

**LECH MAJEWSKI**

**THE  
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WORLD**



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painters, stars, cities, pictures



# America

It doesn't exist as a country. It's an idealized, dreamed-of space. A myth related in picture writing. In the cinema. On the TV screen.

It's a myth of escape. From poverty, hunger, oppression (the inscription on the Statue of Liberty), but above all escape from oneself – Hollywood's biggest money is made by allowing viewers not to think.

A hundred years ago it was a myth for the brave. Endless prairies and desert plains became home to people from Poronin and Luleaa, who gave their settlements biblical names. Bethlehem. Canaan. New Jerusalem. Everything was new. New York, Jersey, Haven, Hampshire. Even Majakowski was drawn in by the new towers of Babylon, when he saw in the cinema how New Yorkers arranged, via white telephones, to meet and dance atop skyscrapers.

Then came Vietnam, Kennedy, Oswald, King and Manson, and something went rotten. Adult America fell apart, and the flower children began making films for an even younger audience. Lucas and Spielberg created a toy kingdom, which left our planet and escaped into abstract cyberspace, sucking the brains out of foreheads stuck to computers.

Then the grown-ups stopped being grown up. They became infantile. Real men became robots (the most expensive, called Schwarze-

negger or „black Negro,” even got pregnant), while women became masculine; they learned to kick men in the groin and play in westerns.

Meanwhile, computers plot, count, romance, date and start relationships, to give birth to abstract myths in the idealized space, the new America, as it rushes headlong into infinity.

## Manhattan

I leave the flat to meet two of Basquiat's colleagues. It's stifling. I'm sticky with sweat. I've lain on the couch for the last few days glued to a three-screened TV. The antenna, which cost me \$26, is disc-shaped and should pick up signals. It doesn't. This is Manhattan. Wall upon wall, crossing other walls, under walls that intersect with more walls...

It's a small flat, but the view from the window is massive. It's Manhattan. An endless city. To the left Mies van der Rohe's first office block, in the middle an assembly of every architectural style, including the gothic Tudor City, on the right is Le Corbusier's UN building, and still farther to the right – a factory with three immense chimney stacks. Maybe not a factory, a boilerhouse with heavy brick walls and blue-steel chimneys like in de Chiric's painting.

Tudor City, a gothic cathedral of an apartment block, explains why New York's other name is Gotham – American Gothic. Enormous, fascinating French windows at its summit. Several storeys high and veiled with blinds, do they hide some rich person's life? A fanatic's? An ordinary person's? A murderer's? On another Tudor-style building, further to the left, are the roof's terraces guarded by statues of devils, or of chimeras? I moved into this flat because of the view, the awareness of being plunged into the stone ocean called Manhattan.

At the foot of Tudor City is a street; it leads onto a wall, a barrier, under the barrier is a drop of several floors. An unreal street, ending in

a wall, and it's only when seen from my block that the street beneath is visible, East 40th. Going along 40th is like walking along a building, but it's not a building, it's a brick wall on top of which the other mysterious street ends. De Chiric's street.

I placed a postcard of de Chiric's painting *La Tour Rouge* on the windowledge. Above the card, through the window, ends the perspective of the Tudor City street. I bought the postcard in Venice, in January at the Peggy Guggenheim museum when I was there with Julia. Venice has just celebrated the centennial of Giorgio de Chiric. I bought the poster of two mannequins which hangs above our bed, there in the next room where Julia's sleeping.

## Chinatown

In compressed air that condenses down the spine, I sink into the closed world of Chinatown, with its brown ducks' death throes in greasy window displays, glow-tube lights illuminating silk threads, hieroglyphic newspapers, fish, the slim buttocks of men permanently in tight trousers; exhausted women always in ill-fitting trousers; young Chinese gigolos with earrings, their hair stacked into perms, sitting on the polished bodies of illegally parked cars.

I look at the open second and third floor windows, where the Chinese are working and talking, and I sense the old desire, the spine-tingling feeling of voyeurism, of observing life while remaining anonymous, another passer-by, and I feel that in New York City you shouldn't be shut away at home. In any other city, but not in New York. This city is a challenge, an unceasing challenge to leave the four-walled shell and travel – travel through the unknown.

I have to buy a telescope and watch the nocturnal windows of the tower blocks' endless walls.

Returning on the bus, I think it's only in my imagination that I'm winning. Reality is defeating me. Disappointing me. I say, „Imagine a 119th floor apartment with a Chinese garden and a swimming pool, with snow swirling outside the thick, hurricane-proof windows.”

A girl on the bus is reading *The Story of the Eye*. On its cover is a plucked-out eyeball.

A lightning fork of cracks cuts up the walls of the buildings.



## Pictures

To live in harmony with oneself, and not with a theorized idea of what's best... To sit. Think. See. Take notes. Note down pictures. Pictures. Pictures. Pictures. The Parajan of New York. Butchers by the slaughterhouse. Blood drips from the axe. A room's semi-dusk. Verses. Octavio Paz. The street. My voice. Passages of prose. Lines. A novel? Write.

