



From *Reconstructing (the Temple) from Memory*. Written, performed and directed by Michael K. Meyers, Organic Theatre, Chicago, 1986. Publicity photo by Kim Tonry.

## Story Pieces and Performance Fragments

Michael K. Meyers

### WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER

Wouldn't it be better to have a third hand, a wooden spoon, a tight collar and pants cuffs that drag on the sidewalk. And wouldn't it be great to have a dog that whines and barks all night. Wouldn't it be nice to have a short bed and a ceiling so low you have to duck. And wouldn't it be funny to have two left shoes and a long way to go.

Okay then; so wouldn't it be interesting to have a rat living on your porch. A large gray rat that evidently came in through the window you had left open just a crack. And you always wondered, from that day on as you fed and watered the rat, "How can a rat that size fit through such a tiny crack?"

### IN TIMES TO COME

In times to come no one will cut grass, eat cheese, smoke wood, eat goat, inhabit a cave, write memoirs or have an opinion about sports, politics or the weather. They will be able to make water in times to come. It will turn out to be easy--like the chart. CO<sub>2</sub>. That's it. Air in. Water out. That's all it will take. Stuff it in, tear it apart, shake it up, put it back together under a lot of pressure and you have it. Distilled water.

In times to come men will take to wearing whistles. At night everyone will keep large pots of water boiling on the stove. In times to come if you awaken in the middle of the night by a shriek you will sit up straight in your bed and cheer.

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Michael K. Meyers is a performance writer and artist with roots in painting and drawing. He has presented work extensively in the U.S., England and Israel, in such places as the Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions and the Tel Aviv Museum. His fiction has appeared in the *New Yorker*. Presently he lives in Chicago and heads the Time Arts program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

## THE GUY NAMED RAY

The scene: Some boys and girls, shredded candy wrappers, dog turds; new and old, and the head from a stuffed monkey which someone has planted on this guy named Ray's hood ornament which Ray finds when he comes home late from a game drunk and happy because his team has won. So being drunk, and happy, and without a thought, but with a bat in his hand, Ray takes a swing at the stuffed head. But he misses and bashes in part of his hood. To Ray this is also funny. So he swings again and takes out one of the headlights. By then a crowd of kids has gathered.

A drunk's mood is delicate and Ray's mood, standing there in front of his bashed in car, with that monkey head leering at him, suddenly turns and he gets mean and takes another swing--but now Ray is aiming at the circle of kids which has formed around him and his car. This time he misses everything and that absence seems to throw off the delicate gyro of his equilibrium and down he goes on the concrete in front of his bashed in car.

So Ray is just laying there in torn wrappers, dog turds and splinters of glass from his headlight when he starts singing. Ray is singing a song from the Prince movie *Purple Rain* which he has memorized by singing the song over and over along with the tape recorder. Singing makes Ray happy again until anger creeps up on him fast and he pokes out with his bat at one of the kids who has placed himself within range.

The kids easily dance back and one kid, a bigger kid who is supposed to be someone's cousin, starting from down the block drives his bike over Ray's chest. It's quick. The "thump, thump," the swish of the bat in air and the Prince song, in a gush, singing itself out of Ray.

## WHEN THE MUSIC STOPS

The music stopped and a man's voice came through the speakers. "Rhythmically," he said, "in the morning, around ten thirty, if you can find the time to stick your head out of the window, assuming you face, north of west, you have a chance, one in five, of seeing a gulf of Muck Bellies or Ring Tops beside the remote chance, one in two hundred fifty, of catching a glimpse at a Geeker."

No one stopped shopping.

The man continued: "Land values being what they are investments in say, Lop-lops and Gro-vras aren't the bad idea they once would have been and anyone would feel proud to have a bunch stuffed into their portfolio."

Uninterrupted shopping continued.

"Now for the good stuff," he said. "Rising up, yeast like, the class of '99 is everywhere making a pigsty of the entire floor and even if the elevator zips past sardine smell is everywhere!"

The pace of shopping increases. Pockets of frenzied action form around those kiosks which have been spotted with an amber light.

"Could it be that when it comes time to repeat all of this we may discover that there isn't enough memory left on the disk and we may have to make do with groping again?"

Some shoppers throw their packages down escalators.

A woman's voice now soft and soothing came through the speakers. She says, "*The Hall of Fabulous Opportunities* has been relocated to the back of the magenta-colored real estate office on the upper level."

Some shoppers, evidently misunderstanding the woman's announcement, dash for the exit disrupting the bathing suit segment of the beauty pageant.

"Announcement." It's the man *and* woman speaking together. "Terry Merchant has a new name!" An audible gasp from shoppers who in near unison shout toward the speaker closest to them.

