

bobrauschenbergamerica

by Charles Mee

An empty stage covered by a blank canvas. The actors come out to remove the canvas as music starts.

1 Title

A chicken slowly descends from the flies on a string.
It has a sign around its neck that says:
bobrauschenbergamerica

2 What I Like

A voiceover is heard while:

A roller skater bursts in with a big red umbrella.
The rest of the characters come out during the music, some with objects— the trucker has a bathtub on wheels with a light set in the mass of crunched steel where the showerhead should be, and maybe a One Way sign on the side of the tub. Susan has a stuffed deer on wheels, or maybe a goat with a tire around its stomach. Becker the filthy, rag-dressed, disheveled, offhand derelict has a cardboard box, Phil's Girl pushes on a baby carriage with a stuffed chicken inside, Wilson has a house window on wheels. Allen crosses the stage carrying a ladder.

VOICEOVER

What I like to do is...
I start with anything,
a picture,
these colors,

I like these colors,

or I might have an idea about something I'd like to try with a shoe,
or maybe I just feel:
happy.

Look,
everything overlaps doesn't it?

Is connected some kind of way.
Once you put it all together, it's just obvious.
I mean, tie a string to something, and
see where it takes you.
The biggest thing is
don't worry about it.
You're always gonna be moving somewhere so
don't worry about it.
See?
Start working when it's almost too late at night,
when your sense of efficiency is exhausted
and then just,
let it come on....

[The sign disappears and the characters exit as the voiceover ends.]

3 Bob's Mom

Bob's mom comes out onto the front porch.
She talks, while we hear crickets,
and while photos are projected behind her on the wall—
but her talk and the photos don't match up:

BOB'S MOM

That's Bob's 1st Birthday Party
on the back porch with the morning glories all in bloom
that's Butch East,
Johnnie East,
Susan East,
she just got arrested for drugs,
Billy Kraemer and Alex Cameron.

And that's Bob with Johnnie East in their canvas swimming pool
when they were about four
Johnnie popped that beach ball later that day
and I told Bob I wasn't buying another one.

There's Bob with his dog Jab.
 He used to feed him the cheese sandwiches I made the boys for lunch.
 They're under the porch.

This is some kind of hut they made in the back yard
 out of crates and branches and clothes.
 You can see Bob's feet out the side.
 That's Donna Kraemer trying to get in the back.

There are the boys outside Dobson's 5 & 10 cent store.
 They almost died blowing up those balloons--
 they're 6 feet long.
 It's Johnnie East, Bob and Tommy Hoffman.
 The Port Arthur Independent ran this picture
 on the front page of their second section for the 4th of July.
 Tommy Hoffman got meningitis and died.
 That was a real sad day for all of us.

Art
 art was not a part of our lives.

[We hear a newspaper boy's bike bell. A newspaper is thrown onto the stage.
 Bob's Mom picks it up, waves, and goes back inside.]

4 Our Town

BECKER

Where I grew up
 you could walk to the end of the block
 and step right into the countryside
 field after field
 nobody owned this land so far as we knew.
 It had little lakes where we would cut down saplings
 and build lean-tos
 and camp out
 no grownups, just the kids, boys and girls
 we had no fear
 of anything.
 You could just go and go

you didn't know where you were headed
 but you were a free person
 you'd see where it was you'd been
 after you came out of the woods at the end.

5 Setting Out

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

When I leave home at 5 AM,
 the Big Dipper is bright over my shoulder
 against the dark road we live on.
 And it's quiet.
 And if there's a moon
 it's still up and hovering
 over the little lake.
 The front range of hills is a dark silhouette in the background.
 In the evening ducks and geese are on the pond
 and the fish are standing on their tails.
 The quarry I load out of is surrounded by
 red monoliths of rock
 like sentinels
 with flocks of blackbirds perched on top.
 When the weather's hot the afternoon sky is blue,
 and it grows giant cumulus,
 which by evening go dark
 and shoot the most amazing sideways heli-arcs of fire.

[A bathing beauty, the trucker's girlfriend, enters sucking the tail end of a
 milkshake from a cup. Phil notices her.]

Everywhere I go there's something to see.
 I don't know how I got so lucky.
 But here I am.

[A girl on roller skates races across the stage.
 Bob's Mom steps out onto her front porch, shaking out a dishtowel.
 Faint music, as though heard on a radio in a truck cab in the night,
 or through the open window of a house in Kansas,
 coming from another house, far distant across the field;

it could be the music of Ibrahim Ferrer,
or another country song.]

6 Falling in Love

Susan enters from the opposite side,
She sees Becker and he sees her. They stop.

SUSAN

So often we find
we look at someone
and
we are disgusted.

BECKER

Oh, yes.

SUSAN

We think: here is a real dirtball
and we think
if we get too close
we might catch something.

BECKER

Yes, we do.

SUSAN

And yet, as far as we know,
we ourselves might be the contagious ones
not knowing what it is we have
but having it even so
without knowing it.

BECKER

We never know.

SUSAN

Still, we think
get this fellow away from me

lock him up, put him away
 send him to an island
 you know, the island of the damned,
 the island of the rejects
 whatever
 just get him out of here.
 And yet, life twists and turns
 sometimes like lightning
 you don't know
 suddenly you've got cancer
 and you are facing death
 or in the least likely place
 you see someone
 and you fall in love
 you look at the guy
 and you think:
 I don't think so
 and yet there it is
 you don't know why
 your friends all say: are you crazy?
 you love him?
 but you love him so much
 you just want to knock him down and kiss him

[She runs at Becker,
 knocks him down, and kisses him madly.]

7 The Triangle

Wilson enters.

WILSON

Hey, what the hell is going on here?
 Do you know who the hell you're kissing?

BECKER

No. No, I don't.

WILSON

This is my wife.

SUSAN
Wife?

WILSON
Fiancee.

SUSAN
Fiancee?

WILSON
My girlfriend.
I mean, I thought we were going steady.
What the hell is this?
I walk/turn my back for one minute
and you're taking up with someone else?
What are you
some sort of biological creature?

SUSAN
Yes. Yes, I am.

WILSON
I am from Chicago, Susan.

SUSAN
I know that, Wilson.

WILSON
So what do you think that means to me?

SUSAN
What?

WILSON
Kissing. What do you think that means?

SUSAN
I wouldn't have any idea.

WILSON

You see what's happened these days
nobody can tell you what kissing means!

SUSAN

I can tell you what it means when I kiss you.
It means goodbye.

[She walks out.]