## Bookshops

They're so terrifying. So many people write. Tens of thousands of ideas, developed in hundreds of thousands of ways, millions of books, billions of pages written, trillions of sentences.

So many books I haven't read. I struggle not to buy them. I struggle, because why should I stuff my flat with books that I hide in dark corners as soon as I buy them, to stop them from tempting me? Like an addict, I'd take to reading and do nothing else. And I've already got so many books I haven't finished reading yet (*Ulysses*, for one), so many more I'd like to read again. My mouth waters. I buy them. And I immediately rue burdening myself unnecessarily with new bricks of ideas and words.

A bookshop on Broadway; an album of Polke, pen drawings, scrawls, smears, notes.

Karawa writing dates – portraits of the days.

## Bull Show

I look through an album of Jean Michel Basquiat bought from the bookshop. I'm jealous of his instantaneity. Bruno Bischofberger – Basquiat's European patron – told me about JMB's visit to Switzerland. Bruno invited him along to a bull show. Basquiat shut himself away in his hostel room and drew *Bull Show Nr. 1. 2. 3.* Went downstairs. Tossed the sketches on the table. Bruno bought them.

I included the scene in the script. This is the first time I've seen the sketches. Childishly drawn sausages, captions: BRATWURST, EINGANG, MISERABLE COW, a bull's head, a fag end, a green stain and a list of dishes copied from a menu, prices and all. And it's art. A moment. A piece of paper. It's own dimensions, colour, even price. He drew, used, noted, went and threw it on a table, and sold it. And me? I painstakingly gather material for material, procure money for the film, analyse legal papers, all so that I can draw my bratwurst, fag end and menu, burn myself out preparing for preparations, and nothing comes of it, or if it does, it's not much, and it's after an unheard-of effort lasting years just to realise life's slipping through my fingers.

## Da Vinci vs. Basquiat

In 1988, when I lived in Iver, I often went to the library in nearby Windsor. Just looking at Leonardo's *Codex* knocked my legs from under me. A page of Da Vinci's notes and thoughts is so beautiful. Raised to the level of a work of art in its own right by being removed from the codex and hung in a display case. The astrological lines of a horse's foreleg, the cosmic arithmetic of proportions of wells, orbits of movement, stars intersected by rays of bone. My eyes, lost in the yellowed heavens of the paper, followed the slightest movements of the hand of God, since Leonardo, like nobody else, was and is God in his beauty and cruelty, in the heat of his work and his cold objectivity.

I realised that now, unable to keep up with the fragmented progress of science and art, even an exceptionally educated person is basically illiterate, an ignoramus in most fields, and could never (if sane) work out the sense of life and God on a sheet of paper. I left the library depressed, with the feeling that I was a piece of rubbish in these rubbishy times of mass culture, showiness, escapism and stupefying consumerism, and that there was nothing else for me to do but get drunk and stare at the television.

That's how I felt up until the moment, half a year later in New York, when through coincidence (do they exist? Leibnitz says there are no accidents, just laws we don't know) and my friendship with Janusz (who gave me an article about the death of Basquiat) I was struck by several drawings which, although in a simplistic and childish way, nonetheless conformed with the pages of Leonardo's codex.

Sheets of paper which Basquiat filled with whatever came to hand or caught his eye: place names taken from an atlas, astronomical graphs copied from encyclopedias, names of texts and weapons from a history book, labels from cigarette packets and milk cartons, words from neon signs, comics and plane tickets, diagrams of sound equipment and subway stations, dishes from menus and chunky copies of twenty-five cent coins, all the things that pass through everyone's hands.

And this simplicity and childishness were, aesthetically speaking, an added strength, reflecting the state contemporary man was reduced to by civilisation – the state of an illiterate lost in the chaos of press articles and TV programmes, an infantile participant in some Star Trek or Star Wars who believes the President is good because he's got a nice smile.

Thus Basquiat, without kneeling to authority, became a modern Leonardo, trying to work out on a piece of paper the sense of the world and the life given to him. And he was insolently aware of it. He called one of his works *Leonardo's Greatest Hits*.

## Manhattan Aborigine

The Aborigine presses his hand against the rock and spits chewed clay over it – he leaves his mark, the proprietary signature of the rock's spirit.

Basquiat marked the rock faces of Manhattan with a spray-can. He wrote graffiti – haiku: PAY FOR THE SOUP, BUILD A FORTRESS AND BURN IT DOWN or THE KANGAROO WOMAN BRINGS THE RAIN. He teased the cause-and-effect, logical minds of Americans.

## War of Letters

A Black guy called Ramelzee initiated me into the art of graffiti. For him, painting a subway is creating a wheeled fresco, a travelling exhibition. The form developed from short, distorted signatures, for example „So-and-so 182” : a pseudonym and Bronx street number, name and address. With time, the letters became inflated along with the competing taggers’ egos and Bubble Style was born. When the letters were blown-up beyond a critical point they burst like balloons to create Wild Style. „For hundreds of years, letters were prisons,” Ramelzee takes on a spliff, „We exploded them and tore them to shreds.”

