

POWDER HER FACE



PROJECTION OF A LIVE SIGNAL ON AN OPAQUE SURFACE THAT RISES.



PROJECTION OF A LIVE SIGNAL ON A SEMI-OPAQUE SURFACE THAT RISES.

Overture / Interlude Strategy

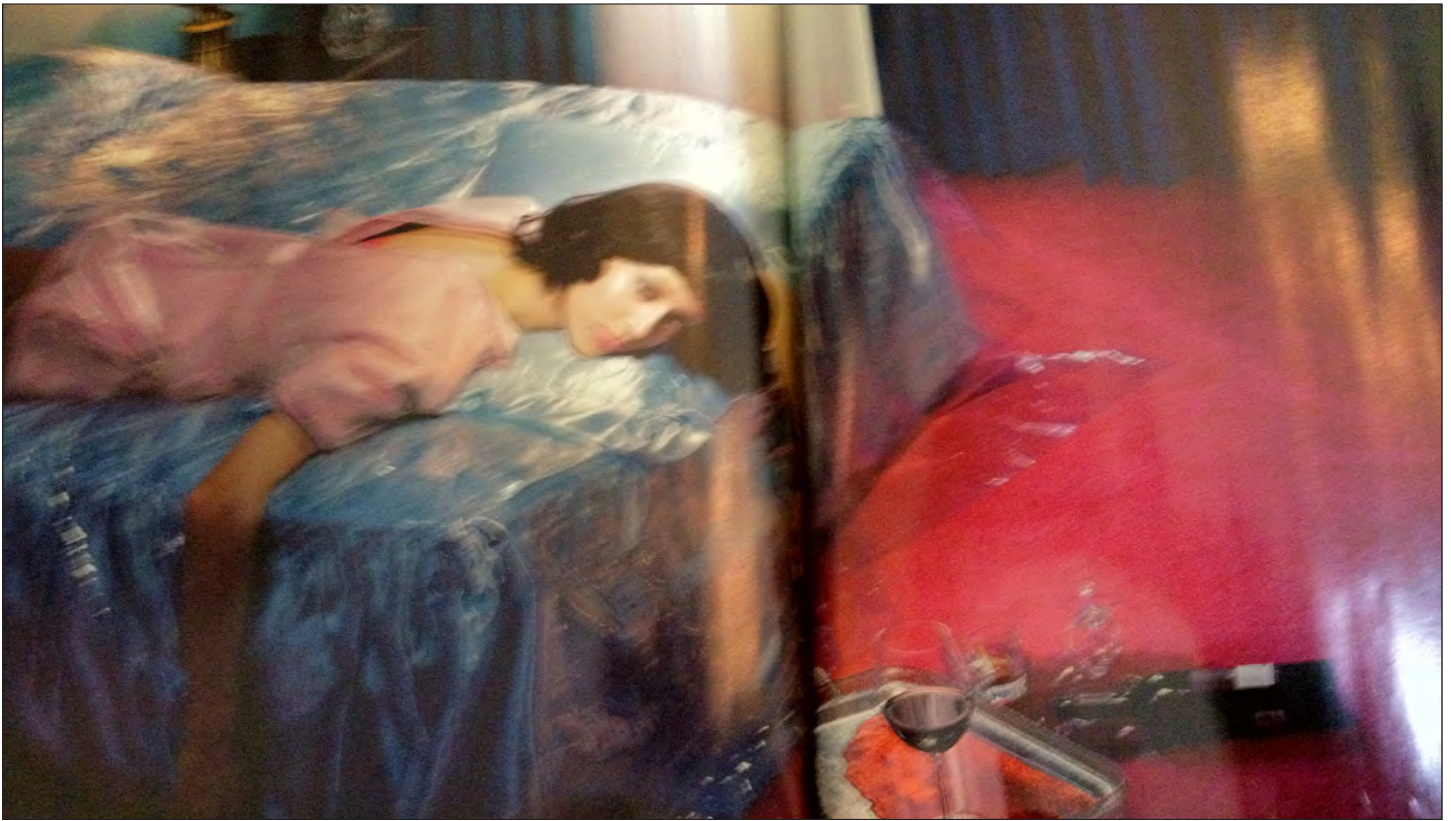
Using front projection of a **live** camera onstage onto an opaque screen or onto a semi-transparent scrim or both. Cinematography is arranged such that action on film has a clear fluid continuum into action on stage. (singers).

