

EXT. THEIR APARTMENT (MAIN ROOM WINDOWSILL) - MORNING

From outside we see into the main room of their apartment. The set is bare, devoid of furniture and decoration. The crew assembles the set and leaves. An alarm clock rings from off screen, and JOHN enters looking like he just woke up.

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (EATING AREA) - MORNING

JOHN is in the dining room, sitting at the round table there. He's dressed and eating cereal, etc. PAUL comes out, also looking like he just woke up, and joins him.

JOHN

Yo sup bro.

PAUL

Bro I gotta tell you about this dream I just had while it's still in my head.

JOHN

I'm glad that you force your dream imagery on me. You know that's how I love starting my days.

PAUL

Sssh, this is a good one.

INT. THEATRE

PAUL is naked on stage in an empty theatre, jumping and dancing around. Spotlights glare, concealing his nudity. We can see threads coming out of him. Above him is crouched a dark silhouette that appears to be manipulating his movements.

PAUL (V.O.)

I'm in a theatre, naked on stage.
Everyone in the world is there.
There are all these threads
coming out of my wrists and
elbows and knees, and there's
this guy crouched up there in the
flyspace. I can just kind of see
his silhouette. I start dancing
around like a retard. I remember
thinking, "I want to dance," but
it's not actually me thinking
that.

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (EATING AREA) - MORNING

PAUL

It's him, up there, pulling the
strings.

JOHN

(beat)

Is that it?

PAUL

Yeah, that's it.

JOHN

I want you to know that I hate
this, but let's do it. The
obvious interpretation is that
you are not in control of your
actions. Your unconscious mind is
trying to tell you something
philosophers have known since
Spinoza, at least, but instead of
all atoms in the universe
following paths determined at the
Big Bang, you imagine it as one
figure up above, making us dance
for his pleasure. Ha, ha!

PAUL

Seriously? That's all it means?
There's no magical prophecy?

JOHN

If this were a film, there would probably be some ominous foreshadowing. But it's not, so yeah, you're just a paranoid neurotic.

PAUL

In elementary school I was terrified by the prospect of performing on stage. I remember once, I believe it was in the second grade --

JOHN

No! I am not your analyst. No way am I going to listen to you free-associate for an hour.

PAUL

Oops, is that what I was doing? Silly me, tee hee.

(beat)

But I'm impressed. I'm totally satisfied with that interpretation. You've actually gotten good at psychology.

JOHN

It's all Jung, baby. He's the man with the brilliant ideas. I just learned them, and applied them to you.

PAUL

Is that what all shrinks do?

JOHN

Oh, I have no idea.

PAUL

For some reason I feel a lot more comfortable with Jung explaining how my mind works than Freud.

JOHN

That's because Jung is a much better doctor than Freud. They were both sort of insane, but all Jung did was induce hallucinations on himself. Freud gave people drugs and, in the end, if you dream about walking down a hall, you're actually dreaming about having sex with your mother.

PAUL

That's some crazy shit. The amount of people that take psychiatric drugs recreationally and are, you know, unstable drug-addicts, is a pretty big indicator that you can not fix something immaterial with chemicals.

JOHN

No-one thinks the mind is immaterial anymore. It's all in the brain now, and the brain is a big pot of chemicals waiting to be balanced.

PAUL

He should have called himself a...a somatician!

JOHN

(laughs)
Yeah, okay.

PAUL

I certainly respect the guy and all. If not for Freud, we wouldn't have...Woody Allen films.

JOHN

Half of The Sandman.

PAUL

A lot of fantasy.

JOHN

And, uh, no Quake or Doom.

They both laugh, and there is silence while JOHN finishes his breakfast.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Okay, I gotta go.

PAUL

Have a good day, sweetie.

JOHN

You too, sugarpie.

While JOHN puts on his jacket, bag and shoes, PAUL disappears into his room. JOHN leaves as PAUL walks out, now dressed. He looks through the window at JOHN walking down the street. PAUL assembles his own things and leaves.

