

Avoidance–Avoidance
A Project of Transparency
(script 8)

By
Jesse Ash

Performance Monday 26th May, 7.30pm, 2014.
With Maria Caterina Frani and Benno Steinegger

Monitor Gallery, Roma.
Palazzo Sforza Cesarini
via Sforza Cesarini 43a
00186 Roma

Character Notes:

Mary

Educated. Elegant and striking with noticeable stature, poise. Moves calmly, carefully with precision, like a dancer. She is a film maker. One of the early pioneers of experimental film making. A soft, confident woman. Thoughtful. Listens intently. Passionate when needs be. Determined to get what's necessary to understand the world and those around her. No children. Wanted them. Problematic relationship with her career. Feels she and her work were manipulated by external forces: art world, critics, society, companies. She has an 'aesthetic relation to politics'. Very serious about the politics of looking and trusting imagery. Interested in the spectator's visual experience and seduction and its emotional and psychological effects. Experimented with drugs and sex in the 1960's. Never loved in the way she would have liked to. Never allowed herself to 'fall' deeply in love. She was always too careful—scared of that vulnerability. Instead, she loved her work and thus feels cheated by it [she never got what she thought she could from it]. A kind woman, but fundamentally hurt by not loving enough—by not taking the most profound of risks. And now its too late. She feels she wants to put these things right by understanding them, speaking about them so she does not feel like she is hiding anything from herself as she approaches the next phase of her life.

Ted

A little younger than Mary. Cinematographer. More simple in temperament and ambitions. Moves a little more slower but not clumsy. Prioritizes more practical things in a straightforward way. People. Mechanics. Friendship. He is a 'family man' but never had children. Wanted them with Mary and so after their relationship he could never have them with anyone else. He never stopped loving her. A string of relationships after Mary all hit problems when the topic of 'starting a family' came up. Enjoys making 'beautiful things'. Enjoys the immersive process of producing film effects. Has a tendency to disappear into his own world when making, or working on craft. Not really interested in politics, but values honesty, trust, respect and fidelity. Deeply hurt by the split with Mary, although he tries to convince himself otherwise. Anger sometimes bottles up. Can be explosive (never violent). Does not entertain conceit or hidden meanings, concealment, lies. Feels he wasn't good enough for Mary. This feeling of inferiority has plagued all his relationships to date. Feels both lovingly drawn to Mary while at the same time anxious and nervous.

(Pages 12-15 SCRIPT 7.)

START WITH NOISE. VOICES. TO BREAK THE VOICES OF PRIVATE
VIEW AUDIENCE. SHOUTS OF 'TED' 'MARY' SEARCHING FOR
EACHOTHER. FROM ONE ROOM TO ANOTHER (DISTANCE TO PROXIMITY)
WHEN THEY SEE EACHOTHER THEY DO NOT EMBRACE OR SAY HELLO.
THEY FIND A SPACE IN THE CROWDS.
THEY START AS IF CONFRONTING SOMETHING AT LAST.

[IN THOUGHT] I was always faithful you know.

MARY: I know [PAUSE, TED LOOKS AT MARY]

TED: It's a shame.

MARY: What?

TED: Us.

MARY: Yes I know. But that's what happens.
Relationships breakdown sometimes.

TED: [ANNOYED] 'Breakdown' are you fucking joking?

MARY: Calm down, [MARY LOOKS AROUND THE GALLERY] please
not here.

TED: You cheated Mary. That was the reason it ended.
That was the beginning of the end anyway. Is that
what you call a 'breakdown'?

MARY: You always had such conventional perspectives on things. A typical cinematographer.

TED: [DISBELIEVING] You're incredible. Sometimes its like you're heart has been ripped out [NO ICE CREAM]. You can be so cold.

MARY: **Just put it in perspective.** It was just a certain period in history. Commitment was a political construct not a personal one. fidelity represented conservative thinking. It was not progressive. The 'epoque' was not a friend of monogamy.

TED: And what about feelings Mary? about people, you and me. Not fucking politics. So in your opinion its ok to hurt people [GESTURES TO HIS INTERNAL ORGANS] repetitively in the name of some ephemeral 'progressive' ideology.

MARY: It was NOT 'Ephemeral'. Things WERE happening Ted. Things were changing. It was not a time to be standing still. Or looking back.

TED: You have no idea. [SHAKES HIS HEAD WITH A SMILE].

MARY: [COLDLY] That's how it was. Maybe some people got hurt...

TED: [INTERRUPTS]... I got hurt Mary. ME. [POINTING AT HIS CHEST].