8 Making Nice

A lone man, Allen, wearing shower cap and towel,
enters and sings a song to smooth things over--
The Inkspots' song: I don't want to set the world on fire--
or something else to distract from the fight
and get everyone's attention moving elsewhere--
and the characters already on stage,
Phil, Phil's Girl, Wilson and Becker the filthy derelict,
sing backup for Allen. At some point in the song, Susan enters and joins in
the song:

I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire

9 Another Lover

Another man, Carl, enters and dances to the song,
and after Allen sings,
while the music is still playing,
Allen, the singer, joins Carl, the dancer,
so that they dance together.

Wilson takes over as soloist

when the lyrics pick up again.

NOTE: as the piece goes on, there will be several relationships among the characters contained in dialogue--but also all sorts of relationships are possible without dialogue, in bits of physical actions that occur on the side, and in dances that suggest deeper, more lingering relationships.

At the end of the song, Carl and Allen exit together. During the following scene, the rest of the characters gradually leave Phil and his girl alone in the tub.

10 The Bathing Beauty

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

I look at you and I think
if it wouldn't be wrong
I'd like to make love with you on a pool table.

HIS GIRL

It wouldn't be wrong if you'd let me handcuff you to the pockets.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

You could do that.

HIS GIRL

What I think about is
I'd like to have sex with you in the parking lot
behind the Exxon station
near that diner on the Malibu highway
you know the one?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Near that road up into the canyon.

HIS GIRL

That's the one.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

That would be pretty public.

HIS GIRL

I'd like to have the whole world see
you want me so much
you can't wait.
I'd like to have the whole world see
you're not ashamed of me.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Why would I be ashamed of you?

HIS GIRL

I feel ashamed myself.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

For what reason?

HIS GIRL

Who knows?
Every fifteen minutes I feel ashamed of myself at least once.
And humiliated.
For no reason.
It just comes back to me over and over again.
Do you ever feel that way?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Every fifteen minutes I feel worried.

HIS GIRL

Do you feel you want to hurt someone?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

No.

HIS GIRL

Do you feel you want to get even?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

No.

HIS GIRL

That's good.

Do you feel you want to bite something?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

I don't think so.

Maybe I feel that.

HIS GIRL

Do you feel you want to take off all your clothes?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

No.

I usually don't feel that.

HIS GIRL

Do you feel you want more money?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Oh, sure. Everybody feels that.

A VOICE CALLS OUT

Lunch is served!

[A big table and several chairs are brought out.]

VARIOUS PEOPLE SAY

Oh, thank god.

I'm famished!

Just in time!

I wasn't going to last another minute!

[Bob's Mom brings out a roast chicken. Chicken picnic lunch is served.
Everyone takes some food and sits in the chairs.]

11 Table Talk: The Stars

ALLEN

The way the stars are, with your naked eyes you can't see much.

SUSAN

Oh.

No. Unless you know a lot.

ALLEN

But even looking at the stars,
I would rather say the night sky,
you see two kinds of things...3 or 4 kinds of things.

SUSAN

You see planets, you see stars, you see meteorites,
you can see aircrafts ...
all these things...

ALLEN

so it's a great show
the way the planets appear and dance around,
we follow it all the time
and we have on our bulletin boards in the back ...
and we have a chart of the whole thing,
and people record that stuff...
because we know these motions very well.
It's the foundation probably of qualitative science.

SUSAN

The early work of people trying to understand...

ALLEN

first just day and night,
then the seasons
and then the stars and then the planets...
there are different things that go back tens of thousands of years,
older than written history.

SUSAN

Right.

ALLEN

There is a great deal more space than time, you know.

SUSAN

No.

ALLEN

Yes.

And this is because the signals we can get
all come in at the speed of light...

SUSAN

that's really fast.

ALLEN

Yes. And they cover a great distance.

So it doesn't take them much time to cover a lot of distance--
that's how you get more space than time in the universe.

SUSAN

Right.

Right.

12 Table Talk: The Dispute

WILSON

How could you just suddenly: disappear?

SUSAN

I didn't.

WILSON

I thought you did.

And I thought you loved me.

SUSAN

Well, I do love you.

[The other characters exit.]

WILSON

Oh, yes, you love me,
but you don't love me in that way.

SUSAN

I never pretended to love you in that way.

WILSON

I can't go on in life
without being loved in that way.

SUSAN

A lot of people are never loved in that way.

WILSON

How can you tell
if you are really alive
if you're never loved in that way?

SUSAN

What do you mean: in that way?

WILSON

Unless I thought you were crazy for me
so crazy for me you couldn't stand it
you just had to kiss me
you just had to knock me down and kiss me
because you couldn't stand it
that you laughed at my jokes
or thought I was so cool
or like said really intelligent things that made you think
maybe not all of those things
but even just any one of them
just one of them

[Silence.]

You see what I mean, not even one.

SUSAN

I'm sorry.

WILSON

Why did you live with me, then?

SUSAN

I thought I loved you
but I guess I didn't know what love was.
I liked you in a way
not much
but in some ways
or at least in the ways I thought guys could be likeable
and the rest of it I thought maybe that's just
how guys are
and as time went on maybe it wouldn't matter so much
but then I find it does matter
I can't help myself
some stuff you do
I just can't get over it
and the stuff I liked:
that I thought you were a responsible person
and mature
solid and dependable
all those turned out not to be true at all
so what am I left with?

WILSON

It's not your fault.

SUSAN

No, it's not.

WILSON

Or maybe it is
that you weren't thinking very clearly
or being very focussed when you made your choice
and a lot of people were depending on that choice being really clear
or at least I was

SUSAN

I know.

I'm sorry.

WILSON

Being sorry doesn't cut it somehow.
I know people always say they're sorry
and probably they are
and I don't think it means nothing
I'm sure it means something
and it's essential for people to feel it
and to say it
in order for life to go on at all
and yet
the truth is
it doesn't cut it.
I'm sorry: but it doesn't.

SUSAN

I'm sorry.

WILSON

Is that somehow now
supposed to cut it?

13 Table Talk: A Couple Seeks Advice

Everyone comes back on and start clearing the table. Allen and Carl talk about their idea, both interrupting one another and talking simultaneously

ALLEN

OK.

I would like to hear opinions or advice on my idea.

CARL

Well, our idea.

ALLEN

Our idea.

It's a business really.

CARL

A new business because....

ALLEN

because the catering business is not like a big business.

CARL

So a year ago we bought a small acreage
we thought: let's go into a real business for ourselves
have a small business

ALLEN

and we fixed up the chicken coop

CARL

and bought 20 broiler chicks to raise for our own butchering.

ALLEN

I have an ample enough coop to raise more chickens for butchering
and also some egg producers.