Ramelzee created Armourism – a militaristic version of wildstyle based on images of weapons and machines. His signature is an arrow. He fires it out on trains to strike at his enemies in the gangs painting rail depots on the other side of town. Because this is war. The world’s only war of graphics and art, where the bullets are letters and the cannons paint tins. Ten painted railway wagons are ten „pages”. These are read and painted over during the night by the other side, creating a new ten-page „book” – a reply of shapes and words, sent back along the tracks the next day to the attacking gang.

„I’m not interested in decorating letters,” Ramelzee shuts his eyes, almost whispering, „I arm them... Letters are like harpoons, they got blades, they’re militarized. There’s armoured letters that can pierce anything, and anti-letters that can stop them... Aerodynamics is based on triangles. An arrowhead’s a triangle.”

His arrowhead's taken out a lot of enemies. They've fallen on the graphic battlefield – they've given up painting trains. And Ramelzee's risen through the ranks of the gang hierarchy to become President. Only the Interrogator is above him. Toys; Bombers; Wizards; Wild artists; Grillers; President; Interrogator – the seven ranks in the underground freemasonry. And how do you reach the top and become Interrogator? It's practically impossible. You have to meet Prey.

Prey is a mystical old Black woman, shrouded in legend, who lives under four levels of rail tunnels below Grand Central Station. And it's her blessing you need, a pilgrimage to the holy empress of darkness. Blind and deaf, she recognises people by their smell. The smell of their excrement, released by fear on their descent among the packs of hungry rats and dogs wounded by the enormous ventilator fans. The descent into the underground temple is only for the select few. The bravest. For Prey is the mother of Manhattan's dark forces.



## Paul Newman's Eyes

I'm attending classes at the Actors' Studio. There are scenes with actors, conducted by former graduates: Ellen Burstyn, Al Pacino, Robert de Niro, as well as Elia Kazan and Joseph L. Mankiewicz. During the break I ask an inconspicuous-looking man in a nylon cagoule for a cigarette. His face is nondescript. Eyes grey and unspar-  
kling. I feel I know him from somewhere. He comes here a lot.

Suddenly I realise that it's Paul Newman. One of the cinema's handsomest amants. Offscreen mediocre, non-existent. His watery pupils not even a shadow of Paul Newman's blue eyes.

## Dangerous Liaisons

Why were two film versions of Laclos' *Dangerous Liaisons* made at once?

Richard Hassanian saw Christopher Hampton's stage adaptation on Broadway. He fell in love with it, bought the rights. He associated the atmosphere of the play with *Amadeus*, so he invited Milos Forman to the theatre. Forman fell in love with the play too. They arranged to meet for lunch at 2pm on February 14th, at the Russian Tea Room, to sign a contract.

At 2pm on February 14th, Hassanian is sitting at the table he's reserved. Forman's late. Hassanian looks nervously round at the other customers. In the Russian Tea Room, playground of the sultans of the entertainment industry, those who sit alone face sharp tongues. Loneliness, after all, is a symbol of weakness, ergo of defeat. It's him sitting and waiting. So he's relying on someone. And not the other way round.

The passing minutes become an hour. Hassanian holds on, he loves his project and Forman is the best choice. But Forman doesn't appear. He doesn't even phone. Hassanian leaves, furious. He's got the number to Forman's house on Long Island, where he usually indulges the great obsession in his life – sleeping. He phones. The answering machine informs him that Forman's gone away for the week.

Ignored, trampled over by an artist (and what's the greatest fear of men who know the power of money?) Hassanian calls up the second director on his list, Stephen Frears.

Frears gets on a plane and flies in from London. They sign the contract on the spot.

At 2pm on March 14th Milos Forman comes into the Russian Tea Room. He's surprised no table's been booked. But for Forman they can find one. He sits and waits. Minutes pass. He feels the other customers' eyes on him. He waits a long time, he loves his new project. Especially after spending the last month writing the script.

Ignored, trampled over by a producer (and what's the greatest fear of men who know the power of the imagination?) Forman phones Hausman, the producer of *Amadeus*. When the misunderstanding is cleared up, it's already too late.

But Forman and Hausman's obstinacy („Why do you need money for a film that's already out?") leads to the filming of *Valmont* two years later. Despite critical praise, the film dies a natural death.

The conclusion? Diaries and notebooks should be filled in with due care and attention.

## The Hidden Life of Paintings

Thomas Newman buys great art for cents. In Soho on Manhattan, paintings are stacked round the walls of the converted loft where he lives. Matisse's, Picasso's, Mondrian's, Chagall's and van Doesburg's in long rows, facing the walls. Newman pulls pictures out one at a time to show guests, then hurriedly puts them back, as if fearing their gaze will damage them.

I ask him why he hasn't hung them up. He hesitates a moment. He says nobody notices hanging pictures. „It's better like this,” he looks round his loft, which is like a museum storeroom, „And now and again, when I want to stand face to face with one of the painters, I get him out and look. For hours. Then I see.” Afterwards he replaces the painting facing away, allowing it a hidden life, and protecting its surface and pigments of colour from the light.