/Overture/

A Punch and Judy routine as imagined by Jean Genet but played by hotel employees—shot live-on-location and projected in glorious black-and-white against a screen in front. We see an insanely bored maid in a beautifully draping fabric in sweet colours with tears on her face, her hands wringing an apron maybe. Trying to cheer herself up she jumps up and down on the bed—her dress bouncing in lovely waves of fabric. A Beautiful blue and antique room torn from those hotels that remain our contemporaries though built so long ago. The maid in pink? or yellow? or blue like the walls. A double set of large doors leading into a bathroom and then a hallway, and then a forest later on. Two single beds and a hotel television. It might be fancy or maybe better said—it might used to have been fancy. Helmut Newton must have shot a dozen photographs here and that's what we are going to do too. Except that we are in the business of resurrecting an image of the Duchess. It might get ugly.



Largely and partially and in some cases profoundly influenced by the work of Helmut Newton and in particular the rich hotels surrounding that which he photographed.



A radically bored maid, or maybe she is crying those silver tears because she is disappointed in herself for having betrayed the woman she served for all those years. A nurse tries to help put clothes into a suitcase. Well, Just A Maid once again in close-up and draped across the bed or slumped against the wall. Or bouncing on the bed again. She seems barely able to contain this admixture of grand excitement and loathsome funeralia. It seems like there must have just been a television interview because there's still lighting equipment in various stages of broken-down and there's a crew moving things away—but then it looks as though we are seeing the sordid remains of some sort of horrid b-movie for extra-late-night Italian television. She looks Exhausted. Utterly. Just so bored. And then room service arrives. The tattered ends of craft services represented in bananas and cheese cubes. Wine and ham salad sandwiches. And tea and coffee. The room service guy looks pretty nervous like he's been here before. And the room service girl? she looks nervous too. Jittery even. A dude dressed like a grip or maybe he's a real-deal electrician and he strolls past in his boots and overalls, taking a sandwich from the room service tray. The Maid, tears like rain, walks into close-up and takes a bite from his sandwich and She hits him once. Really hard too. Wow. That must have hurt. And then she takes his sandwich away and takes a glass of wine back to the bed where she goes back to bouncing. (The Music will start any second. Who's that guy talking to the woman in the bathroom?) The maid looks beautiful there with her dress bouncing





up and down and up and down on the bed in glorious black and white on screen. Wine spilling onto the now bare mattress with abandon and the room service guy, the one who looked so nervous before tries to stop her (knowing he'll have to clean everything up on his own) and he tries/takes her glass away the maid loses her balance and the Electrician, the burly-working-guy-type he is, misreads her falling and pushes the room service man and a wrestling match ensues as the music begins. We can't tell if it's funny or if it's actually erotic all this wrestling. The history of the tango. Two drunken sailors expressing their inebriated frustrations physically at sea (The electrician takes it a little farther, unzipping his coveralls, taking down the top. Skin on skin like high school and oh man they're wrestling and it's rough and the camera finds the room service girl who's laughing hysterically and trying to open the champagne and the bouncing maid is trying to break it up. Does he howl with laughter? or is he really in pain? The maid takes another sandwich and tries to open the champagne. What a struggle. She takes the meat and cheese from the sandwich and eats it putting the empty bread back on the plate. And then the room service guy seems to have slipped and hurt himself and he is on the floor and the construction worker guy's pants are around his ankles, or that's what it looks like and as he unravels himself and slowly stands up the curtain too begins to move. What an unsettling feeling. And his underwear too maybe around his ankles! Crazy. And then what? Is he peeing on the room service guy? That's awful! Oh my God! We see it under the curtain! Peeing on the injured room service guy? No way?! What kind of opera is this? But on screen we see it's just the maid trying to pour the champagne into a glass but she was distracted for a second and laughing again. And the curtain keeps moving up and we see oh the construction worker guy wasn't a guy at all! it was a she? Or anyway her legs are shaved. She's pulling on stockings and wait a second? Is that a mustache on the maid? had I missed that? Somehow? Nice though not really matching lingerie and she's actually pulling a dress over her head (I thought it was a construction guy but I guess it was a girl. What a sexy dress and then a fur but it's like





a gigantic fur-like blanket? Wow. And what a gorgeous wig, or is that her real hair? And she slaps the waitress who was attending the room service guy and tells her to get out. And she picks up the room service dude and pushes him up against the wall and kisses him and oh my oh my. Sorry Ma'am I really can't you know your car will be here soon ma'am. You're checking out right? /END OVERTURE/