CARL

I like this idea because I've always wanted to do something with farming,

ALLEN

but we didn't inherit farmland,

CARL

which is usually how you get to be a farmer.

ALLEN

Well, anyway, how do you find your target market ?

CARL

Advertising would not be hard,
I have a good program on my computer to make flyers and business cards,

ALLEN

but do we have to get a license to maybe sell to local restaurants?

CARL

Do we have to be monitored by the state since we'd be selling meat?

ALLEN

We just have the idea
and now we don't know what to do with it

CARL

and also we're nervous about failing
and Allen:
he's afraid if we go into the chicken business
he's going to end up looking like a chicken

ALLEN

Well.
I mean, look at Frank Perdue.

CARL

What do you mean?

ALLEN

What do you mean, what do you mean?

CARL

You mean he looks like a chicken?

ALLEN

Well, look at him.

CARL

I don't think being a chicken farmer
is going to make you look like a chicken, Allen,
otherwise plumbers would look like pipes
carpenters would look like sawdust
the president of General Motors would look like a bumper.

ALLEN

Have you seen the President of General Motors?

[Allen and Carl storm off. Phil, Phil's girl, Wilson, and Becker exit. Susan
climbs into the bathtub. Bob's Mom is left on stage.]

14 Table Talk: Bob's Mom's Grandmother

Bob's mom talking about family photos in album, a slide is projected behind her.

BOB'S MOM

When I was sixteen my grandmother had to be put into a home. My grandmother had terrorized my mother and uncle for so many years it was difficult to feel much in the way of empathy or compassion or love for her. But I related to her in one way. We shared a real passion for the color red. My grandmother's house was a museum. She collected cut Italian colored glass decanters and glasses. Each object uniquely shaped. Colors rich. I valued those objects deeply. I wanted to play with them, to make new shapes of them, to make new surfaces for them. I wanted to smash them and see what they looked like as heaps, to see how light played on their shattered surfaces. My grandmother always wore a large rectangular ruby pendant on a gold chain. I dreamed of having that one day. Of having that color. When my grandmother died I asked what became of the ruby. It turned out she had gone into the home years before and everything was sold at a yard sale. The objects she collected--beautiful objects--all discarded. Thrown out. No one wanted them. Cast off. I would have preferred to smash them against brick walls to see what they might have become.

Well, art was not a part of our lives.

[A girl skates through on roller skates. People drift back slowly and continue to clear away the food from the picnic.]

15 Guy Talk

Phil comes out with a checkerboard.

He sits down beside Susan and they start to play checkers.

As this scene goes on,

people drift to and from the table,

getting up to get something and then not coming back, going inside,

or getting up to get another drink for someone

and then not coming back,

some taking their plates or glasses with them

to continue eating and drinking wherever they stand.

And as the conversation continues,
the others may begin to engage in other activities--
Allen and Carl both bring out ironing boards and start to do some ironing in
the background;
Phil's girl swings in a tire swing;
Becker the filthy derelict sets up housekeeping inside his box;
etc.

SUSAN

The woman next door
is having an affair with an orchestra conductor in Cincinnati.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Does Cincinnati have an orchestra?

SUSAN

I guess it does.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Does her husband know?

SUSAN

He doesn't know.
She just flies off to Cincinnati from time to time
when her husband is away on business
or the conductor comes to Denver.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

How did they meet?

SUSAN

On an airplane.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

What does she do?

SUSAN

I don't know.
She flies around a lot.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Is she a stewardess?

SUSAN

Oh, right.

She's a stewardess.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

No wonder she can just go wherever she wants.

SUSAN

Right.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

It's a perfect job if you want to have love affairs.

SUSAN

Right.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Do you think all stewardesses are having love affairs?

SUSAN

Well, most of them probably.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Why not?

SUSAN

Exactly.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Would you, if you were a stewardess?

SUSAN

Yes, I think I would.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

So would I.

SUSAN
I have to pee.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER
What?

SUSAN
I have to pee.
Would you wait here?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER
Oh. Sure.

[She leaves;
everyone stops what they are doing,
turn to look, and just stand around waiting for her to come back;
we hear a flush from offstage;
finally she returns.]

SUSAN
Times have changed.

[Everyone else resumes what they were doing.]

PHIL, THE TRUCKER
Since when?

SUSAN
Since, oh, I don't know.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER
I don't think they have.

SUSAN
Of course they have.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Well, of course they have
in the sense that now you have electric lights and so forth
the internet
whatnot,
but otherwise I don't think times have changed.

SUSAN

I think they have.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Compared to what?

SUSAN

My grandmother.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

You wouldn't know.

SUSAN

That's true.
I wouldn't know.
Maybe that's what changed.
But in Russia you know
they didn't have love affairs for years
all during the communists.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

How do you know?

SUSAN

There was a study.
They didn't even have sex with their husbands and wives
not much.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Why not?

SUSAN

They didn't feel like it.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

Are they having sex now?

SUSAN

Now! Well, sure. I suppose they are.

You know, things have changed in Russia.

16 Becker's Movie

Becker climbs out of his box, holding two old license plates, which he uses as the script. He casts the other people in the movie and they do the roles as well as being film crew and audience. The objects around them on the stage become props in the film. Bob's Mom watches from inside the house.

BECKER

OK. I have an idea for a movie.

I think this could be really great.

You will play Clem, the meteorologist
you will be the billionaire on his deathbed,
the roles are all marked for you in the script.

Ready?

CAST MEMBERS [variously]

Sure.

OK.

Right.

BECKER

OK. Here it is:

This is a film about a conspiracy to blow up a train carrying nerve gas from the west coast to the east coast where it is supposed to be dumped into the Atlantic. Only one FBI man is alert to the danger and he cannot convince his superiors that a conspiracy exists. He is playing a hunch and sometimes he doubts the validity of his intuition. Minutes before countdown he has the evidence he needs.

OK.

The conspirators include a folksy meteorologist, an embittered homosexual, a Chinese cameraman, a Lesbian, a Mexican pistolero, a Negro castrated in his cradle by rat bites. The time and place for countdown depends of course on prevailing winds and the meteorologist is busy with continual calculations, weather maps, barometer and wind reads, telescopic observation of clouds and birds. There are also instruments of his own invention. He is contemptuous of weather reports.

ALLEN as CLEM, THE METEOROLOGIST

Doesn't know a typhoon from a fart. You see that vulture up yonder? He can tell you more than a room full of weather maps and barometers. The birds know.

BECKER

The conspiracy is financed by a private inheritance. This sum was left to Clem the meteorologist by an eccentric billionaire perturbed by overpopulation, air and water pollution, and the destruction of wild life. Now there is a shot of the billionaire speaking on his deathbed.