Newman is an inventor. His simple construction revolutionised the second half of the 20th century. He tells me how, after returning from World War 2, he started up a dispatch company on Manhattan's docks, on the Hudson. He specialised in sending outsize, awkwardly-shaped packages to less popular regions of the world. Bigger firms dealt with more regular packages on more commonly frequented routes. So he had to wait months for the right ship to sail in, then haggle with the captain for reductions when calculating the volume of each package. For example, a table was treated as a solid cube despite having enough empty space between its legs to fit in something like a sack of coal.

It was a long process, the money rarely flowed, and it was hard to make ends meet. Newman had no luck, or even secretary, but he did have debts and for four months he hadn't paid any rent for the office. The office which a greying woman entered, one summer afternoon when the sun was setting over New Jersey, lighting up the windows along the river. She said she had a daughter in Peru, and wanted to send her her most precious thing – her piano. Newman accepted the job, and the next day (by accident, or an unknown law?) received a visit from a certain gentleman wishing to send a piano to his brother in Chile. The second booking was a godsend, as it didn't add to the costs. The two pianos fitted together into the same crate.

Playing with miniature pianos cut from matchboxes, Newman had a revelation. He smoked a lot, but that day he got through a whole week's worth of cigarettes. He spent the rest of the year in libraries, courts and record offices, studying the transport norms of every country in the world. He was interested in the widths of tracks, wagons, lorries, planes and ships; parameters of transport by land, sea and air; all the data that he gathered, he analysed and recalculated, until one day he came up with the perfect receptacle for transporting things. And thus was born, thanks to two pianos headed for South America, the freight container.

He offered his invention to the big transport firms, but, as sometimes happens, they all refused. According to the experts, the idea was totally unrealistic. Just as EMI told the Beatles in 1962 that four-piece rock and roll bands were a thing of the past. However, Newman found an investor to finance some prototypes.

Today, lorries on every road, barges on rivers, aircraft holds, the whole world is overflowing with containers. And each one means another four cents in Newman's pocket. And these swell the ranks of the painters who occasionally turn to face him.

## Pelting Season

Julian Schnabel is the most outstanding among painting's current neo-expressionist rulers, as well as my partner on the *Basquiat* film project. I meet Janusz Kapusta on the last day of Schnabel's exhibition presenting his Fox Farm series. On each canvas are scrawled the words THERE IS NO PLACE ON THIS PLANET MORE TERRIBLE THAN A FOX FARM DURING PELTING SEASON in blood-coloured paint. Enormous canvases. Painful. Like open wounds. Julian found it written on a ten dollar bill a cabdriver gave him.

Next door in the IBM building, an exhibition of the computer breakthrough in science. Press a button and little screens display cosmoses in precisely animated films. Benoit Mandelbrot's breakthrough. By creating a closed line growing out into infinity (fractal geometry), they enable complex cloud surfaces or mountain scenery to be created. They look like Cezanne's later paintings.

The producers of the screen cosmoses intersperse them with the occasional picture of children in garish overalls. The children gibber into scientific devices which then draw their gibberings, etc. This is America. Or rather a vision for the masses. The rosily down-to-earth versus the mystically cosmic. Dogs, children and stars.

Writing is constant choice. The choice of concentration point – whether to describe, for example, Janusz's coat and scarf, or the view of New York's skyscraper architecture, the steep terraces breaking up the walls' abysses. Is it the unique aesthetic that's important in

these walls, or the fact that those who live on their edges, and thus have balconies, pay more rent? Life on the edge, at the top, or on the corner is always more expensive.

What impressed me most at the IBM exhibition was the picture of a camera homing in on the Earth. Ever nearer the clouds, the shape of a continent, a coastline, a town, a meadow by a river, a blanket on the grass, a boy asleep on the blanket, his hand, skin, pores, tissue, blood, layers of cells, a nucleus then deeper, deeper, deeper with the speed of tenfold magnifications, until, with the picture blown up by ten to the power of twelve times, the camera bursts out beyond matter into the black emptiness of interatomic space. Here, from the blackness – as slowly as from interstellar space – appears the planet of an atom.

I also saw a droplet of milk falling on a tablecloth, filmed at a speed of one femtosecond. I would have to wait another eight hundred and thirty thousand years to see the drop hit the cloth, because there are as many femtoseconds in one second as there are seconds in thirty one million years.

As we wait at the subway station, I talk with Janusz about Teilhard de Chardin and his third cosmic dimension, module 28, not noticing that the track is cordoned off with red tape. A fault. Today is Red Day. The tape. Julian's painting. My jacket. The red tablecloth awaiting the drop of milk.



## A Mathematical Formula for God

1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000.

A billion times a billion, times another thousand.

That's how many of us, humans, there have been since the so-called dawn of time.

As counted by Yale's Kray supercomputer.

Janusz Kapusta loves figures. He studied architecture at Warsaw Politechnic, then history of philosophy at the Catholic Theology Academy. When he found out how many of us, humans, Yale's supercomputer had counted, he worked out a mathematical formula for God.

$$\frac{1}{1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000}$$

In this formula, God tends towards zero.

