SLUMALITY

Scene 30

[Setting:] An urban landscape. A bus.

Faces droop into windows and seats. The madman bobs back and forth like the other bodies, in his seat, on the bus, in unison, as it rumbles along the empty street, his body an interesting mass of moving parts, elastic tissues, and inward neuroses.

Empty windows pass by. Signs, street posts, bodies, arms. Two sockets stare blankly at the pavement.

The madman salutes the fallen: his thin arm rises and his hand emerges. A single flick and then it vanishes back into the folds of his coat, a brown coat, buttoned, with nylon patches on the elbows. Within the coat could be a body, but no-one would know. Even the protruding face resembles the landscape it passes through, a grey-brown fabric of folds and furrows, part shadow, part ridge, the faint glimmer of hope in an otherwise sunken eye.

Another body.

Another flick to the fallen: a mangled display of limbs wedged in a drain. Again the hand vanishes.

Bodies rock to and fro, the harmony of absence, eyes pitted against reruns of past lives, kisses from long unfelt lovers, punches from long still felt breakdowns, a patchwork of trauma and dislocation, image after image of empty and impenetrable windows and landscapes, a blurring of dreamscape and actuality, simulacra and simulation, all at once.

The madman arrives at a place and gets off. The doors suck shut behind him and the bus murmurs away.

He surveys the landscape, first left and then right, forward and then back, but in every direction it is almost entirely the same, shades of grey blurring into buildings and skies and factories and fences. Roads (that lead nowhere), street lamps (that illuminate no-thing), fences
**Economic Extinction:**

In the economic sphere, free-market economic rationalists argue that the best interests of the society as a whole will be served by the individual and unrestrained pursuit of self-interest with an absolute minimum of governmental intervention. In the case of free-market economic policies, as a recent United Nations report concluded, while it is clear these policies are capable of economic growth, ‘it is far from clear they are capable of creating just, civilised and sustainable human societies’. This is the result of ‘insufficient account being taken of the effects [of these policies] on the poor, the vulnerable and on the environment.’

(Evan Willis, *The Sociological Quest*, 1999, p. 53)

(that protect no-one), signs (that make no sense), his own feet, his own torn boots, against the pavement, each pebble in the tar so precisely the same, so entirely alike, yet different, when crouched, on closer examination, forced to lie uncomfortably side by side, compressed, flattened, infused with the whole, an endless carpet of pebbles, stretching from his toes to the street, the street to the lamp, the lamp to the building, this street to another street, this one to yet another, on and on, dividing, spreading, entangling and smothering the land that is his city, which represents his society, which somehow involves him, or dissolves him, or something.

The Wasteland of postmodern life. The camps for the economically weak and expendable. The useless.

A bus passes. White faces nod in the windows. Exhaust fumes billow.

The madman, coughing, staggers down the empty street, right of his last vantage point and towards the east.

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[Voice over:] For he was slinking further away from the safety of the Author, deeper into the recesses of nothingness and abstraction, a stranger in his own strange land, wasteland upon wasteland, stretching from his toes to infinity and from infinity to beyond. For he, like those he so yearned to touch and embrace, like the girl, was lost. Dislocated. Lurching towards the Disputed Territories beyond the bogs. Eyes straining for a place beyond everything. Up ahead. Beyond hell.

Amassing the details of hatred as he went – the specifics of God’s failure to himself and the world – to add to the weight of his condemnation. He was attempting to bring the whole damned ludicrous thing down upon his head, like Samson, whilst also keeping an eye out for a wormhole to escape the task altogether. The task of Everything. The task of God. The task of convicting the Almighty for crimes against Humanity. For fucking up.

Circe.
Scene 32

[Setting:] A club.

‘Looks like a cheery place,’ he says, staring down into the shadows of a stairwell at a dimly lit door. He pulls up his collar, tucks in his shirt, straightens his jacket, and descends. (Smiling queerly)

The door bitch scarcely notices.

Jack skips down the stairs, crosses the floor, shakes his coat, and pulls up a stool at the bar. ‘Wine list, please,’ he says, coughing. ‘I’m celebrating.’

The barman doesn’t respond. He continues towelling out a glass.

‘Humanity,’ he adds. ‘Its inception. From apes. And Wilberforce.’ Jack hesitates and merely exists within the pulsating rhythms of dance music. Smoke circles the beams of light that reach down from the ceiling above him, and spreads along the surface of the bar in waves. He raps his fingers playfully.

‘If you will,’ he says. ‘I’m celebrating.’

No response.

(Louder) ‘In your own time.’

Nothing.

(Yelling now) ‘You disgust me,’ – and then, as an afterthought – ‘you retarded pervert.’ (Smiling oddly) ‘When you’re fucking ready, useless!’ – and then – ‘Dog fucker.’ (laughs)

No sooner has Jack contemplated this last remark and yelled it at the top of his lungs, than the music stops, and the barman, suddenly awakening from a trance, drops his glass. It shatters.

Jack turns away and begins rummaging through his coat pocket. ‘What’re the odds?’ he mutters. When he turns back, the barman is within inches of his face and stabbing a finger into his lower lip.
‘You wanna die tonight, frog face?’ – grabbing Jack’s neck – ‘Huh?’

Jack notices a blemish in the man’s left iris. And veins, tiny twisting red veins, in the whites of his eyes. He suddenly feels sympathetic.

‘Of course,’ he says, blinking this image of humanity away and smiling solemnly. Instead, he imagines [enter fantasy] Fanny Brawne bent over a bed and Keats lavishing kisses upon the nape of her neck, his soft white fingers tip-toeing up her golden thigh to the nape of her crotch… All the while Jack’s head slumps back as if conducting an orchestra or composing a symphony, or simply dreaming about death.

‘That’s your last warning, buddy,’ says the barman.

The madman is whipped across the face with a tea towel.

‘Thou still unravished bride of quietness,’ he mutters, imagining Keats bending Fanny still further back (Keats, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn,’ 1820). A gasp escapes Fanny’s parting lips as she sighs and surrenders. Jack sucks the finger jabbing at his mouth.

Another whip.

The madman’s eyes open.

‘Last chance, fucker,’ the man yells, wiping his finger on the towel. ‘Damn weirdo.’

‘The wine list?’ Jack ventures. ‘If I may.’

The last whip leaves a red welt on the madman’s right cheek.

(Gesturing as if to make another strike) ‘Sober now?’

‘Completely,’ Jack says.

The barman walks away and returns with the wine list. ‘The ’96 cabernet’s splendid, I hear. Try sitting up.’

‘Splendid,’ says the madman, wiping a tear from his eye and raising himself. ‘That’ll be fine. Thanks.’

It is at this point that Jack notices a very odd thing. The barman, now facing away from him and crouching to put the wine list back on the shelf, has two slits cut into the back of his leather pants to expose his buttocks. Jack glances about the bar in dismay, but is met...
with nothing more than vibrating smoke and encaged bodies, which
convulse mechanically to the music. The shapes surrounding the cages
remain fixated, although their eyes glow in the darkness beneath the
fluorescent blue bars.

The barman presents Jack with a bottle. ‘Your wine, sir, for your
inspection.’

‘What’s that bird on your shoulder?’ Jack says.
‘Surprised you noticed.’
‘Was it there before?’
‘Yes.’
‘Really?’
‘Yes.’
‘What is it?’
‘A parrot.’
‘Even when you were accosting me?’
‘Yes.’
‘Even when I got here?’
‘Yes.’
‘What’s it for?’
‘It’s the club icon, Binky,’ the man replies. ‘Hence,’ and he
shrugs his shoulders, ‘Binky’s Club X. Like the name says.’
‘Unusual name for a nightingale,’ Jack adds. ‘Binky?’
‘If you say so,’ says the man, pouring Jack a glass.
‘That’s fine,’ Jack says. ‘Tell me,’ and he leans toward the man,
‘does that parakeet ever, you know?’
‘No. Except when it eats olives.’ (Smiling queasily) ‘Then it
gets rather messy. By the way, it’s a parrot.’

The madman clears his throat. ‘The voice I hear this passing
night was heard in ancient days by emperor and clown,’ he says, with
a knowing nod towards the barman (Keats, ‘Ode to a Nightingale,’
1819). ‘Tell me,’ and again he thrusts forward with a profound and
smug smile, one finger poised at his temple as if to telecast his mind.
‘What language does it speak? Eh?’ (Winking queerly)
Sign of the Cross:

The Sign of the Cross or Signum crucis in Latin is a ritual hand motion made by members of many but not all branches of Christianity. For Christians the motion symbolises the Cross on Calvary by tracing the shape of the cross in the air or on one's own body. There are two principal forms, one followed by Eastern Orthodox Churches, and the other by the Western Churches (Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and Roman Catholicism) and Oriental Orthodoxy. The sign is rarely used by non-liturgical or evangelical Protestants.

The open right hand is used in the Churches of the West. The five open fingers represent The Five Wounds of Christ. Though this is the most common method of crossing by Western Christians, other forms are sometimes used. The West also employs the ‘Small Sign of the Cross’ in which a small cross is traced with the thumb over the forehead, lips, and breast of the individual while whispering the words ‘May Christ’s words be in my mind, on my...’

‘What medication you on?’

But Jack’s question is answered all the same. For the parrot suddenly lifts its wings and defecates down the barman’s back, and sings ‘F-T-W’ in a raspy yet melodic voice.

‘In code!’ Jack yells with a clap of his hands. ‘Should have known.’ He laughs. ‘What’s it mean?’

The barman shrugs and shakes his head; but the bird, with a ruffle of its feathers and an almost exaggerated and knowledgeable nod of its beak, answers emphatically: ‘Fuck the world—FTW—Fuck the world—FTW—Fuck the world,’ in a rap sequence.

Jack is spellbound.

‘Screaming is believing,’ yells the parrot, turning in circles and stepping backwards and forwards from one foot to the next. ‘Screaming is believing – believing is screaming.’

‘Take no notice,’ says the barman.

The bird continues its peculiar dance, each movement of which Jack watches with greater and greater delight. Until, finally, the chain from the bird’s left leg to the barman’s studded collar has completely entangled its legs, and the bird, swaying and stumbling sideways, suddenly leaps, like a bungee-jumper, straight up, then down, and finally comes to dangle upside-down over the barman’s stomach, with the chain miraculously wrapped around its broken neck. Here it continues with even more rigour than before: ‘FTW—Fuck the world—’ And dies.

‘More wine, sir?’ says the barman, pouring a glass and offering it to Jack.

‘Your parakeet seems to be... Yes, thank you,’ Jack says. ‘It seems to have hung itself. You might consider freeing it. Seems depressed.’ He crosses himself (incorrectly, but nonetheless).

‘One moment, sir.’ And with this the barman vanishes into the back room and Jack never sees he or Binky again – his last image being one of a white shirt and a stream of bird shit, and another of a buttock streaked by the same deathly emission.
You are only as valuable as you pay cheque.
left to the right, because from misery (left) we must cross over to glory (right), just as Christ crossed over from death to life, and from Hades to Paradise. [Some priests] do it this way so that they and the people will be signing themselves in the same way...'


Logorrhoea: an excessive and often uncontrollable flow of words. Excessive talkativeness. Verbal diarrhoea.

Glossolalia: speaking in tongues; speaking a language one does not know, or speaking elaborate but apparently meaningless speech, while in a trance-like state. Xenoglosy.

Echolalia: the immediate, involuntary, and repetitive echoing of words or phrases spoken by another.

Logorrhoea. Glossolalia. Echolalia. Purging the head of words, thoughts, voices, memories, and anguish.

The girl looks confused for a moment and then resumes her performance.

Jack writhes unnoticed in the shadows of the floor, safely camouflaged by a film of smoke, which rises in a dense band from a foot above his face to the ceiling many metres above again.

The cleaner air and perspective-change soon rejuvenate and calm Jack, and very shortly after he is simply lying there, outstretched, staring vacantly up at Circe dancing in the clouds above. From here, fortunately, her genitals aren’t nearly so large, and the various dimples, nodules, and lumps that populate this region aren’t nearly so exagger-
Hyperreal/Simulacra:

‘Simulation … is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyper-real. … It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real…’ (pp. 1-2).

‘We are in the era of events without consequences (and of theories without consequences). There is no more hope for meaning. And without a doubt this is a good thing: meaning is mortal’ (p. 164).

(Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation, 1981/2006*)

ated and pronounced. He sees faces in the clouds [enter fantasy].

Sees Fanny Brawne unfurling herself for Keats. And in the face of Keats he sees a man mesmerised by the physicality of his dream, the tactility of something otherwise only explored via the arcane impulses of nerve-ends and synapses. Something real. Hyperreal. And haptic.

‘Ah,’ he sighs, now aroused by the warped and transmuted performance going on above him, and tapping a toe. A strange smile comes and goes from his face. His tongue emerges from the corner of his mouth. His eyes expand. Strange creases cross his brow. Saliva drips down his hollow cheeks. Syllables are uttered and lost within his mouth. He sighs. ‘Ugh – umnh.’

And tugs.


A bouncer descends over him and picks him up by the scruff of the neck. ‘Who lets you resies in?’ A single blow to Jack’s stomach is enough to call back the wine within; it spills down his front in much the same way Binky’s emission had the barman’s back. ‘Fuckin’ freak, fuckers,’ the man adds. ‘No more wanking for you tonight, fucknut.’ He begins pushing Jack in the direction of the door.

Enter Circe. She emerges from the cage like a naked apparition.

‘I’ve got him,’ she says, nodding at the bouncer and slumping Jack into a chair. She pulls up Jack’s fly and tucks him in.

‘All yours, pet,’ says the bouncer. He adds, ‘Wash your muck holes tonight, I’m hungry,’ and growls. ‘Remember: 3 pm. Don’t be late.’

Her demure smile isn’t lost on the three shadows blinking in the gloom.

The madman dreams of Keats.

And death.
Hap

If but some vengeful god would call to me
From up the sky, and laugh: ‘Thou suffering thing,
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
That thy love’s loss is my hate’s profiting!’

Then could I bear it, clench myself, and die,
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
—Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan. . . .
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.

Thomas Hardy, 1866/1898
When the farthest corner of the globe has been conquered technically and can be exploited economically; when any incident you like, in any place you like, at any time you like, becomes accessible as fast as you like; when, through the TV ‘live coverage,’ you can simultaneously ‘experience’ a battle in Iraqi desert and an opera performance in Beijing; when, in a global digital network, time is nothing but speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity; when a winner in reality TV-show counts as the great man of a people; then, yes, there still looms like a spectre over all this uproar the question: what for? – where to? – and what then?

Slavoj Žižek, Against the Populist Temptation, Critical In-quiry, 2005, p. 25
La Belle Dame Sans Merci