CARL as BILLIONAIRE, on his deathbed

Clem, swear to me by everything we both hold sacred that you will use every cent of that money to turn the clock back to 1899 when a silver dollar bought a good meal or a good piece of ass.

BECKER

Cut to conspirators headquarters in run-down 1920 bungalow. Audrey [Becker indicates Susan] the homosexual is looking through the Telstar. Inside the gate the last cylinders of nerve gas are being loaded into a train. The Telstar lingers lovingly on the ass of a young soldier who is bending over to pick up a cylinder of gas. Mr. Lee the Chinese cameraman takes over at the Telstar. Train doors shut and locked. A gum-chewing MP reading Sextoons presses a button. The train moves out.

ALLEN as CLEM

You know I love this country. Only thing wrong with it is the folks living there.

BECKER

His face goes black with hate.

ALLEN as CLEM

Mother loving stupid asses bible belt cuntsuckers.

BECKER

He smiles and turns to Audrey, Miss Longridge and the spade whose name is Jones.

[Phil's Girl becomes Miss Longridge, Wilson becomes Jones and Tio Mate.]

ALLEN as CLEM

Now you're city folk. You never drank cool spring water on a summer afternoon. You never sat down to fried squirrel and jack salmon with black-eyed peas and wild raspberries. You never sank your hands in the soil and let it run through your fingers.

BECKER

He turns back to the map.

ALLEN as CLEM

Yes, sir. We're going to lay down a mighty fine load of fertilizer.

BECKER

He sweeps his hand across the Middle West.

ALLEN as CLEM

The trees will grow again, the bison will come back, the wild turkey and the deer.

SUSAN as AUDREY

Other people are different from me, and I don't like them.

BECKER

Miss Longridge is looking at the nudes in Playboy. Tio Mate the Mexican pistolero is cleaning his Smith & Wesson tip-up 44. Jones is taking a fix.

Cut to FBI man pacing up and down in his office.

CARL as ROGERS

I tell you I had a dream. I saw that train go up and that gas sweeping up the Eastern seaboard.

PHIL'S GIRL as FALK

Are you going to tell the chief about your dream, Joe?

BECKER

[ROGERS, picking up the phone.]

CARL as ROGERS

No, but I'm going to ask him for more agents.

BECKER

Cover story for the conspirators is that they are making a documentary film of America. Clem is the director, Lee the cameraman, Audrey the script writer, Miss Longridge the business manager and Tio Mate the studio guard. The film of course is a documentary of America.

In a deserted roadhouse Audrey rapes a young sailor at gunpoint while Lee impassively films the action.

AUDREY

OK. CUT! You can put your clothes on now. And now let's see how fast you can run.

BECKER

Sailor takes off like a rabbit and reaches the top of a hill fifty yards away. Tio Mate draws and aims and fires. Tio Mate can blast a vulture out of the air with his 44.

Miss Longridge rapes two female hitchhikers. And then, stark naked, she kills them with a baseball bat.

They stop at a filling station and honk. Nobody comes, so Jones gets out to fill the tank himself. At this moment, the owner of the filling station, a Nigger-killing lawman with six notches on his gun, comes out a side door.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER as LAWMAN
Get away from that pump, boy.

WILSON as JONES
Yassuh, boss.

[As Becker speaks the following lines, everyone tries to keep up. Chaos ensues.]

BECKER
Jones drenches the lawman with gasoline and sets him on fire.

Jones who is hooked on junk leaves a wake of dead druggists.

Audrey is restrained at gun point from mass rape of a Boy Scout troop.

Tio Mate shoots down an army helicopter.

Clem sounds a word of warning to his impetuous companions.

ALLEN as CLEM
Such a thing as too much fun. We're leaving a trail like a herd of elephants.

BECKER
That's as far as I've gotten so far.
How do you like it?

[No one is sure how to respond.]

17 Line Dancing
Suddenly: a line dance.
At the end, it stops as suddenly as it began,

and everyone goes back to their normal lives. Phil's Girl crawls into the tub, Becker climbs back into his box and watches the following scene. Everyone else exits, except for Wilson and Susan, who are left onstage.

18 Crazy for You

WILSON [confronting Susan]

So
it turns out
you come to me
to be with me
and then
as soon as you feel reassured that I love you
you go back to your husband
and then if you talk to me on the phone
and I seem to be slipping away from you
if I seem anxious or uncertain
then you come back to me and make love with me
and stay with me
until you know you have me again
I can't help myself loving you
and then you go back to your husband again
so it turns out
the only way I can keep you is by making you feel anxious
keeping you on edge
making you feel I'm about to drop you
so the way to have you
is to reject you
and if I don't reject you
then I don't have you
we are in a relationship that is sick
where you show love by showing aversion
you show aversion by showing love
so that you live a backwards life
and the one person you want to love and cherish
and show how much you care
is the one person you will drive away by doing any of those things
how can we go on like this?
this is insane

this will make us both insane
this is how people go insane!

[He storms out.]

19 Dessert

Bob's Mom brings out a cake and
sets it down on the picnic table.
As this next scene goes along,
Susan starts to eat compulsively,
taking pieces of cake or cupcakes from the table--
at first absentmindedly, at a normal cake-eating pace,
and then more and more compulsively,
until she is stuffing it into her mouth.

BECKER

I think I know how he feels myself.
I thought you cared for me, too.

SUSAN

I did care for you.
There was something about you
I don't even know what it was that just hit me
I couldn't help myself
but then it turns out
it was like a summer storm
it passed as quickly as it came
and then it was over.

BECKER

Maybe it wasn't over for me.

SUSAN

I'm sorry.

BECKER

I don't think you can just drop someone like that
and just say I'm sorry.

SUSAN

I didn't just say I'm sorry
I am sorry.

BECKER

This is why some people call women fickle.

SUSAN

I don't think it has anything to do with being fickle.

How it is for women:

Women feel what they feel when they feel it
and then when they don't feel it any more they don't feel it.

Unlike a man

who won't know what he feels when he feels it
and then later on

he'll realize how he felt

and so he'll talk himself into feeling it again

when he doesn't feel it

because he thinks he should be consistent about the positions he takes
and stick to them

so a man always thinks he feels things he doesn't feel
and so he never really knows how he feels at all.

BECKER

That could be true.

SUSAN

Of course it's true.

Pretty soon

you're going to thank god you had such a narrow escape
you're going to feel lucky I dumped you

BECKER

I'm never going to feel that.

SUSAN

Maybe not.

BECKER

I think you must be a sort of a tease

or worse
some kind of seducer and dumper kind of person
who is just a loose cannon
cutting a swath through men
leaving them wrecked all around you
what is that all about?