Because he's creating ever more people in his image.



ALBRECHT DÜRER *Self-Portrait*

## Durer's Hair

A self-portrait by Durer. Every hair painted. Every hair of his badger-fur collar. The hair of his head decorates the fur like a crown of different tissues. The hair of his head, eyebrows and lashes differs in colour and finish. Microscopic detail, piously executed. For the patient observer with time. Time for contemplation.

From baroque paintings, you have to take a step back.

From impressionism, another two steps.

Pop art requires greater distances.

Durer – 30cm

Monet – 3m

Wesselman – 30m

The artist of the future – 300m

The distance is increasing. Detail is being lost. Minor gestures, quiet words are becoming unimportant. You have to shout to be noticed. Clone yourself into a million pictures. Then, brought into homes on TV screens you get crushed to death by clichés. You miss intimacy. Your patience has run out. Who's got time for Durer's hair?

## Cabirian Nights

It's four in the morning, I'm sitting on my balcony watching a couple dancing in the middle of the street. There's music pouring from their car. I think of another couple, a man and a woman across the road who, yesterday, in the middle of the afternoon, pulled back their curtains and made love on the windowsill. He was a tall, broad blond, with a bra on.

Cabiria, our greyhound, is restless. I let her out. She hurls off down the hundred-yard long landing. Like a strong-legged bullet. Dogs have to live a bit too.

A greyhound's racing career lasts two years. Then they're „liquidated”. In response to a TV appeal, Julia went to a race track in Connecticut. She saved a greyhound from the needle. When she brought her in, I was watching Fellini's *Cabirian Nights*.

## They Shoot Films, Don't They?

A letter from the American Directors' Guild. The results of a poll of the ten best films of the eighties. Only two films qualified. From among hundreds, even thousands, the directors couldn't even choose ten. From a whole decade!

What's happened to cinema? As recently as the sixties, film was a living tongue, every year there was an explosion of masterpieces. In 1960 Fellini's *Dolce Vita* competed with Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, Visconti's *Rocco and his Brothers* and Bergman's *The Virgin Spring*; in 1961 Bunuel's *Viridiana* with Pasolini's *Accatone*, Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* and Olmi's *Il Posto*; in 1962 Antonioni's *Eclipse* with Bunuel's *The Exterminating Angel*, Richardson's *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and Kubrick's *Lolita*.

In 1963: *8 1/2*, *The Leopard*, *The Silence*, *Le Mépris*, *The Fire Within*, *This Sporting Life*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Billy Liar* and *The Birds*. In 1964: *Zorba the Greek*, *The Red Desert*, *The Woman in the Dunes*, *Night of the Iguana*, *Dr. Strangelove* and *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. In 1965: *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, *Cul-de-sac*, *Loves of a Blond*, *Redbeard* and *Simon of the Desert*. In 1966: *Persona*, *Terra em Transe*, *Closely Watched Trains*, *The Chase*, *Young Törless*, *Masculine-Féminine*, *The Hawks and the Sparrows* and *Battle of Algiers*. In 1967 *Blow-up*, *Belle de Jour*, *The Graduate* and *Elvira Madigan*. In 1968 *2001 – A Space Odyssey*, *Twilight of the Gods*, *Teoremat* and *Bullitt*. In 1969: *Andrei Rublev*, *The Conformist*, *Satyricon*, *Antonio das Mortes*, *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*, *Easy Rider*, *Midnight Cowboy* and *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*.

And from the 80s, from a whole decade, they could only choose two: Scorsese's *Raging Bull* and Lynch's *Blue Velvet*. That was it. None of the other films proposed (including *Amadeus*, *Mephisto* and *Wings of Desire*) received enough votes.

## Uncollected Works

There are no libraries with tapes of film's greatest achievements.  
The best directors have never had their „Complete Works Of..." issued.  
The poets of the cinema have died out.  
But the butchers aren't doing badly.

## Rhythm of a Japanese Garden

*Rain Man*. An excellent film. Why not a masterpiece? Neither the director nor the cameraman made the most of the script. There's no transcendence into visual poetry, into the power of symbols. It was the same with *Midnight Cowboy* and *Scarecrow*. Only *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* gets through to the archetypes inherent in realistic action: the barred window, a stone, the spring. The window is opened by the Indian, the Man of Nature, who, in an act of superhuman strength, lifts off the stone which is blocking the spring.

From *Rain Man* I discover that I'm an autistic savant. My world (desk, books) is obsessively set to the sterile geometry of right angles and the rhythm of a Japanese garden. It's a constant attempt to introduce order into the chaos of the dull grey area between laziness and activity. It's a testimony to the only control I have over my life.

Probably everybody's autistic in this sense. After all, who wouldn't impose a geometric system of rituals, routines and order on their day? According to Tatarkiewicz, a sense of order is one of the three pillars of happiness. The others are a feeling of love and belonging. Freedom? Doesn't exist. Love, belonging and order are a surrender into slavery.