/Scene One/

1. Scene one (1990) - the maid and the electrician satirize the duchess. In the top floor apartment of an expensive hotel. Having just come from her television interview but it's 1990. The Duchess is unsure what to wear and is putting herself together in another part of the house. The maid and the Electrician who is convincingly disguised as the Duchess re-enact the famous blow job scene but here done as a sort of reality clown show. He looks like a she and she like a he and the duchess discovers that the maid is a he and she offers him a tip. From under the skirt of the maid comes a very normal little penis. The duchess blows the prosthetic. Her gratuity is so awesome that some of it spills on (his) her dress—profanely. Ugh. What a mess...And then the duchess walks in on the whole affair. Tea service turns into milk spilling turns into profound fear as the Hotel Manager comes to evict her, the scene ending with an ominous knocking at the door.....The Duchess loses her grip just a little bit as the shadow of the Hotel Manager/ Duke looms larger than life, as the knocking at the door, as the clutching at her dress (torn so long ago, on the night she met the duke after rolling in the leaves), and the smell of Joy





Notes on Scene 1 vs. Scene 8



In terms of time's unruly route through memory, I am thinking of objects and smells and sounds. Chronologically, Scene one should directly precede Scene 7. The whole opera then functions in a way as a sort dissonant memory—each overwriting the previous.

There are two or three critical events that I want to focus on in order to make the transitions both memorable (reconizable and effective) but also fluid. **She sings about her perfume: "Joy."** Considered one of the greatest and most timeless perfumes Ever. It's ad copy goes: **"There is only one Joy...the costliest perfume in the world."**

She is expecting "her duke." **She wants to look right.** "Her" Duke however is a Hotel Manager and he is going to evict her and move her into a nursing home She wants a different fur. She wants her tea. The machine is broken and she spills the spoiled milk all over her fur and whatever else she was wearing. **She chooses a tea gown. But It's torn! When was it torn? (1934?) And the memories begin to rage inside of her.** The Hotel Manager knocks. Interior Panic—she clutches the torn gown to her chest and throws the bottle of perfume at the huge shadow he has cast on the wall. The bottle shatters against the wall and simulataneously we release enough "Joy" in the auditorium that the whole place smells like the **costliest perfume in the world.**



Duchess at time of interview.



Duchess much earlier



(perfume) and memory crashes over her and she hurls the bottle at the wall where it explodes and memory washes over her.

Interlude/ Scene 2/

(Supposedly 1934 but I dunno.)

As the perfume bottle smashes against the wall and the shadow of the duke and the Interlude begins, the curtain/screen roars in and on it arms and legs and clothes and we see someone getting it on in the back seat of a car? - or no? wait a second? Is that the duchess sitting on the hood of a car as a twenty-something hottie? Wearing that same stunning and sort of semi-see-through tea gown — except that now it looks new? as though, yep, we have gone back in time? — So just before the ominous knocking on the door and just before the smashing of the perfume against the wall and the crazy smell of joy the duchess held that dress in her hands and maybe it was the feeling of the fabric and the smell of perfume and the stress of moving after so many years that blew her into this dream. Maybe this is how the clock spins out of control and in reverse.

That's one of her friends on the hood and look, she's still in her Leni Riefenstahl shorty short shorts and the sleeveless shirt. Is that the Electrician in the back of that car? turning into some sort of strange lounge lizard with one of the local girls in the back of a car? I love these interludes. It's like they're there just for changing clothes and hair? In the back seats of cars. Who knew it could be so awesome. She emerges from the backseat of infamy, eyes a little glassy but who cares. It's 1934 and she's ahead of her time. Maybe she was just helping the lounge lizard into his fancy pants. It is such a nice outfit. It's the perfect country club, lounge-lizard kind of guy. Just in from the back-nine. And feeling Great. **This is Scene 2.** In the bar of a country-club, or on the estate. The help gossip about the divorce of Mrs. Freeling. Soon she'll meet the duke and then she'll play the duchess. The divorcé all dressed



The Duchess and her confidant on the hood of a car



Dodge Charger



Teens / thirties inspired teagown

up to catch a known womanizer (but what the hell? he's royalty.) But first we'll hear about her previous divorce. And we'll hear about an affair that the Duke was known to have had and we'll hear about the girl who got pregnant and, *no thanks to him*, the pregnancy she ended, ended maybe by illegal means. She ended up dead. No thanks to him she ended up dead. *Sort of an ominous*

start to a beautiful marriage.

