and she
Would wonder who it was
Perhaps scared that some
Maniac had gotten her number
But she knows me
I mean not well and not by name
But if you were to ask her
'Do you remember the man who helped
Her in the park that day?'
I'm sure she would say
'Yes, I remember him, quite well, thank you'.
But probably not well enough
To call her in the middle of the night
That would be reserved for her mother
Or childhood friend or lover...
Maybe if I just rang and listened to her voice
Sleepy and warm
Returning from her nightly
Walk through pillows and clouds
And if I didn't say anything
She would simply assume it was a malfunction

In the service
Think nothing of it
Roll over
And go to sleep again, not remembering that I had
Visited her as a lover might
In her most intimate state
And perhaps during the day
While on a break a thought might drift into mind
A thought without face or shape
Of something vague and now recalled
And perhaps a small curious smile
Will appear on her lips
In between a sip of coffee
And I will know that it was me, my presence
That brought her this small moment of joy...

I go to a phone
Only I don't have any change
I just had some...
It must have fallen out
Shaken loose from my pockets

When I was knocked to the ground
Or as I was trying to get to that place
Which really isn't a place
In physical space and time
But we already went over that...

I'm beginning to feel something
An urgency
A need that's beginning to grow
Take on a life of its own

I mean, before I thought of making the call
Before I had the idea to make the phone call
There was no thought of it, no idea of it
It didn't even exist

But now, now that I know I can't make it
Now that I know it is impossible to make it...

I have to get control of myself
Get a handle on the situation
This calls for a drink...

(Reaching for the bottle)

I hear a sound

Coming from the shadows
The rustling of clothes
A moan, like a small hungry animal
The slapping of skin against skin
I can barely make them out
It's them, the couple
The red haired woman and her man
Her coat open, her legs spread
His hips pushing up in between

I know I shouldn't bother them
I know I really shouldn't bother them
I mean, not at a time like this
But you see, you see
I have to make this call
I really do
I know it's not an emergency
Not like a real one
With someone dying, someone bleeding
But it feels like one
It really feels like one

'Cause unless I can talk to her
Feel her voice on my ears
I don't know, I don't know
My tongue is getting dry
My mind beginning to race
In a continuous loop
Of need, of wanting, of having to
And just maybe
Just maybe they might have the change
So I can make the call...
'Excuse me, excuse me
I need to talk to this
Woman, I mean she's not my girlfriend
But you see it's something
That I just have to --'

They're surprised
She screams
'No, no, remember, I'm the guy
You almost hit --'
He's fumbling to grab

Something in his coat pocket

'I'm sorry about earlier

About the thoughts I had

Of you with no dress on

And you with no pants on

That's why I was giggling

But my mind, sometimes my mind --

No, no, you don't need to do that

I just want to ask you one thing

Keep doing what you're doing

Don't stop on my account

I just want to ask you for some

Change 'cause I have to call

This woman '--

(Gun shot. Joe stares. Then falls back onto the floor. Lit in a round pool of light lying flat on his back.)

(Long silence)

Joe: The sound is enormous

No, it's very small, no it's very big

No, it's both, the sound is both

Huge and small

And it's wrapping me in its
Soft, milk warm hands
It's like this funnel, yes
That is the shape
Of the sound and it
Swallows me up
From both ends
At the same time
Drawn into
Both ends
Big and small
In these hands of warm milk
Like my mother's as I suckled
Her breast
A sound
Big and small
Little and huge
In its mouth
In this funnel
Carrying me

Sucking me

Inhaling me

Down, down, down...

(Through the following the round pool of light gets brighter and brighter and tighter and tighter. The floor panel upon which he has fallen begins to rise up as if it were on a hinge so that he is gradually brought upright. By the end Joe should be standing straight up, a very hot pin spot just on his face.)

(Music change)

I see her face

The look in her eyes

As she turns to go away...

So many things I meant to do

To write

Perhaps in spring

Yes

When the winds become warm

Large bodies of ice begin their thaw

Rivers surge, geese return

Intense fingers of green push through

And the air is filled

With that wondrous murmur

Of budding life

I am sitting in the kitchen

Of my parent's old house

I am a child again

There is a cup of tea

That sits before me

Hot, green tea

Like my father drinks

Before he goes to bed

I reach down and take a sip

I am reminded of how

Simple and yet deeply satisfying

This drink is

I hear the sound of a lid rattling

As a fragrant smell surrounds my senses

A steamy pot of rice on the stove

My mother is cooking

I immediately feel content and full-bellied

Like I have eaten three big bowls

(Of my mother's best offering.)

I take another sip
The complications that
Have imprisoned my body
With each year of its existence
Begin to unlock themselves
Fall away like old skin
Inside my head an ancient movie begins
To unspool itself
'How did I get here?'
'What time is it?'
'Where am I going?'
'Who am I?'
Questions that are no longer questions
Pass before me like the whisper
Of lost wind

I walk down a corridor
Towards their bedroom
My body feels so light
I wonder if I will float away

It is sunset

The room appears like a rich

Sepia-toned photograph

Fading golden hues escape through windows

And there

In this gathering darkness

In this closing of the day

I see them

Mother and father

They are making love

I watch them for a moment

They are making me

I slowly back away

I don't want to disturb them

Young, beautiful, embracing life

This is how i choose to remember them

I turn to walk outside

I ignore the door

I pass through the wall

Amazing...

I notice that the sun has gone

It is almost dark

Only the smells of night

And the sound of a distant television

Coming from a house down the block

I long to run and shout

As i did as a child on these streets

Crew cut hair, skinned knees

And boundless hope

But i don't have the strength

I can feel bits of me

Uncoiling

Leaking away

In small rivers

Out of my body

I am dying

This i know

I look up at the night sky

Filled with stars and distant, unattainable wish...

I am waiting for something

A voice?

Yes, a voice...

Large

Grand

Eloquent

Arresting me

Fully and exact

A mysterious self-penned story

Taken from a hidden ledger

That has been

Documenting my life

In words beyond utterance and logic

A home movie

That begins to play

Beneath the fluttering of my eyelids...

There I am as a new born baby

My toes begin to tingle

There I am as an old decrepit man

As if they are on fire

There I am as a... Big white male

But fire without pain

There I am as a middle aged black woman

It spreads up my body

There I am as...

The flame is growing

Dissolving my mask

Engulfing my heart

I am being absorbed

Into this perfect...

I am being obliterated

Into this perfect...

I am being extinguished

Into this perfect...

Immolation

Of nothingness...

"Somewhere

A train leaves for a distant moon

Large tankers dock at a port of continuous light

And messages

Forged in the hearts of small birds

Gathered with spoons from the lips of tiny fish

Carried on shoulders of silent, dying monks

Are passed eyes to eyes

By mysterious blue men"

Where does this thought come from?

What does it mean?

My hands begin to twitch

I am inspired, I can write again

I begin

"I awaken from a..."

(Black out. Silence.)

(End of play)

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