[She speaks, with a mouth full of cake,
eating as she speaks,
with greater and greater animation as she goes on,
till she is yelling through a mouth full of cake.]

SUSAN

Maybe that would be about something
 if it were in any way true
 but it is not in any way true
 I'm a person who is looking for true love
 like anyone else
 except the difference is
 I am trying not to be afraid of my feelings
 and censor things
 and lie and lie and lie all the time
 pretending I feel like this or that
 going with some guy because I couldn't be sure any more
 how I felt about him
 because he had some things I liked and other things I didn't
 and trying to talk myself into not caring about the things I cared about
 and caring about the things I didn't care about
 because I've done that a lot in the past
 so I am trying to let my feelings lead me through life
 And
 feelings are feelings
 they come and go.
 So probably I'm just as disoriented as you are
 and left in the lurch
 suddenly dropped
 or thrown down the stairs
 it's not as though this is not a struggle for me too
 but the one thing you can be sure of is
 if ever I am sure of how I feel
 in a way that is the kind of feeling that I know will last
 then when that time comes
 if it so happens that I do tell you I love you
 then you can be sure of it.

[Becker and Susan exit.]

20 Martinis

Music.

Phil's girl brings out an immense piece of plastic sheeting

which she spreads out on the floor.
 She takes a bottle of gin
 and pours it out on the sheeting,
 then she takes a bottle of vermouth
 and waves it over the gin,
 then she takes a bottle of olives and pours it out onto the gin;
 she begins to slide forward on the gin,
 licking it up with her tongue.
 Phil enters in a bathing suit
 and he joins her
 sliding forward on his stomach
 and licking up the martini.

Everyone enters and clears the stage.
 A girl on roller skates rolls by.
 The stage is empty.

21 Why does the chicken cross the stage?

A chicken crosses the stage--moving cautiously, stopping and looking
 around as he goes, scratching at the ground--maybe while we hear, as a
 voiceover, an astronaut talking to Houston base.

VOICEOVER FROM SPEAKERS

A man in a chicken suit crosses the stage.

[Silence, till the chicken is almost off the other side.]

Why does he cross the stage?

22 The Universe

Music begins to play. Characters arrive slowly, all of them moving as if
 walking on the moon. Allen emerges first, pushing a car door on wheels.
 Susan and Phil's girl are cuddled up inside.
 while:

A man (Wilson) practices his golf swing in slow motion and:

A young girl eats candy wrappers or dog biscuits to the awe of her peers while Allen speaks:

ALLEN

You think that you see what's present ...but you don't, you never do...

All you can ever see is the past.

Look in the mirror,

you see a person in the mirror who is younger than you are...

because the light has to go from you to the mirror

and from the mirror to your eye.

So it leaves you, goes to the mirror

and comes back.

So whenever you see yourself,

you see yourself a little earlier.

It's actually unimportant. It's nanoseconds.

But the truth is:

all any human being can ever observe is the past.

You never see the present.

And everything you look at is younger than it is right now.

When you look at the universe,

you are looking at a universe that is billions of years younger.

[Allen and Susan drift off into space. Phil's girl joins the golfer. Carl rides by on a bike. He climbs off the bike, and then laundry falls from above.

Bob's Mom comes out and watches him.]

23 The Laundry Opera

Carl dives over and over again into a pile of laundry while we hear an operatic aria. After a while, Carl exits.

24 Clean Sweep

Becker the filthy derelict, as janitor with a push broom, crosses, sweeping up the laundry, while Bob's Mom speaks again, with slides projected behind her, but the photos don't match up:

BOB'S MOM

That's Bob and Freddie Martin

dressed up as The Lone Ranger and Hopalong Cassidy.

Look at them in their masks and cowboy hats,
 with all those swords and guns and flashlights stuck in their belts.
 Two tough little cowboys.
 I don't think Hopalong ever wore a mask, actually.

This is Bob
 and some kind of contraption he made in Boy Scouts
 from hundreds of popsicle sticks.
 You can see how he glued the sticks all straight
 and organized at the bottom
 and then where he got bored.
 He started gluing the sticks every which a way
 and adding feathers and bottle caps and twigs to it
 so it looked like that on top.
 He looks pretty pleased with himself,
 but I don't think the Scoutmaster was.

Oh my Lord, that's Bob up on the roof
 trying to fix his short wave radio antenna.
 Just after I took that picture the antenna fell over
 and touched the power line on the street.
 He was smart enough to let go in time,
 but the power blew up his radio and burned a hole in his desk.
 I think he got more careful about things after that.

And here's Bob and Barbara Spangler
 at Ethel Howell's Ballroom Dance Class end of the year formal.
 Barbara got the Most Polite Student Award that year.
 I don't know why Bob didn't get one too.
 He certainly was just as polite as she was.

25 The Galaxy

Allen enters with a ladder. He climbs to the top of the ladder and speaks.
 During the scene, the other characters come out one by one and wave at him.
 He appears to be waving back, but he exists in a different time and space,
 and his gestures are linked to the images he is describing.

ALLEN

This connection between time and space is everything...and you can't interpret or judge easily the way we can around here. That's why we're not sure of many things because we have only one interpretation--the way things look to us here on earth at one particular moment.

What we did: we thought it was, at that point, urgently necessary to do that. But I don't know why that is. In any case, it all happened and it's very hard to see how it could have gone otherwise.

But the place itself was fascinating, especially for a scientist engaged in the work...

it was dangerous...it seemed very responsible, it demanded all our attention, and we worried a great deal about what was happening ...

But, meanwhile, it was a beautiful place, a high mountain, 8,000 feet high, fair weather in New Mexico, in the winter it snowed, in the summer it was hot, never humid. The snow would cover the whole world in two feet of snow overnight and a week later it would be gone...no trace of it...

And when the snow was there you'd poke a hole , you'd look into it and you would see a deep blue color...because of the sky...the shadows are blue against it....for the same reason. The bright blue sky light...the bright blue sky light fills in the shadows and the shadows are intercepting the light from the sun itself. Just that little bright disc.

So behind it, in the shadow, like the earth's shadow, there's a kind of local light that has a blue tinge because the sky has not turned off. At night, the sky is turned off because the sun is what illuminates the sky, illuminates the earth and the sky , the sky is just there and we see the air in the shadow.

So it's the most beautiful place, Los Alamos...It was very grim, you knew the outcome couldn't work at all, that's what we all thought, but we weren't going to give it up.

[A newspaper boy's bell. Bob's Mom comes out to pick up the newspaper. The other characters come out to admire the stars.]