## Eastern Artist vs. Western Artist

After a visit to Julian's (where, him in the bath, me sitting by the sink, we discussed the production plans for *Basquiat*, phoned Hollywood and made an appointment in St. Moritz), I go to the Clocktower Gallery. To an exhibition of art inspired by television.

The exhibition is as barren as television itself, so it's with relief I step out onto the balcony which surrounds an enormous clock, facing the four corners of the world. And this evening the world is a delicate tissue of bright clouds, spread out over the searing column that is Broadway. It's warm, the smell of ripe Spring in the air, and from where I'm standing Manhattan seems full of endless, magical potential, lurking behind the glimmering of windowpanes. Roberto Mann, my assistant from Rio de Janeiro, and Janusz Kapusta arrive. I manage to introduce Janusz to Alanna Heiss, the gallery's director, who, in turn, introduces us to Nam June Pak, who tells us that Zbigniew Rybczynski is the best video artist in the world. So it's acrid white wine, some documentary maker from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a big clock, the galaxy of Manhattan and the discovery that I'm standing next door to the pain centre, a place familiar from hours of queuing for green cards and visas – the Federal Bldg. A video of a baying Alsatian and the DRUGS, DEATH + DETROIT graffiti on the gallery wall, then that's it, we leave and go to a party.

Roberto takes us to see Roman Kriheli, a Georgian who greets us with his mother over a table set with a feast of Jewish dishes. By the walls stand pictures more reminiscent of Michelangelo than Miche-

langelo himself. Wine, whisky and supper. Roman's face, full of gentleness and pain; his loving mother (who gives me not one, but three business cards with her son's address: „Take them, give them to someone, he's so lonely, without friends...") And conversation until late on, about Art. Painting. Julia whispers with the mother, I lecture Roman on the theory of Eastern artist versus Western artist.

„I was at Schnabel's," I begin, and Roman confirms he knows who I'm talking about and that, yes, he admires his work, „and now I'm at your place. I'm making a film about Basquiat and thinking about my previous films, and I see one thing: we, artists from the East, don't have the courage to destroy. They, artists from the West, destroy without a second thought. Julian takes a nineteenth century painting, scrawls something on it, and creates his own painting. You spend days, weeks and months painstakingly working on meticulous paraphrases of Michelangelo. I work out every last detail of my film, to the point of masochistic exhaustion. It never even occurs to us that we can destroy. That destroying is also building. And Picasso could never have been born in the East, or he wouldn't have hacked at Europe's refined painting with his cubist axe.

„NWO – Nullify Worthwhile Objects. The East lives in poverty, people spend years saving up for objects. Some never get as far as a washing machine, let alone a car. The West is overflowing with things. An Eastern artist works for his art like it's a colour TV. The Western artist smashes up his colour TV to dig his way out of the pile of things and cleanse himself. You paint on more detail, he erases it, you confirm, he denies. For you, objects are fetishes, for him, just ballast."

## TV Alcohol

In Katowice, in the cell of my little room, I could dream. I could almost feel myself swimming in the sea at dawn, in Paul Valéry's poem. Now I've got the life, money and visas to go out, seek and find that sea, rise at dawn and lie down on the water; to swim, lazily hitting the skin of my hand against the cooling, yielding substance, and the very thought of it fills me with terror – the planning, the tickets, the sweltering airport...

I prefer to cleanse, to protect at any price from the inkstains that are the empty days on the calendar, which itself is a store of fear, an oracle of extinction. To escape again, lie hypnotized again by the rainbow eye of the television. And die, expire, rot away by the light of the shining picture cluster.

TV alcohol doesn't soothe, it disarms, puts to sleep. It sets me aside for some undefined future, a tomorrow. A faceless tomorrow roused from a set-aside dream.

The set helps set things aside – work, food, sleep. To set aside the memory and imagination. The self. Billions of people at once, experiencing the TV set's flowing rainbow, the illusion of attainability, set aside their dreams, memories and imaginations. They set themselves aside.

Late at night I talk to Julian about a new idea – going to the Virgin Islands. To read. To work. Not to chase after film production. Weed

out and throw away so-called outside work – phone calls, meetings, cash hunting, film crews, actors, producers and so on and so forth.

Go diving (I saw on television how astronauts train – underwater). Write. After all, there are still some earthly paradises. I looked for paradise and I found it: the house in Frederiksted. The Buck Island coral reefs. And I'm not discouraged by the fact that St. Croix has been flattened by typhoon Hugo. I found a dozen reasons to go.

## Coney Island

An elderly man in a black bathing suit is lifted up on the waves, in his arms is Ms. Wonderful – an inflatable sex-doll.

Later on the beach, dripping with water, he sits on her.

## Barbara Johnson's Chapels of Blessing

New York's become a bigger prison than Poland. For \$50 a day rent, I was shut away in the cell of an anonymous apartment, one on a long landing where I never see the neighbours. So I live in „internal exile” in the World's Most Exciting City, and I've only really got two friends: Janusz and Julian. Americans seem superficial. Poles? When I'm with them I drink myself to death, like they do with me, since everyone's constantly trying to act like a winner, a success, when really they're losers. But the act goes on, the only alternative is shooting yourself in the head.