MARY: Ok, People got hurt, but you have to understand Ted, the word 'infidelity' is often misunderstood. Its not an evil. It has a relation to 'fidelity'. You need to see this relation to truly understand what was happening. [MARY LOOKS UP TO A NEARBY ART WORK-FLOWER DRAWING, AND WALKS TOWARDS IT] We make representations of things, copies and we try to be 'loyal' to the original. Like a kind of high fidelity. In Sound recording you know. HI-FI. Faith to an original live sound.

TED: What are you talking about? We are meant to be talking about your affairs!

MARY TURNS, SEEMS DISINTERESTED OR NOT PREPARED TO TALK FURTHER ABOUT THIS SUBJECT. SHE MOVES AROUND AND STARTS TO LOOK AROUND THE GALLERY. TED WATCHES. SHE PICKS UP A SPHERE PAINTING SHE IMAGINES HOLDING IT. MAKES A SPHERE SHAPE WITH HER HAND. SHE PASSES ONE TO TED. TED SITS AND LOOKS AT THE PAINTING. MARY FINDS A PLACE AND BEGINS.

(Pages 21-26 SCRIPT 7)

MARY: What were we doing?

TED: Us?

MARY: The film.

TED: Universal?

MARY: (ANGERED BY TED'S NAIVIETY) Of course bloody Universal!

TED: I don't know, I thought it was an interesting project. I thought it would be something different, something that we could continue to work on together, but in a different context, a different genre.

MARY: (SERIOUS, BEGINNING TO GET PASSIONATE) [TED CLIMBS PLINTHS TO A HIGH POSITION] But you did not seem to understand how I felt about it. How our work reveled in form and composition and the abstract nature of light. (LOOKING STERNLY AND COLDLY AT TED) You see that right? You didn't seem to understand how the work would be affected in the context of a Universal Newsreel! Real stories, you know, stories of politics and power and conflict from around the world. How did you think our forms would work in relation to that? You never really said, you just encouraged the project without due consideration, and I never stopped you (MARY LOOKS GUILTY, ASHMAMED).

TED: I thought we talked about it? About how our work would act as a formal counter to all that. Something that massaged the eyes, that worked with optics, bending light and objects, creating relations between things without having to describe a particular message, and that forming a relation to optics was political in itself, it was about looking, about activating the visual sense.

MARY: But we were seducing too, together we wanted to take our audience somewhere unthinking, psychedelic, *hallucinogenic*, we openly talked about making a visual form or material substance to escape within, to dream with, like opium or absinth or whatever, we were making an alternative, another landscape of mental activity. Don't you think by creating this aesthetic hedonistic place, we were placing the audience in a passive position, ready to be manipulated by universal newsreels and their partisan representations? Why else did they invite us? We were completely complicit. (MARY LOOS AT TED ACCUSINGLY).The very beginning of mass propaganda.

TED I never saw it like that [LOOKS DOWN TO THE FLOOR, PAUSE, LOOKING FOR WORDS]. Anyway (PAUSE) we are talking about different kinds of politics. (PAUSE) It was just an opportunity to reach a large public audience. A stage where our work, our cinematography..

MARY: (INTERRUPTS) *Your* cinematography [she raises her eyebrows knowingly]

TED: (PAUSE, SMILES KNOWINGLY) so this was the problem! Authorship!

MARY: Don't be ridiculous.

TED: You think I think they were *my* images?

MARY: Of course not, it's jus..

TED: I lined up the shot. My composition? Is that the problem? (VOICE GETS LOUDER, ANGRIER) I took your directorial territory? Is that it? You think I stole your voice through my framing? This is absolutely ridiculous!

MARY: I think you are getting carried away, this is simply about initials, credits. You wrote TN on the rushes, your impulse was to claim them. Yours. You wanted them for yourself..

TED: (INTERRUPTS AND ALMOST SHOUTING) I always signed off TN, I still do. I sign off texts the same. TN, LOL...

MARY: [CUT?] (INTERRUPTS WITH A DRY SMILE) Until I informed you that it meant 'Laugh Out Loud' not 'Lots Of Love'...

TED: Well, ok, all I'm saying is, you're reading authorship into things that don't need reading, and that's why we always come back here.

MARY: Where?

TED: (SIGHS DESPAIRINGLY. LOOKS DOWN TO THE FLOOR AND THEN BACK UP TO SEE MARY) You know what I mean... Initials, territory, ownership..

MARY: Control (PAUSE) You know, (RELUCTANTLY HONEST) it's easy to see how all this happened. We got to know each other because of your role in the industry, my role in directing, we struck up a relationship. Our relationship got stronger..

TED: Right so now you're saying you regret it. You would rather it never happened?

MARY: I don't know, sometimes I think it might just have been a 'marriage of convenience', something that happened through circumstance rather than emotion.

TED: (INTERRUPTS) ...or love?

MARY: (QUICKLY, ALMOST SPEAKING OVER TED) Yes, I suppose, maybe it was a *circumstantial* love. A *circumstantial* set of relations... Me, you, our work, our words, the tools we used, the devices we made, the light we reflected, the audience, you know, the whole lot. Chance, circumstance.

TED: (INTERRUPTS HURT AND ANGRY) Friends of convenience? You make it sound like some proxy state!

MARY: (LOOKS WITH QUICKLY RAISED EYEBROWS AS IF TO SAY 'EXACTLY' AND THEN SPEAKING SLOWLY AS IF TO CALM THINGS DOWN) Sometimes it felt like we both lost control.

TED: (IN CONFUSED DISBELIEF) What?

MARY: Do I really need to spell it out?

TED: (ANNOYED, EXASPERATED) Word for word. I have no idea what you're talking about.

MARY: [RELUCTANLY, SYMPATHETICALLY) We were vulnerable, there were underlying tensions, I don't think we ever really addressed.

Ted: Like what?

MARY: (CONTINUES, IGNORING THE QUESTION) Lets be honest, (LOOKS AT TED FOR CONFIRMATION) let's be open for once. We were literally at war a lot of the time...

TED: (LOOKING CONFUSED, SHOCKED) Honest?

MARY: What?

TED: (LAUGHS) I can't believe this!

MARY: (CONTINUES) We were vulnerable, we had no stability. And it was at that time when larger powers got involved, they started to direct us when we were weak.

TED: (INTERRUPTS, SLOWLY, LOOKS INTENTLY AT MARY) We could never have done the things we did without them. We were liberated by their support.

MARY: But at what price?

TED: We needed them. Plane and simple.

MARY: All we really needed was the work. Our ideas.

TED: And each other.

MARY LOOKS AT THE WORK. THE DRAWINGS AGAIN. SHE HEARS THE MUSIC FROM THE FILM IN THE OTHER ROOM.

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MARY: Beautiful music.

TED: Kind of disturbing at times.

MARY: [IN THOUGHT AS IF THE MUSIC HAS REMINDED HER OF SOMETHING] Maybe the films we were making contributed to my 'state of mind'? Maybe the hallucinations in the imagery we made and the objects that we filmed somehow merged with my consciousness? I don't know.

TED: **You mean** what the therapist said, your 'condition'. There was a period when you were really anxious about being watched wasn't there? Someone following you?

MARY: I doesn't matter now Ted. what mattered then and matters now is trust. Between people. Between us. You never believed me. You thought it was all in my mind and you still do. I needed support. I needed transparency between us. And you didn't offer it. You offered nothing. You didn't believe me Ted.

TED: What was I supposed to do. You were seeing things in everything Mary. You were hearing voices in the apartment, you thought the telegraph poles we passed were passing messages about you. You tried to get me to paint them. To camouflage them so they'd disappear. You started to read messages in the flower beds in public gardens. Some secret floral code like writing that you said was transferring information. I mean, come on, what was I supposed to think?

MARY: I needed you. I needed to trust someone.

TED: But it was too much Mary, you needed help and I didn't seem to be able to help you. Do you remember in Moscow when I left you for a few days in the airport. I emailed you and you didn't respond. (MARY LOWERS HER HEAD) When I returned you said it was because you feared we were being watched, that our emails were being followed! Why on earth would anyone be interested in a love affair between a cinematographer and a film director! It didn't make sense Mary!

MARY: (ANXIOUS) You wrote 'weak and difficult to convince' and 'crystal clear' in an email. That could have been interpreted as a low concentration explosive liquid or chemical or something. I could not respond to that email. It was too risky. Things can be inferred you know. Words of love as you put it, can be translated into anything. You know how the they spied on lovers.. you know all that, it still goes on. Those words when you described the contours of my face as a landscape. Beautiful words Ted, really they were (MARY LOOKS AT TED) I remembered them. But they are open to interpretation you know. Someone else could read some other content in them. Something that was aligned with their particular intentions. You know when you're looking for something. Something specific. Things you're looking at can start to transform into things you're looking for. Like you said, there maybe words in flower beds, or in the arrangement of these plinths.

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MARY: (STANDS UP AND LOOKS AT THE PLINTHS) PAUSE AND THEN CHANGES SUBJECT) I've started making models.

TED: What?

MARY: Of the places we stayed in during that journey.
Hong Kong, Moscow, Quito...

TED: We never got to Quito.

MARY: Yes but I still think of it somehow. I made a
model of the Quito airport terminal, and I
haven't even been there! [LAUGHS]

TED: Why?

MARY: I don't know. I just had the impulse. Maybe I
needed to see those places that were part of our
journey but we never got to?

TED: (NONCHALANTLY) Mainly airport terminals as I
remember.

MARY: Yes, airport terminals. Transit zones.

TED: They're all the same aren't they? (PAUSE)
Where are the models?

MARY: they're not all the same, they're quite
different. [PAUSE, A THOUGHT COMES TO MARY'S
MIND] 'The narcissism of little difference' as my
father would say. They all have their own
identity. Little Differences. They all have
different Characters. But those little
differences are quite disorientating, like an
American speaking English or a Portuguese in
Brazil.

TED: That's colonization not Disorientation.

MARY: Well same thing. Anyway. I keep the models at home, around the house. In the kitchen, by the sofa.

TED: Why?

MARY: Why the sofa?

TED: Yes, the sofa, the kitchen, why there?...

MARY: So I don't forget

TED: Forget what?

MARY: How I got here.

TED: How we got here.

MARY: Yes, ok.. How we go here.

TED: It wasn't just the journey that got us here. It was everything else. But I mean, does it matter? Cant you just leave it? it's the past do we really have to understand everything?

MARY: That was always your problem. You had no desire to understand. You just trusted your impulse without thinking.

TED: Well, its plain to see, you need to understand too much. You're making models of airport terminals for Christ's sake. Its too much.

MARY: (Pause) It allows me to remember that's all. I made one, a model, of the transit zone in the Moscow airport. Of that space that somehow evaded jurisdiction. I remember when we were there. For those hours that merged into days... that I began to feel really 'present' in that zone. I mean it was completely controlled, Air conditioning, tannoy announcements, vending machines and all that... but it did not have any sovereignty. I liked that about it. I mean, this ground is claimed (MARY TAPS HER FOOT ON THE FLOOR). All cut up (MARKS A LINE WITH HER FOOT). You'd expect sovereignty to dissapear in the sky (SHE LOOKS UP) but it doesn't. or the sea, but it doesn't. So it was nice to just be in a space, in a room [POINTS TO THE GARDEN GALLERY], on the ground, without being in 'a country' [GESTURES TO THE SHAPE OF THE FLOWER DRAWINGS].

TED: I felt trapped there. The rhythm of the place was terrifying. The smell of coffee and pastries so early every morning. 5am or something. That false, sweet air. Yuk. Claustrophobic. I hated it. I'm not sure why I stayed with you there? I was following you I suppose.

(MARY LISTENS INTENTLY)

We traveled from Hong Kong to Moscow. We took a plane in the afternoon. It was June. Humid. You said you were leaving because you thought someone was watching you. But that **was paranoia** right?

MARY: (LOOKING INTENTLY AT TEDS EYES) Its not paranoia. **How many times to I have to explain.** I saw them watching the house Ted. I told you that. You never listened. You just followed. You didn't believe me. Did you?

THEY LOOK AT EACHOTHER, TED SHRUGS SHOULDERS
LOOKING UNCONVINCING

MARY: (ANGERED / FRUSTRATED) You still think it was some psychologically induced state. You think it never happened? You think I was running from city to city because of some vision or voice controlling my every move?

(TED GESTURES AS IF TO SAY 'WELL EXACTLY')

I had to get out of Hong Kong. (PAUSE) Moscow seemed right. Cooler. I don't know. It was summer then.

TED: June.

MARY: Summer.

Ted: The end of Spring. Come on it wasn't about the weather Mary! It was about politics. You had it laid out in front of us. Moscow, Havana, Quito.

It was a pilgrimage. You said you wanted to follow a line of red blood. 'The thinning arteries of socialism' You said. That there was still socialism in the world and you wanted to follow it, and see where it would take us. It took us to a city 1500 metres above sea level. Where the air effects your breathing. (PAUSE) So your political pilgrimage ended in our loss of breath, our light headedness! We found ourselves together with a sort of uncomfortable dizziness induced by politics not love... (PAUSE).

MARY: (TO THE CEILING AND LOUD) The Vertigo of Politics! (THEN TO TED) Could be a film?

TED: More like a thesis title.
Look, it doesn't matter why or how we got here really does it?

TED LOOKS AT MARY FOR HER ANSWER

MARY: It matters Ted. It matters. [SHE LOOKS AROUND, THE GALLERY WITH DISPLEASURE] These places. Bright white. They're no place for Love.

END