26 Square Dance

A country music song slams into the piece--
 remember what country music does, how american it is, how it adds
 automatically themes of love, betrayal, a hundred story lines enter the piece
 with country music
 a country music song
 a country music song
 a country music song
 a country music song
 a country music song
 a country music song
 a country music song
 a country music song
 a country music song

CARL

Square up everyone

[Music starts. CARL does a singing square dance call,
 the old square dance standard:]

Four ladies to the center and back to the bar
 four gents center with a right hand star
 opposite ladies for an aleman thar
 back up boys but not too far
 throw in the clutch, put 'er in low
 it's twice around that ring you go
 on to the next for a do pass-o
 and bring her on home as fast as you go
 down in Arkansas on my knees
 I thought I heard a chicken sneeze
 I looked around here's what I saw
 a bald headed maid with a pretty little taw

[The rest of the characters join in on the following verse.]

ALL

too old, too old

I'm too old to cut the mustard any more

[The music cuts out into ecstatic mode--

The square dancers
do flat out clog-stomping
so that they seem to float in the air
and only occasionally it seems the heel of a boot stomps the floor
as they float in ecstasy.

As the music continues,
Wilson and Susan have an especially ecstatic duet.]

27 The Assassination

Carl is assassinated—several shots ring out and he drops dead. Allen catches him and holds him. People stand around staring, then slowly go off, leaving Allen, Carl and Phil onstage.

28 Chicken Jokes

Phil tells chicken jokes to distract from the solemnity.

PHIL

A chicken went into a library
and went up to the circulation desk
and said to the librarian:
Booooooook!
Book! Book! Book!
So the librarian gave the chicken four books,
and the chicken left
and came back later that day,
put the four books down and said:
Book! Book!
so the librarian took back the first four books
and gave the chicken two new books
and the chicken left
and came back later the same day,
put down the two books and said:
Book! Book! Book!
so the librarian took back the two books
and gave the chicken three new books
and the chicken left.
But this time the librarian

followed the chicken out of the library
 to see what it was doing with these books
 since no one could read fast enough
 to go through those nine books in a single day.
 So the librarian followed the chicken down a dirt road
 and right down a path through the woods
 and came to a pond
 where the chicken was handing the books
 one by one
 to a frog
 who kept saying of one book after another
 Read it! Read it! Read it!

[Allen carefully places Carl down on the ground, and leaves.]

or

A chicken and an egg are lying in bed. The chicken is leaning against
 the headboard smoking a cigarette, with a satisfied smile on its face. The
 egg, looking a bit ticked off, grabs the sheet, rolls over, and
 says, "Well, I guess we finally answered THAT question!"

What do you call a chicken that wakes you up at the same time every
 morning?
 An Alarm Cluck!

The sound it makes is tick tock a doodle do

If you have deviled eggs, what you need is an eggsorcist.

Chickens are the hardest working animals. They work around the cluck.

Chicken soup is good for you. Unless you're a chicken!

When a chicken is crazy, it's referred to as a cuckoo cluck.

Why didn't the chicken look both ways before she crossed the road?

[Waits for the audience to answer.]

Because she was a dumb cluck!

[Phil exits.]

29 Welcome Speech

Carl, who has been lying on the stage dead, sits up and gives a speech welcoming everyone to an art opening, while we hear cement mixers, pounding, banging, clanking, sawing.

CARL

OK.

How we put the show together.

First, I want to welcome everyone

I'm glad you could all come tonight.

We don't often get to do a show like this
where we can just put on whatever we like
figure OK what the hell

lets just do whatever we feel like
and hope you'll enjoy it.

I often feel those of us who are in the museum world
are particularly blessed.

Because we get to explore our feelings
whatever they may be
that's a sort of freedom.

You know, that's how it is to deal with art
because art is made in the freedom of the imagination
with no rules

it's the only human activity like that
where it can do no one any harm
so it is possible to be completely free
and see what it may be that people think and feel
when they are completely free
in a way, what it is to be human when a human being is free
and so art lets us practice freedom
and helps us know what it is to be free
and so what it is to be human.

But, still, it often seems to me almost miraculous
how we can put things here in the museum
and ordinary folks
my mom and dad and my own neighbors
and I myself
will come to see things
sometimes things that I myself find completely incomprehensible
and really offensive
people will come to our museum
and think: oh, that's interesting
or, oh, that's stupid
but they don't really hold it against the show
they just move on and look at something else and think
oh that's cool.
And I wonder:
how do we get away with that?
And I think well, we are a free people
that's why
and we understand that
in a way maybe other people in the world don't
we like an adventure
often we might think
well, that's a piece of junk
but that's how this fellow sees the world
and there's a certain pleasure in seeing things from his point of view
we are a patient people
no matter what you hear people say
and a tolerant people
and a fearless, open people
that's how it is for us

I think that's how it is to be an American.

We're all unique.
It's a precious thing to compare ourselves to nothing else.
This is my working attitude.
I don't feel shame in my joy.

[He looks confused.]

I started out here knowing what I meant to say
 and now I have to say
 I don't know what I said.
 But I'd just like to welcome you
 and let you know
 we're all glad to be here with you tonight
 to share this with you
 and we hope you have a swell evening.

30 General Applause

Canned applause and bravos from the audience at the 25th anniversary Cage concert at Carnegie Hall, which continues over the following scene:

31 Yard Sale

Bob's Mom comes out, puts something down, goes back inside.
 A guy comes in, looks at something,
 hands money to someone
 and walks out with it,
 and then others enter and do the same
 while Phil speaks

PHIL

On the way out of Albany
 we stopped at Joe's Eat All You Want restaurant (\$1.50).
 Just for dessert Steve Paxton had five pieces of pie.
 I asked the cashier on the way out:
 how do you manage to keep this place in business?
 Most people, she said rather sadly,
 don't eat as much as you people.
 Near the Grand Canyon
 we found a lodge in a meadow surrounded by a forest
 near the north rim of the canyon.
 We were so comfortable there.
 Fireplaces and good food.
 Steak, salad, and Irish whiskey.
 North of Seattle
 we stopped at a place in the middle of the forest
 that advertised homemade pies.

Some of us had two pieces.
 Blackberry.
 While we were there, some other customers came in
 and ordered pie.
 "I'm sorry: we don't have any more."

Eat
 in any municipal, state or national park is my advice.
 Build fires: broil steaks or chickens
 roast vegetables in foil with butter, salt, and pepper.
 Fill a large wooden bowl with salad greens you've collected.
 Heavy cream, lime, salt, and mushroom catsup,
 olive oil, lemon juice, chives (or shallots),
 potato salad,
 corn on the cob,
 ice cream with chocolate sauce
 red raspberries.
 Ginger ale and beer.
 Dark beer.
 A big kettle full of chili.
 Peanut butter.
 Dill pickles.
 Rare roast beef, mustard on the side
 smoked salmon and cream cheese
 A sandwich of beef, ham, lettuce, tomato with Russian dressing.
 Garlic.
 Whenever anyone mentions they are going to put garlic in a dish
 I always hope the cloves will be large.