"*Will someone please tell us his new name!*"

### EATING GRASSHOPPERS

Could I get used to eating grasshoppers, or walking around naked, or drinking water from a spoon? How long would it take to re-learn the meaning of words? For instance if someone were to say that from then on *big* meant *little* or when I said the word *arrow* people would imagine a *rock*. How long would it take me to adjust?

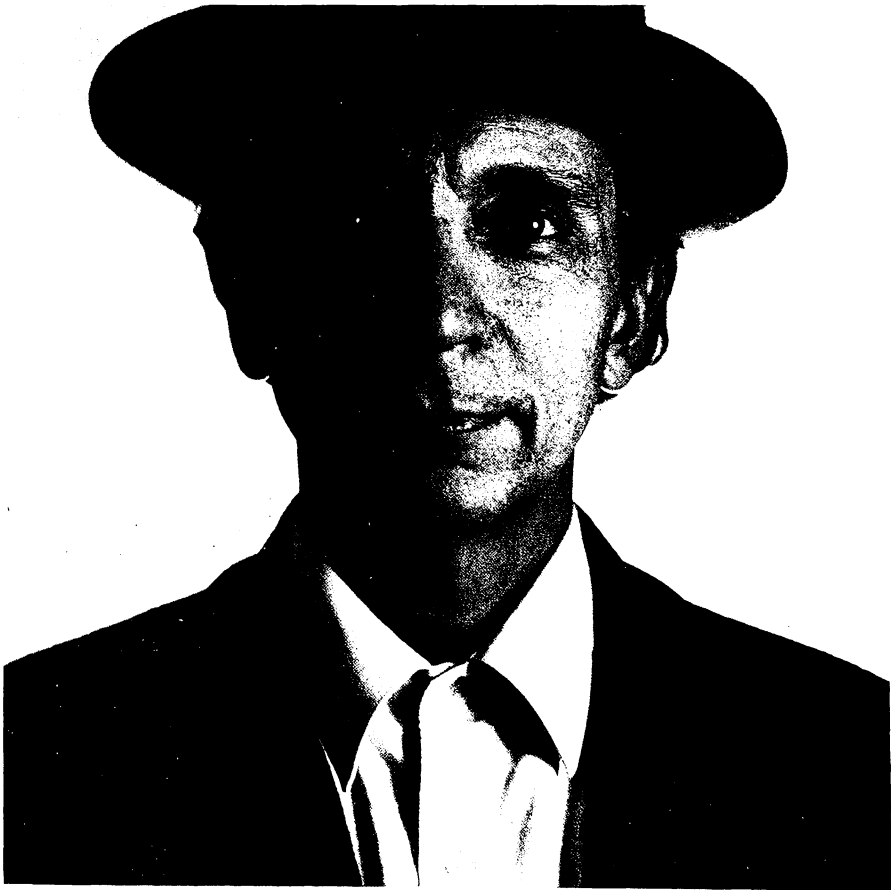
Pathology is about extremes, about a failure, about the need of mediation; the outside hand--the doctor, the priest, the policeman--each called upon to administer a hoped-for measured response. So it's natural to be cautious, to be wary of strangers and situations where, for instance, although you speak the same language you can't tell what is going on. It is therefore easier, in those instances, to simply raise your hands, palms up, smile and say, "Dear sir," or "Dear madam, if you please." Or "Ladies and gentlemen, at this time I believe I am best suited to accomplish carefully delineated tasks so ask me to jump. I will jump." Or "Dear friend, the room spins. If you are not careful I will scream."

The body can be a place to hide out in for a while. (But cautiously because wounds heal and you have to be on the outside when they do.) In raw times, when you are "the stranger," the analogy of the eyes being windows seems apt and often you find yourself sitting on your own lower lids driving yourself from one awkward situation into another.

So what works? What can you *really* count on? You can always count on insanity. Insanity works. So does ignorance although taking the stance of "an innocent" only buys you a little time for unless you are rich or gorgeous people lose interest in your vulnerability and soon no one looks up when you enter the room.

In this world with each of us standing at his or her own personal center of the universe is it really that much of a puzzle that we have so much trouble getting along? If someone I cared about brought home a snake would I reexamine my revulsion to snakes? Would I come to say, "Oh, I had not considered that." Or "Oh, if you can see the good in all of this I will try."

How close or how far away would I have to stand from a monkey to think I looked like a monkey? With my nose pressed up against the beast's muzzle, how long would it take before I no longer became repulsed by the smell?



*Talking*, Michael Meyers. Publicity photo by Phillip Cantor.



From *Self-Possession*. Written and performed by Jon Erickson. Performance photo by Jim Brozek.



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