On the wall an enormous screen.



If Scene 2 and Scene 3 are in similar locations, would it make sense to try to change our relationship to the event? rotate it 30 degrees or something?



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A camera person frails the action in this made-for-the-big-screen Interlude. Preparations of the bridal party. The car disappears and an enormous banquet table is brought onto the stage. The bride is being dressed

Dressing of the Bride and Groom Scene 3. /Interlude/ Transition out of scene Two/

Scene 3. A scene in a stand of trees. Preparations for a wedding feast. The Maid sets the table where the Bride and Groom will soon be on display (and how). Cakes and whole chickens and whole vegetables in aspic and a very FANCY ARIA. The preparations of the Maid are filmed by the wedding videographer and projected large onto the stage left wall, just there, snaking between the trees—the groom, still in his tuxedo, makes his tipsy entrance just before system “M” as the maid sings “Just like her_ Just fancy being her.”___ and the stage directions say: SHE TAKES A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE AND OVER THE NEXT FEW BARS, PULLS THE CORK OUT And the Duke approaches her and puts his hands on her and she goes on singing “Fancy putting milk and almonds in your bath. Fancy your underclothes costing thirty shillings the ounce.” The duke tears her dress and kisses her neck and the Maid keeps singing. Clutching the bottle in one hand and the duke with the other and all the while trying still to finish her job and goes on singing: “Yes, fancy having nothing to do but wait for the man for your hair and the girl for your skin and the boy___with the telegram with reply paid for. **Fancy purchasing a Duke.**” And this really works on the Duke —who by now is tearing his own tuxedo from his waist and the stage direction in the score says that THE BOTTLE EXPLODES (but it’s definitely

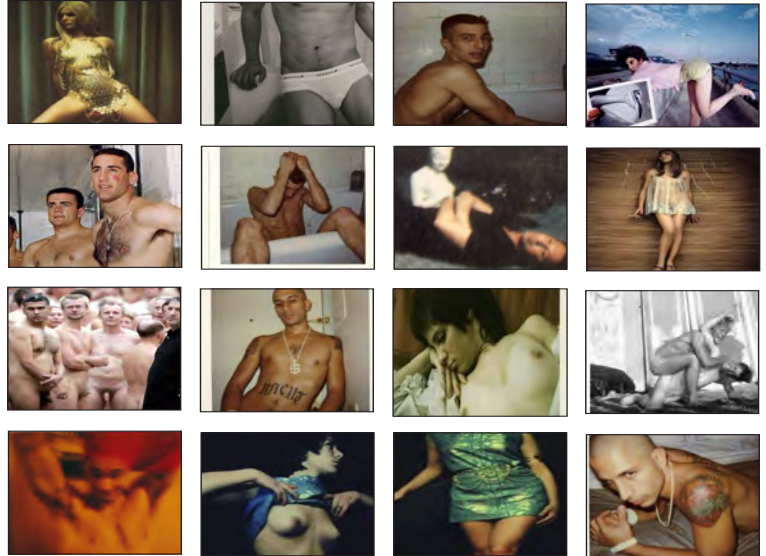


he who explodes) and then as she pours the champagne (The Duke by now is losing his mind and she too because as the stage direction in the score says SHE POURS IT INTO A GLASS AND CARRIES ON POURING UNTIL THE BOTTLE IS QUITE EMPTY AND THE TABLE SOPPING WET. And she's sopping wet. And the duke and the maid are both also sopping wet and the Maid sings: "That's what I want. That's what you want. You'd love it." (marcatissimo!) As the Duke, still in the remains of his bridegroom tuxedo gets it on and on with the maid — the whole thing is projected 30 feet tall and I don't know 18 feet wide — and the as the light balloon ascends away from their merry-making a television of the hotel variety is wheeled out by a naked dude eating a sandwich. And on the television is the duke and the maid still getting it on but it looks like just any old garden-variety-soft-core-super-designed-porn-film where the man in the tuxedo is having his way with a maid or maybe it's the maid having her way with duke on a table with the table cloth drenched in champagne and they're both getting drenched and then it begins to rain