[Phil exits.]

32 The Beating

Allen comes on carrying a square of astroturf, a garbage can, and a baseball bat. He sets the astroturf down carefully, places the garbage can on the astroturf, takes out two earplugs and puts them in his ears. He beats the garbage can with a baseball bat. He exits.

33 The Marching Band

A 123-piece local high school marching band enters playing and marches through the center of the piece and out again.

Everyone gathers to watch the parade.

34 The Dark Side

Bob the pizza boy, a character we have not seen before, enters from where the marching band exited with a pizza box in his hand.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

And yet, I think, nonetheless, forgiveness is possible.

SUSAN

You do.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

Well, sure.

Really under any circumstances.

Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...
primarily the question is
does man have the power to forgive himself.

And he does.

That's essentially it.

I mean if you forgive yourself,
and you absolve yourself of all, uh,
of all wrongdoing in an incident,
then you're forgiven.

Who cares what other people think, because uh...

SUSAN

Was this a process you had to go through over a period of time?
Did you have to think about it?

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

Well, no.

Not until I was reading the Aquarian gospel did I,

did I strike upon,
you know I had almost had ends meet because I had certain
uh you know
to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about of course what I did.
And uh,

ALLEN

I'm sorry, what was that?

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

Triple murder.
Sister, husband. Sister, husband,
and a nephew, my nephew.
And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

CARL

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use?
What were the instruments?

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

It was a knife.
It was a knife.

ALLEN

A knife?

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

Yes.

ALLEN

So then, the three of them were all...

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

Ssssss...

[points to slitting his throat]

like that.

WILSON

So, uh,
do you think that as time goes by,
this episode will just become part of your past,
or has it already...

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

It has already become part of my past.

CARL

Has already become part of your past.
No sleepless nights? No...

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY

Oh, no. In the first three or four years there was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there were something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, but uh I remember distinctly I just cut her throat once.

[Becker offers him a chair. He sits, making himself at home.]

That was all, you know, and I don't know where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re- re- re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime--my initial steps, etc. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur with the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of some lines in Revelation, in the, in the New Testament. Uh I had a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter 6 something, verses 3, 4, or 5, or something where uh it was a man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red horse came out, and uh, and uh uh, and he was given a knife, and unto him was given the power to kill and destroy. And I actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And and and uh, you know, uh after the murders I thought the nephew was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister,

there's no question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through uh for me. You know and I was in another, one of these manic attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this you know one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other people that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etc. and like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh so uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh you know, that was that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out, that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject of forgiveness. If I forgive myself I'm forgiven. You know that's essentially the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permission. I just (he nods) "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven." You know. Ha-ha. You know. (Laughs.) It's as simple as that. You know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of people know that.

Who ordered a pizza?

ALLEN
Oh.

SUSAN
A pizza.

ALLEN
I don't think anyone here ordered a pizza.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY
Someone ordered a pizza.
I don't go around picking up pizzas
if nobody ordered one.

ALLEN
I think there's been some mistake.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY
I think you are the one who is making a mistake
if you think nobody

is going to pay me for the fucking pizza.
I paid for the pizza.
You know: pizza
is not returnable.

ALLEN
Right.
I'll pay you for the pizza.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY
Plain cheese.

ALLEN
Right.
Here.
Keep the change.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY
[checking the money Allen has given him]
Right.
Thanks.
Appreciate it.
Which way did I come in?

[The others all look at one another and then point in the same direction.]

ALLEN
Over there.
Right out that way.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY
Right.
Thanks again.

[He leaves. We hear a newspaper boy's bike bell. Bob's Mom comes out, takes the pizza, and goes back inside. Everyone follows her, except Allen, Carl and Phil's Girl.]

35 Lovers

ALLEN
You know
I've been thinking about it
and it turns out
I love you

CARL
You do?

ALLEN
Yes.

CARL
I didn't know that.

ALLEN
Neither did I
but
I look at you
and I think you're good-natured.

CARL
Oh, good-natured.

ALLEN
Yes.

CARL
You do?

ALLEN
Yes, I really do.
And I think
if you think a person's agreeable and warmhearted
then I think there's something there you can't explain
that gives you real
delight.

CARL

Oh.

ALLEN

I find
you give delight to me.

CARL

Oh. Well.
That's what I'd hope for more than anything.

ALLEN

So would I.

CARL

And you're not sorry about it?

ALLEN

How do you mean?

CARL

That you find delight in someone
who doesn't seem to you in any other way
desirable
who doesn't perhaps have those qualities
that you can count on
for, you know, the solid, long-term kind of thing.

ALLEN

I would just take delight long-term.

CARL

Oh.
So would I.

[Bob's Mom comes out, Allen sees her and follows her back inside.]

36 Falling in Love

Carl begins to dance as he talks to Phil's girl.

CARL

I think I fell in love with him
 and I mean I fell in love with him like
 the first time I saw him
 I just couldn't stop looking at him
 he was a soccer player
 and I don't go to soccer games
 and I don't like jocks
 but I was there because a friend had taken me and bla bla bla never mind
 but I was walking to our seats in the bleachers
 and I saw him walking along the sidelines
 and I just couldn't take my eyes off him
 I was like a cartoon joke
 I was looking at him and walking
 and I could have walked right into a wall
 and I think the reason I fell in love with him
 is that he reminded me of a friend from high school
 who reminded me of a guy I saw in a movie.

[Carl sits down beside Phil's girl.]

37 Fidelity

PHIL'S GIRL

When I was nineteen
 it seemed to me I shouldn't be tied down to one guy
 I loved him
 and when we were together we were just with each other
 but if I went to Paris, for example,
 I thought I should have love affairs because I was nineteen
 and I thought he should, too,
 and I told him I was having love affairs and he should, too,
 and I wished he did
 both because it would have made me feel less guilty
 and also because I would have thought he wasn't such a nerd if he did
 but he said he only cared for me
 and it made me feel like such a bad person
 that's definitely one of the reasons I broke up with him
 and then, when we broke up,

he told me he had been having affairs with other women
and then that just tore it
after that, I just thought he was a jerk.

[Susan enters, bouncing a ping pong ball. Carl turns to Phil's Girl.]

CARL
Pizza?