Apart from the irreplaceable alcohol, the state of false euphoria is also fired by borrowed time, at ever lower interest rates. Everybody, without exception, in a year, a month, the very next day is going to sign an important contract, finally start something that's been bubbling away inside them, ascend to the world of red carpets, where Liz Taylor and Donald Trump will dance a pavane of happiness with them. And it'll end in extravagance, jealousy and envy, then they'll become Barbara Johnson Chapels of Blessing, handing out the sweets of their glory left, right and centre to the plebs.

The best illustration of the above are the so-called Polonian Balls, which abound in New York. These balls are like a placebo of life's peak. He dons a coat and tails, she her gold dress, and they glide through the halls of the Waldorf Astoria in the lights of Polonian television's battered cameras. Stiff, dripping sweat from under the freshly-washed tufts of hair, they only start to take it easy after fuelling

up sufficiently; a trifle too easy – babbling; see me buddy, Friday it is, some guy from the Chase Manhattan... Then that's the last I remember; looney toons and starched squares dancing to a band playing disco music which fucks my head. My body could do with...

## Eddie – King of the Bums

The Four Seasons on the corner of East 50th Street and Park Avenue is Henry Kissinger's favourite restaurant. And also Herbert Ross, head of Warner Bros, and Jacqueline Onassis. I'm invited there by Eddie, a hobo. I met him in the doorway after leaving Elżbieta Czyżewska's place. He was lying across the stairs and asked for a cigarette. I gave him one. He stank.

He said something. I walked off without listening. I felt disgusted. After a couple of steps, I hesitated. I was working on the story of *Stoneman*, a demigod living on the streets of Manhattan, so talking to a hobo would be a chance to get inside my topic. I turned back.

Eddie's mouth never shut. He'd been in Vietnam. He'd survived Tet. He stopped believing. He ended up on the street. He begged. Now he lives from coins left in phone boxes. And from contacts. Walking down opulent Park Avenue, he points out the houses which are „his”. Houses with marble staircases and liveried doormen. He spends winter in some, summer in others.

He talks of the sophisticated women who want him and lure him into their homes. Because it seems to them that since he lives on the street, he's not a man but an object, a thing to help them fulfill their sexual fantasies. Free from ties, they let themselves do with him what they'd never do with others. Sleeping beside their perfumed husbands, what they really dream of is the beast.



I'm becoming convinced that I'm talking to a madman, and when he invites me to the Four Seasons, it's the last straw. I don't want to collect any more material, and hurriedly make my excuses, no more time. Maybe I don't like European cuisine – Eddie looks me in the eye worriedly. Maybe I prefer Chinese or Thai. There's a great Indonesian restaurant just over here, so maybe...

His snobbery provokes me. I want to humiliate him, call his bluff. I answer no, the Four Seasons sounds fine. Let's go there. Obviously pleased, Eddie leads me there with a spring in his step. He walks right past the restaurant entrance, and opens a narrow metal gate.

We're in a passage between two buildings. Puffs of steam spiral from a kitchen window. The shadow of a ventilator dices up beams of light. Eddie takes a deep breath and shuts his eyes. Spicy odours penetrate the nostrils. Eddie, comes the shout of a slant-eyed cook, how you doing? Fine, Kim. What're we having today, chateaubriand as usual? Yea, but I'm not alone, I came with a friend. Eddie turns to me – What do you fancy? No thank you, I mumble, I'm not hungry, and Kim the Korean passes Eddie a plastic container of food.

„I know,” Eddie says to me with his mouth full, „It looks bad to you, but it's fresh food. All these businessmen order the dearest dishes, then turn their attention to their clients or mistresses while the food goes cold, and the waiter takes the plate away untouched. Then what, throw it in the trash? That would be a sin. They'd rather give it to somebody.”

We return to Park Avenue, Eddie shows me new houses he's got access to, a cellar here, attic there, and now I believe him and let him lead me like a child in a strange town. He explains hobo language – the signs left on walls by the homeless – porters greet him, and Eddie draws a square with his finger in the air. „This is my territory,” he says, „North as far as East 92nd St., to East 14th in the south, west to Fifth Avenue, and in the east, East River. Here I've got my houses, women, benches and restaurants. Beyond is the jungle.”

He stops and shrugs. „I don't have a bad life,” he says. „I'm not complaining. In this country it's worth being destitute or rich. Then life costs nothing. When an ordinary person goes into hospital for a day, he pays a thousand dollars. Me, nothing. Where would they get it from? I'm tax-deductible. Everybody gives themselves stomach ulcers with chasing after money, I don't have to. I go to the library, I sit and study. Last year I studied baseball, this year I don't know yet. Maybe the question of religion and a single God.”