a little too but just there, where the camera can see and into the scene comes the drunken bride — the blushing bride but not for long *cause this scene'll wipe the smile from anyone's face* — walking in on the duke and the maid and it's raining on her too now and she's drenched as well as the wall of the hotel moves in slowly, so slowly to conceal the scene just bit by bit, and then they're gone and AT SYSTEM B SCENE 4 the door opens and suddenly the duchess is stepping out of the bathroom still soaking wet but from the bath and drying herself off and wrapped in a towel or a bathrobe-dressing-gown-or-whatever. Maybe she's just wearing a bra and a towel on her head but it's ten years later. And on the television of the hotel room we notice that the duke is still getting it on with the maid. Will this sort of thing never end? Will it just go on like this? Will it just get worse? One infidelity out of boredom or self defense after another out of boredom or love or whatever. And the duchess lays back on her bed. Bored out of her mind and holds that beautiful red phone to her ear and listens to her messages and takes notes in a book. And then a naked guy strolls out of the bathroom drying his hair and stops at the other end of the wedding table cut in half by the wall





ing door of her boudoir and many many affairs of the duchess. He loses his mind with jealousy and while trying to get his ding dong back in his pants he is already spouting off about her infidelity! She shows him where the fotos are kept. The proof! He acts like he doesn't know who took the photographs. But we know. The examination of photos takes over the screen. The Duke



throws the Maid/Mistress onto the bed as he rifles through the bottomless box of photos of the duchess and the many naked boys and men in various states of Love Making he spreads them out on the bed and on the Maid/Mistress too and photographs the photographs so that he would also have proof. Proof of the Duchess's Infidelities laid out over Proof of his own. Hundreds of Carlo Molino inspired polaroids.

Intermission

A tour of the photos continues throughout the intermission like one endless slideshow of what?



/Interlude/ Scene 6/

6. A highly publicized divorce with a judgement in the duke's favour. Passersby / Rubberneckers become observers of the court—perhaps in a gesture of governmental transparency or maybe because the whole thing is already so public anyway—The court has emerged in this hotel room that has been overtaken by trees. Passersby/Rubberneckers discuss the finer points of the proceedings and then jump on the beds like children. A very public trial staged invades our living room—just like life. Like a makeshift court in a wrecked room—where every judgement imaginable can unfold in wild abandon. Far in back, the car of her youth seems to have been smashed through the wall and belches smoke. Or maybe it's those beds back there that seem maybe to be on fire? is it possible? Well. Is it over the top? Well. No one notices.

/Interlude/ Scene 7/



Duchess at time of trial

7. Interview at 60 minutes. Like slowly realizing that you are dreaming and waking up from that dream still believing to be neither quite awake nor still yet asleep. Neither dreaming nor waking but some consciously organized combination of the two. A giant light descends from above. Strobes flash in the sky. Grips and Production assistants crowd the craft services table as the Duchess makes her case to the world. The room transforms itself and from a above, the wall of the hotel slowly falls as the bed replaces the judges box, and the witness stand folds itself away.

/Interlude/ Scene 8/

8. The events leading into and out of Scene 1 are re-enacted in finest detail. Like a video tape that has been rewound just a little beyond it's targeted start. Events catch up. Still clutching that dress to her chest. She smashes the perfume bottle against the wall where the Hotel Manager's shadow is again there against the wall. This cold numb feeling deep inside, waiting for the Hotel Man-



ager. Wondering how she might postpone this mess. It's 1990 and she is being kicked out of her room. The hotel explodes in light and the landscapes shift one into the another. The Duchess picks her way through the room and the boxes and half packed suitcases trailed by a nurse in perfect Richard Prince nurse attire. She will wake up from this dream in a nursing home. Later she will fall and hits her head. Dead.

/Ghost Epilogue/

A perfect re-enactment of the Overture. Only this time, the Maid no longer wants to play along. She's leaving the opera. Time's up. The Maid says No Mas. And this is how we end. Convinced, utterly convinced that we won't - just this once - repeat ourselves again. Not again. Or, never again. Oh dear please. Not again. No mas. Not again. Throughout scene 8. The walls close in. And in the ghost epilogue perhaps the screen rolls in and we see them on screen again. The struggle and the fight. The craft services table and the teasmade, the torn dress, and the unruly beds. And far far away in the distance, The Duchess, trailed by the nurse, picks her way through the landscape. Slowly we are only aware of the Duchess, just there, alone in the darkness.



If Scene 2 and Scene 3 are in similar locations, would it make sense to try to change our relationship to the event? rotate it 30 degrees or something?