[Phil's Girl nods. They both go into the house, leaving Susan outside.]

38 Eternal Love

Wilson opens a window and sees Susan.

SUSAN
You know
I've been thinking about it
and it turns out
I do love you

WILSON
You do?

SUSAN
Yes.

WILSON
How could that be?

SUSAN
I look at you
and I think you're sweet.

WILSON
Oh, sweet.

SUSAN
and good-natured.

WILSON
Good-natured.

SUSAN
Yes.

WILSON
You do?

SUSAN
Yes, I really do.
And I think
if you think a person's agreeable and warmhearted
then I think there's something there you can't explain
that gives you real
delight.

WILSON
Oh.

SUSAN
I find
you give delight to me.

WILSON
Oh. Well.
That's what I'd hope for more than anything.

SUSAN
So would I.

WILSON
And you're not sorry about it?

SUSAN
How do you mean?

WILSON

That you find delight in someone
who doesn't seem to you in any other way
desirable
who doesn't perhaps have those qualities
that you can count on
for, you know, the solid, long-term kind of thing.

SUSAN

I would just take delight long-term.

WILSON

Oh.

[He runs downstairs and joins her outside.]

So would I.

39 The Waltz

Music starts.

Wilson and Susan do a beautiful Viennese waltz while Allen speaks.

ALLEN

Well, it depends on what you want to predict...I can predict the death of the sun quite accurately probably within ten to twenty percent ...I don't think I'd be wrong by more than one billion years plus or minus. You can predict the positions of the planets 100s of years into the future very accurately because we have studied vectors so much. But if you want to predict what's going to happen two years from now in Haiti you can't say very much--because the human system, that's a very complicated system.

[Wilson and Susan continue to dance. Phil and Phil's Girl appear at the windows above them, and throw out ping pong balls like confetti. The music stops suddenly, they go inside.]

40 Whitman

As Becker speaks, people wander out of the house and slowly clear the stage.

BECKER

O take my hand Walt Whitman!
Such gliding wonders! such sights and sounds!
Such join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next,
Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all.

What widens within you, Walt Whitman?
What waves and soils exuding?
What climes? what persons and cities are here?
Who are the infants, some playing, some slumbering?
Who are the girls? who are the married women?
Who are the groups of old men going slowly with their arms about each
 other's necks
What rivers are these? what forests and fruits are these?
What are the mountains call'd that rise so high in the mists?
What myriads of dwellings are they fill'd with dwellers?

What do you hear, Walt Whitman?
I hear the workman singing and the farmer's wife singing,
I hear in the distance the sounds of children and of animals early in the
 day,
I hear the Spanish dance with castanets in the chestnut shade, to the rebeck
 and guitar,
I hear fierce French liberty songs,
I hear of the Italian boat-sculler the musical recitative of old poems....

What do you see, Walt Whitman?
Who are they you salute, and that one after another salute you?

I see a great round wonder rolling through space,
I see diminute farms, hamlets, ruins, graveyards, jails, factories, palaces,
 hovels, huts of barbarians, tents of nomads upon the surface....
I see the tracks of the railroads of the earth....
I see the filaments of the news of the wars, deaths, losses, gains, passions,
 of my race...
I see the site of the old empire of Assyria, and that of Persia, and that of
 India....
I see the battlefields of the earth, grass grows upon them and blossoms and
 corn....
I see all the menials of the earth, laboring,

I see all the prisoners in the prisons,
 I see the defective human bodies of the earth,
 The blind, the deaf and dumb, idiots, hunchbacks, lunatics,
 The pirates, thieves, betrayers, murderers, slave-makers of the earth,
 The helpless infants, and the helpless old men and women.

I see the male and female everywhere,
 I see the serene brotherhood of philosophers,
 I see the constructiveness of my race,
 I see the results of perseverance and industry of my race,
 I see ranks, colors, barbarisms, civilizations, I go among them, I mix
 Indiscriminately,
 And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth.

[Becker exits.]

41 Bob

Late evening.
 Do we hear an operatic aria faintly in the background?
 a man singing a love solo.

BOB'S MOM

He was a sweet boy.
 Of course, he loved his bicycle.
 He would float for hours in the canal in an inner tube
 and he built a go-cart out of wooden boxes.

We belonged to the Church of Christ
 so of course there was
 no drinking, no movies, no gambling
 not even card-playing for fun,
 no kissing before marriage,
 no dancing.
 You can be sure the Pleasure Pier on Lake Sabine,
 which had a dance pavillion,
 was definitely off limits.

Everything you did,
 if it could possibly be interpreted as an indulgence,
 was evil.
 That's how it was then.

Everyone was poor those days.
 We were a rural people so I knew how to sew.
 I could arrange the paper patterns so close together on the fabric
 I didn't waste a bit.

I scrubbed all the clothes on a washboard
 I planted vegetables and canned them every year
 and we raised chickens in the backyard for Sunday dinner.
 We had linoleum on the floor in the kitchen.

He was a handsome boy
 with a clear, fair complexion.
 But he was not full of himself.
 He was humble within himself,
 and kind to everyone.

You knew he was going to go someplace,
 you just didn't know where.

Isn't it something
 how he can see the beauty in almost anything!

We were ordinary working people.
 Art was not in our world.

[We hear a newspaper boy's bike bell.]

42 The Last Dance

Night time.
 Stars in the sky.
 Crickets.

The music of Ibrahim Ferrer (of Buena Vista Social Club fame). Bob's Mom starts to dance. Becker the filthy derelict joins her. Eventually everyone else enters and dances. They leave in couples. The last remaining couple is Bob's Mom and Becker, and then he leaves.

Crickets.

Bob's Mom does a few moves alone on stage and enters her house.

43 The Final Moment

At the end of the piece: a man's voice says:

"OK!

That feels good to me."

~

PROGRAM NOTES:

The text for this piece was developed in a workshop with Tali Gai, Jane Comfort, Kathleen Turco-Lyon, Rebecca Brown, Reba Herman, Alec Duffy, Jacki Goldhammer, and Carolyn Clark Smith and incorporates texts from them as well as from Robert Rauschenberg, Fred Becker, Philip Morrison, Walt Whitman, William S. Burroughs, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Allen Ginsberg, and Laurie Williams.

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bobrauschenbergamerica
by Charles Mee

Contact Information:

Sam Cohn

ICM

40 W. 57th St.

New York, NY 10019

212-556-5600

Characters:

BOB'S MOM

BECKER, THE FILTHY DERELICT

PHIL, THE TRUCKER

PHIL'S GIRL

SUSAN

WILSON

ALLEN

CARL

A 123-PIECE HIGH SCHOOL MARCHING BAND

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY