

E-time, E-space, Emotion...

"In the closed universe he [the artist], he escapes sterility only by that continuous renewal afforded by a game in which nuance acquires idolatrous dimensions and in which a verbal chemistry achieves compounds inconceivable to a naive art. So deliberate an activity, if it is located at the antipodes of experience, approaches, on the other hand, the extremities of intellect."

The Temptation to Exist

"Renunciation is the only form of action that is not degrading."

Anathemas and Admirations

"On this immaculate page, a gnat was making a dash for it. 'Why be in such a hurry? Where are you going, what are you looking for? Relax!' I screamed out in the middle of the night. I would have been so pleased to see it collapse! It's harder than you think to gain disciples."

Anathemas and Admirations

"In front of poverty, I am ashamed even of music."

On the Heights of Despair

DO THE UNTRANSLATED thoughts of a Rumanian writer exist if there is no English ear to hear them? Like the philosophical tree in the forest, E. M. Cioran may not have made a sound, but he surely fell over. Explorers to deepest Paris brought back word: "Yes, he works. Yes, it hurts." Here be monster intellects... perhaps. How would we know, lacking the language skills? Though translated into English from the sixties, the works were unavailable here due to a legal huff, or a Harvard plot or something. My own attempts at booklegging came to nothing. Forlorn, I went to drown my sorrows, and, just when I was impressing the bloke next to me, the barman says, 'Cioran?—Quartet Encounters you want mate.'

Now it is one thing to have a pet-intellectual hero whose name you are unsure to pronounce and whose pre-eminence is effected on the heights of the four spindly quotes that comprise your knowledge of his oeuvre. Another to behold a parcel from the book mongers that may have clay feet writ large upon it, to be revealed only by your powerful x-ray vision... as if. This boy's from Krypton; able to leap off tall buildings in a single bound.

As the Job club would have it, Cioran is a philosophical essayist with aphoristic experience. Born in Rumania in 1911, by 1937 he had completed his post grad study at Bucharest University when he won a coveted scholarship with the French Institute to Paris. And there he stayed, soon deciding to write only in French. Only his first collection, 'On the Heights of Despair' (1934), was written in Rumanian. The title derives from Rumanian journalists' habit of prefacing the obituaries of suicides with the phrase. His themes are suffering, mind, insomnia, death, madness, music and the salutary

effects of lying down in the face of it all. You might not choose to read it to your friend in the hospital, but he's a good laugh really. If you like your laughter so slow and deep that you mistake its undulations for moods you are having. It is Transylvanian laughter after all. Even this first book though, has a Franco-feel that goes beyond theme and style. In his sensibility and droll elegance he out Franches the French, and they do so love that in a foreigner—look at Monsieurs Picasso and Beckett, and their exile Joyce, par another example. Yet even the French initially championed him unread, taking the word of the few who had read him in the Rumanian. Cioran has a PR angel where we make do with mere guardians. I'd read an essay or two on him which told me little but that he was much admired for vague reasons. Then this in Newsweek: "If it hadn't have been for the possibility of suicide, I would have killed myself years ago."

Suddenly I love this man. I want to take him for a drink and talk him into it. It isn't the humour, paradox, bathos, irony or self-deprecation that gets me. Despite all that, something else is happening. Cioran has elsewhere described his work as diagnostic (di-agnostic, when two or more don't know for certain?). He may be telling me I'm sick, but I rather see his aphorisms as prescriptions for the condition—how to tread air in the abyss. It says, when on the horns of a dilemma, sit on the bull's head and hold tight to the pointy bits. It is a call to remember that survival is a way of life, and not something that operates only at crucial points.

Logically the phrase is an ourobus, biting its own tail—a position simultaneously self-destructive and self-sustaining. Not a time for action, but to persist. But all this is plan B. Plan

A, I feel, is the use of the mechanism of emotional resonance, a communicative mode which works only if the receiver has experienced similar emotions. Emotion is the memory of being, and like smell, evokes the whole experience it is bound to, the time and place and myriad streams of consciousness associated with it, whether the emotion is depressive or ecstatic (odd how many emotional terms are spatial in origin). Extreme emotional states such as trauma, for example, have many possible causes, but the human reactions to it are clearly delineated, and few. The experience of trauma is homogeneous—indeed, to the extent that we say Post-traumatic stress is syndromic. In the diagnosis and treatment of the condition, only the evolution of its stages is characterised; self-blame, survival guilt, aggression, fear, etc. Cioran, to the contrary, addresses and is informed by the resolved, consolidated condition. He uses tactical emotional bomblets, that, if they strike home at all, strike hard.

But perhaps I'm out of my depth. Although such emotional resonance is a highly effective mode of communication, some, like Theo Adorno, reject it out of hand. Adorno insists on 'non-participatory teleologies,' that is, his participatory teleologies. What he means is, you don't dream because he cannot verify it. But, if all teleologies are to be non-participatory, who is to participate in them? Anyone with experience of a similar enough one to resonate with, I suppose. So get a life Theo. Or a near-death experience. Better still, get a book: "On the Heights of Despair" (1934), "The Temptation to Exist" (1956), "Anathemas and Admirations" (1986), "History and Utopia" (1960), E.M. Cioran, Quartet Encounters.

Michael Donaghy

Tea and Videos in Paris

Around tea time (16.00 hrs) on the first and last Sunday of each month, Corine Miret and Stephane Olry organise a screening of video works in their apartment in the Le Marais district in Paris. Tea and biscuits are served in the living room while the bedroom is set up for viewing.

The organisers wanted to combat that "terminal" Sunday feeling, the terrible boredom of the day in the week they both dreaded. Corine—a fan of different kinds of teas—combined their enjoyment for tea and cake with a good excuse for cleaning and rearranging their apartment to focus into the organisation of Thes Videos.

Set up in 1993, their public grew gradually through word of mouth and from Stephane and Corine's contacts within the world of art, theatre, dance, cabaret and multi-media events, Corine Miret is a dancer, Stephane Olry is a theatre director and writer and together they operate a production company called "La Revue Eclair" which organises large multi-media events.

With Thes Videos, invitation cards are sent out every few months to already established contacts and some are left in gallery spaces. The invitation cards are mainly to announce when screenings will recommence after the summer, winter or autumn breaks or when Corine and Stephane have returned from travelling and working outside Paris.

Entrance is free but a donation box is situated in the lobby for contributions, a

list of video works is provided when viewers enter. All videos are selected from their personal archive, to date, the archive comprises of sixty to seventy videos mainly by French makers with a few other Belgian, Dutch and German works. The organisers collect and screen video work that they like, their choice is purely subjective. This becomes evident when they introduce individual works and give a brief background to them, they take a great delight in what they show.

Their preference is for direct, live to camera works in 'real time,' often with an element of humour. They do not favour flash technical skills and paint-box usage. In this sense their archive represents a current trend in art for highly subjective personal works in 'real time.'

On the occasion I was there, one video played showing its maker (head and shoulders shot to camera) singing a well-known French pop song without the aid of music or an accompanying record. All the pauses, timing and intonations were perfectly studied and memorised and the video maker's complete sincerity in his rendition caused great hilarity amongst viewers.

Three to four new titles appear each month. The archive grows organically through word of mouth and it is the video makers themselves who approach Thes Videos with their works.

Care is taken to inform each video maker about the reception of their video, to describe and explain the context within which the work will be shown if the

maker is not already familiar with Thes Videos. This is important as throughout a screening viewers may come and go, out for a cigarette, a cup of tea or a chat. The television/monitor itself is more than simply a 'black box,' being camouflaged in a 50s sci-fi style and set up as a unique, almost sacred object. Mattresses and cushions are littered across the floor accommodating ten persons comfortably and fifteen at a push. The apartment is spacious enough, but for organisational ease numbers do not exceed twenty/twenty-five. In 'le salon' where tea is served, viewers get together to decide what they would like to watch. A list of video works is provided on entering, these being generally of short duration, between three and five minutes, with the occasional thirty to fifty minute video included for those who enjoy an element of perseverance. Some people turn up uniquely to view videos, others come simply to discuss, without watching a single work.

Corine and Stephane are themselves video makers, producing video postcards whenever they travel, and naturally they are included in the archive for viewing. Thes Videos started up again in September and any video maker passing through Paris with a copy of their video under their arm, and in need of a cup of tea can contact Corine Miret and Stephane Olry: 11 Rue Des Arquebusiers, 75003 Paris. Telephone 42 77 16 62

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