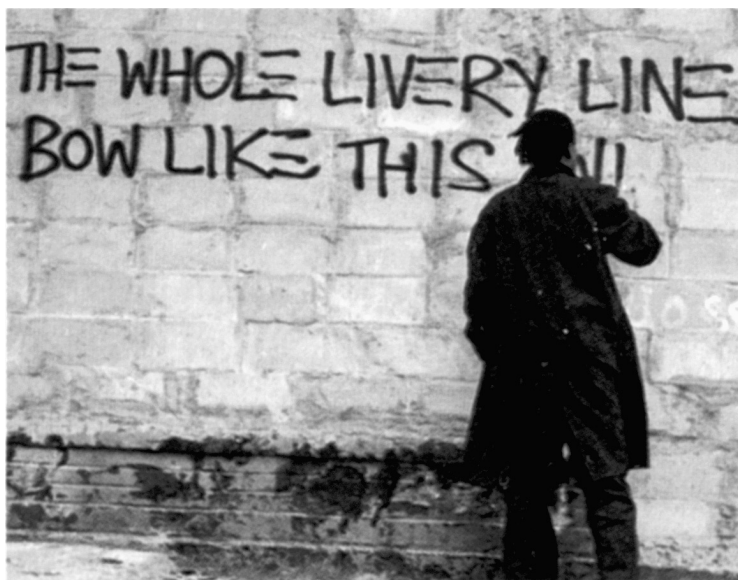
## Farmers and Hunters

New Yorkers (and maybe all city dwellers) can be divided into farmers and hunters. The farmers have a single home, a steady job, and reap the harvest of family life. Their existence is measurable, it has clear limits (defined or not) and is subject to natural cycles.

Hunters have many homes, or rather lairs or nests, to set out hunting from. They have no regular feeding times. Their gait clearly differentiates them from the farmers. While a farmer knows every centimetre of the road he treads daily, a hunter goes into the unknown. He must be watchful, slightly stooping, able to feel tension in his spine.

Which is how the homeless walk. And just as a tracker is able to tell from almost indiscernible signs which way his prey went, and when, so a hobo can make out tiny, practically unnoticeable lines and notches in the nooks and crannies of walls. The circles, crosses, dashes and dots left by those who've already been here tell him which house is friendly and which not, where there's a free loft, a free cellar, and even what type of heating they use.

A tourist has his guide-book. A hobo has signs on walls. Graffiti language and hobo language – signal beacons for initiated urban navigators.



JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT

## Attendance Not Compulsory

Father's dying. I talk to mother. Nobody knows what's wrong with him. Sclerosis? Cancer? He's wasting away before our eyes, weighs forty kilos and his ravings are getting more frequent. No strength to walk, doesn't want to eat. Mother fears loneliness. She says, „Don't come, you're better remembering him how you last saw him." That was a year ago, in Poland. „I don't want you to see him now."

I leave in two weeks. Travel agents. Airlines. They all give different prices. I'd go earlier, but on January 31st I'm swearing to be an American Citizen. Somehow I just don't believe my father's dying. It doesn't sink in.

Queues for hospital beds. So they've to take father home. He's to lie at home. Julia cries. I don't feel anything. Nothing. I don't understand death. Does death exist? If so, it exists every day. So many things die: skin, thoughts, feelings, the trousers I recently cut up for cloths (they died aged nine). Cigarettes burn out, hair falls out, water runs out. I die every day, just like today. After all, never again will there be the same combination – thirty-six-year-old me, January 20th 1990. Not to mention today's sleet. New York steams, and the airline telephonists give me complex networks of connections, so that (after talking to Julian) I've to go to Switzerland...

Janusz rings. I tell him about the phone call home. About the family gathering by the bedside. Aunts. Uncles. They'll arrange rows of seats and sit and wait for father's death.

God should be obliging and send out an announcement: you are hereby invited to the death of so-and-so, at such-and-such a time, on such-and-such a day. Attendance not compulsory. It would save us so much time, us – active people who have to run about and arrange things, fight the grey dragons of mundanity, earn a crust and for holidays, and prove to ourselves and those around us that we're useful.

## Father's Death

Father died. At nine o'clock on Wednesday. It was three in the afternoon here. I was arriving at a meeting with an accountant. Does it matter?

He's in cold storage now, must be chilly. He's waiting for me to arrive with my goodbyes. Mum was brave. Everyone is telling her, „Thank God father didn't suffer.”

I shut the blinds. I watch the video that I recorded on the balcony in Rio de Janeiro. Father, Copacabana and a glass of the tea that he used to make just right, and brought into the room with trembling hands. In a few hours, it'll be exactly a year since I saw him last. A year ago I came to Poland after an eight-year absence. I was looked after, fed and shown round Krakow's Wawel castle (who would've shown me round Wawel if I'd stayed in Poland? Oh, irony of fate. The illusion of unreality ). It was an experience for father. His eyes reddened as he saw Julia and me off. Julia touched the halo of his grey hair. He pinched her. My visit allowed him to die. After we left, he was sick all the time. Pneumonia, circulatory problems, sclerosis. He could hardly move. The post mortem revealed cancer. Cancer of the liver, lungs and stomach. Metastasis.

I spend all day packing, although my flight isn't for another week. Any kind of automatic activity helps. I've had a haircut, and a shave. I've got the face of a child. But now I've got no father.