EXT. CAFE/AMELIA'S BOOKSHOP (CORNER) - MORNING

PAUL is sitting on his bike beside a building on a corner in a trendy part of town. He's watching a CAFE on the street opposite him. AMELIA walks out, holding a coffee, and across the street to AMELIA'S BOOKSHOP only a few storefronts away from him. He looks embarrassed and tries not to watch as she unlocks the door and enters. PAUL bikes off as soon as she's gone.

EXT. CITY STREETS - MORNING

John walks down the street to the metro.

INT. METRO - MORNING

He boards a train with a huge group of people, but manages to get a seat next to an aisle. He takes out a book of Jung lectures and starts reading. He's listening to music. Three portly men in white robes with shaved heads approach him and start speaking in French; JOHN pauses his music.

FRIAR #1

(in French)

God has something special in store for you!

JOHN

(in French)

I'm sorry, sir, I'm really not interested.

FRIAR #2

(in French)

I've seen your face in visions!

FRIAR #3

(in French)

The truth is in your soul!

JOHN

Oh, Jesus Christ.

FRIAR #1

(in French)

You are special, a chosen one.
You must pray at a house of God,
and seek wisdom from Him.

JOHN

Bugger off!

JOHN returns to his music and book. The three men stand nearby, talking and gesturing excitedly until his stop arrives. Standing by the door, POLLY approaches.

POLLY

Hey, I saw those guys trying to
talk to you.

JOHN

Yeah. Total weirdos.

POLLY

What were they saying?

JOHN

They were going on about how
they've been having visions of
me, that I'm a chosen one or
something.

POLLY is momentarily taken aback, and glances into the camera.

POLLY

(beat)

Oh, uh, that's incredibly
strange.

The train arrives, and they get off with a flood of other people.

JOHN

Do you go to McGill?

POLLY

No, I don't go to school. I'm starting at a new job today. I wonder how many people wake up in a bad mood and fall prey to these nuts, shaving their heads and giving up their lives? All to escape this ennui I so eagerly signed up for.

JOHN

They're both just doing what they think is right, the nuts and the bees.

POLLY

Why are you defending those guys? I saw how quickly you dismissed them.

JOHN

I'm impatient with fanatics, but I respect their place in society.

POLLY

You're right, though. I am being mean. I'm just sad: this is now my life. I'm going to walk this exact same fucking path until I die.

JOHN

Wow. Now you're making me feel bad.

POLLY

I'm really sorry. I don't mean to be such a complainer. I've worked, but never in an office building.

JOHN

You never went to school?

POLLY

The school of hard knocks.

EXT. BUSINESS DISTRICT STREETS - MORNING

Their conversation continues as they walk through streets crowded with business men, both ignoring the fact that they're walking in the same direction. After a few minutes they arrive in front of a huge building.

EXT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING) - MORNING

JOHN and POLLY stand in front of a massive office building.

POLLY
What are the odds?

JOHN
I don't know. Pretty steep, I think.

POLLY
Are you a gambler?

JOHN
On a train bound for nowhere.

POLLY
(laughs)
I bet for.

JOHN
No fair, I want to bet for. Let's flip a coin.

They flip a coin. JOHN wins.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Okay, now on three.

JOHN (CONT'D)
1...2...3...LTE!

POLLY
1...2...3...LTE!

JOHN (CONT'D)
Awesome! What do I win?

POLLY
You win the pleasure of seeing my unhappy face every morning.

At that moment, BENJAMIN and two goons (TONY & GILLIS) arrive.

BENJAMIN
Hey, you're POLLY, right? We met
at your interview. This your
first day? Let me show you
around. This is Tony and Gillis.
(they grunt)

BENJAMIN sweeps POLLY away from JOHN, rudely bumping into him. The two goons, trailing along behind, glare at JOHN meanly.

GILLIS
What's up JOHN.

When they're gone, JOHN looks extremely angry. He takes out a cigarette, but crumples it up in frustration and walks after them into the building.

INT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY) - DAY

JOHN takes an empty elevator to his floor.

INT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING - WORK AREA) - DAY

Reaching for the doorknob to enter the cubicle farm, JOHN hesitates and looks sad. He enters, walks to his desk, and slumps down in his seat.

INT. LOCATION "B" (RESTAURANT - KITCHEN) - DAY

PAUL arrives at his work in a restaurant. As soon as he walks in the door, his boss (MURRAY) starts to berate him. PAUL acts very meek.

MURRAY
Hey, PAUL! There was shit in the
toilet left over from last night!
What the fuck, PAUL?

PAUL
Sorry, boss.

MURRAY

What the fuck am I paying you for
if not to make sure there's no
shit left in the toilets all
night?

PAUL

Won't happen again, boss.

MURRAY

It better not. Now let me show
you what you're doing.

MURRAY leads PAUL over to the deep fryers and indicates the
floor underneath.

MURRAY (CONT'D)

I want you to pull these out and
use this to scrape the grease up.

He hands PAUL a trowel.

MURRAY (CONT'D)

Have fun -- and hurry up!

INT. LOCATION "B" (RESTAURANT - BACK DOOR) - DAY

PAUL stands by the back door of his restaurant, drinking
coffee and smoking a cigarette in the squalid alley there.
There's a high concrete wall across the way. PAUL sets down
his things and walks over to it. Jumping, he grabs the sharp
top and pulls himself up, but on the other side there is only
a desolate parking lot.

INT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING - JOHN'S DESK) - DAY

JOHN is sitting at his desk watching a slide-show of
photographs on his computer. Each photo represents a
different emotional range, and through subtle variations in
his facial expression, we see JOHN's emotional reaction to
each image. He is interrupted by BENJAMIN, who has come over
to insult him.

BENJAMIN

What were you doing with POLLY?

JOHN

None of your business.

BENJAMIN

Do you know her?

JOHN

I do now.

BENJAMIN

That's the only reason I can think of that she would start talking to you.

JOHN

Do you know her?

BENJAMIN

(laughs)

I'll know her good soon enough.

JOHN

Something makes me think that's not going to happen.

BENJAMIN

What are you talking about?

JOHN

We walked together, talked some, and she mentioned that she's a lesbian.

BENJAMIN

Fuck you!

JOHN

She also told me about her visit to Africa. She was kidnapped by terrorists and they cut off her
--

BENJAMIN

Shut the fuck up. If she's a dyke, why'd she keep looking at me and licking her lips like she wanted it?

JOHN

I don't believe she was doing any such thing.

BENJAMIN

You weren't there. She wanted it hard. I can tell because she was acting all nice to me.

JOHN

I guess you aren't used to that from women?

BENJAMIN

She wanted it hard! I can tell!

JOHN

Careful, don't get too excited.

BENJAMIN

You're a loser. How long have you had this shitty job? And when's the last time you had a girlfriend? Not since high school. Maybe someday you'll get a girl, but not today, and not this one. POLLY belongs to me.

JOHN

I'll believe it when I see it.

BENJAMIN

Well believe it, 'cause what you saw this morning was just the first of many.

JOHN

The first of you cockblocking me many times?

BENJAMIN

Hahaha, that's rich! Me, blocking your cock? You have to start swinging it first, JOHN. When's the last time you got laid?

JOHN

I'm outta here.

JOHN stands up, puts on his jacket and moves to leave his cubicle. BENJAMIN stands in the entrance, blocking his exit.

BENJAMIN

Where do you think you're going?

JOHN

I'm going to smoke ten cigarettes
in a row. You got a problem with
that?

An intense look is exchanged. After a moment, BENJAMIN lets
JOHN past.

BENJAMIN

You've got fifteen minutes.

EXT. LOCATION "B" (RESTAURANT) - DAY

A quick, rhythmic montage of pretty girls with various
positive natural expressions, set to upbeat music. The
montage switches randomly between close, medium and wide
shots of girls caught in glamorous poses, as in fashion
magazines. The emphasis is not on their clothes. After a
minute or so of montage, we are shown PAUL sitting on some
steps on the street, idly watching the passers-by, smoking a
cigarette. The last girl shown can be seen in the background
walking away as YOKO approaches. They engage in a
conversation with obvious hostile undertones.

YOKO

Well, hello there, PAUL! I
haven't seen you since...why, not
since --

PAUL

Yeah, hey YOKO, how's it going.

YOKO

Well, you know, it's going pretty
fucking wonderful! I'm on the
board at this company I've been
with for a year or so. Ha, ha!
I'm getting paid a hundred bucks
an hour right now, just to talk
to you! Ha, ha!

PAUL

That's pretty incredible.

YOKO

Yeah, you know. I'm gonna have to get out of this city soon. Montreal's too small for me, you know? L.A. is where I really want to be. Beautiful weather all year 'round. Sure I'll miss the French-Canadian chicks, but I'll be getting my fill of bronzed bikini goddesses in Cali, right? Ha, ha!

PAUL

Awesome.

YOKO

So, how's it going with you? How are you doing? Not still washing dishes at the same greasy spoon, I hope?

PAUL

Yes, actually, I am, except I've graduated from a greasy spoon to a slightly oily fork. I'm on break right now.

YOKO

Oh...sorry about that...so, any women in your life?

PAUL

Nope.

YOKO

Ha, ha, ha! Hey, remember in high school when you got really drunk and tried to kiss my girlfriend? After she rejected you, you spent the rest of the night crying about how much you loved her.

PAUL

No, I don't remember that. I'll sue you if you spread that dirty lie around. I don't even remember what she looked like.

YOKO

No-one since Angie, huh?

PAUL

Who?

YOKO

Yeah, I don't have a girlfriend, either. A new one every night, right? Been too busy getting them to keep them around for more than a quick fuck.

PAUL

I'll bet your fucks are quick. I remember --

YOKO

Yeah, whatever. Say, do you still hang out with JOHN? You guys used to be pretty tight in high school, if I recall.

PAUL

We're room-mates now.

YOKO

No shit, huh? How's that?

PAUL

Awesome. Fantastic. We've been considering turning gay so we can have an excuse to spend all our time together, rather than just most of it.

YOKO

Ha, ha, that's rich. Remember in high school, how you guys always used to shower --

PAUL

No, I don't fucking remember that. It's because guys like you were always grabbing our cocks, okay.

YOKO

So what are you doing with yourself, PAUL? Really! I don't want to visit in ten years and run into you like this again.

PAUL

Yeah, I would really hate that.

YOKO

You got any kind of long-term plans?

PAUL

I was thinking about staying here for at least a decade longer and mulling over how to waste my youth.

YOKO

Well, I certainly hope that you succeed at whatever it is you end up doing.

PAUL

And I hope you leave, never to return.

YOKO

Thanks, PAUL. Well, it was nice talking to you, but I gotta go earn a lot of money doing nothing. I'll see you around, PAUL.

YOKO walks away. PAUL looks extremely angry; his frustration can be seen to build between flashes of girls as before, except this time their faces are frowning and their poses uninviting. PAUL's frustration grows until he finally lashes out and strikes the wall.

EXT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING) - DAY

As in the last scene, a montage of all different sorts of girls, smiling and frowning.

JOHN (V.O.)

I have never loved a woman (not counting my mother). Lovers are liars; romance, an ideal those disgusting teenagers invent because they never learnt how to be alone. They carry this ridiculous notion of altruism with them their whole lives. Me, I never knew my mother, but I love her because she brought me into this world, and, well, I'm very grateful for that. But girls mean nothing to me: I like them with a pretty neck...pretty breasts...a pretty voice, pretty wrists, a pretty forehead...pretty knees...but I don't love them, not for any of it. I only want them. "Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs; being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes; being vex'd a sea nourished with lovers' tears. What is it else? A madness most discrete, a choking gall and a preserving sweet." That's what Shakespeare thinks, and it's true he's never let me down before. Here's Percy on love: "Sterne says that if he were in a desert he would love some cypress. So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was." If that's true, certainly I am merely a husk. Shelley and Wordsworth were both Romanticists, but so were Beethoven, Liszt and Mendelssohn. I know that love is the desire to own the good forever, but I still don't understand. Ah, well; I am content that it's all bullshit.

The montage switches from pretty girls to a shot of YOKO walking down the street. JOHN's monologue continues.

JOHN (CONT.) (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Oh, look who it is. It's that contemptuous simpleton, YOKO. Seeing his ugly face again makes me recall how much I hate him. On one level, I crave to break free from this clichéd relationship, of high-school bully and nerd, but on the next level, I hate his guts.

YOKO arrives, stopping suddenly in front of JOHN, who is sitting, as if he hadn't noticed him.

YOKO

Oh, shit! JOHN! How's it going, man? Guess who I just ran into --

JOHN jumps to his feet as soon as YOKO begins to speak. The sidewalk is crowded; JOHN pushes YOKO into the middle of it, yelling. YOKO responds with the same tone and volume.

JOHN

Fuck you! Who the fuck do you think you are, coming up and talking to me all friendly-like! I'll break your goddamn nose!

YOKO

Fuck you! I just ran into your faggot friend PAUL, still washing dishes! What do you do, work in some shitty cubicle? You were losers in school and you're just as worthless now!

JOHN

I will tear your fucking head off, asshole! If I ever see you again, I will attack you. If I ever see you on this street I will fucking murder you.

YOKO

Fuck you, bitch! I'll go where I want and do what I please! Bring it on! Do your worst!

YOKO starts to move away slowly, not turning his back to JOHN.

JOHN
(shoves him)
Get the fuck outta here!

YOKO
Fuck you!

YOKO starts walking away quickly.

JOHN
Asshole!

YOKO turns around and gives JOHN the finger over the top of the crowd.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Stupid bastard! You couldn't read
until Grade 3!

JOHN returns to the point he had been sitting at originally, and resumes his cigarette. After a short moment, he is hailed by POLLY, walking from the same direction YOKO went.

POLLY
Hey! How's it going? Did I see
you screaming at some guy?

JOHN
Me? I don't take no guff. If an
argument escalates past normal
speaking volume, I start swinging
fists.

POLLY
Oh. I passed a guy who looked
really angry, and I saw him
yelling at someone around here.

JOHN
Well, I've only been here for a
moment, actually. I must have
just missed the commotion.

POLLY
Sometimes I wish they'd bring
back the guillotine. I think it
would be good for people, to see
a public execution every now and
then.

JOHN
I'm sure the better man won.

There is a moment of awkward silence. JOHN throws his cigarette away.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well, I should go do some more work, I guess. I already got in a fight with the boss once today.

POLLY

A fist fight?

JOHN

It was an argument carried out in very moderate tones, but my barbs were no less stinging for their lack of volume.

POLLY

(laughs)

Okay.

JOHN

Goodbye.

POLLY

Goodbye.

INT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING - ELEVATOR) - DAY

JOHN mutters to himself angrily in the elevator, then slumps and holds his head until it arrives at his floor.

INT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING - JOHN'S DESK) - DAY

Embarrassed, he sits at his desk and begins to type.

JOHN

(typing)

Embarrassed, he sits at his desk and begins to type. The words bounce for infinity, caught in the recursive trap of a hall of mirrors that no-one will ever see.

CUT-TO:

JOHN sits slumped at his desk, watching the clock on his computer. It hits 5 PM and he leaves quickly.

EXT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING) - DAY

JOHN walks out of his building and calls PAUL on his cellphone. Intercut with PAUL at work washing dishes.

JOHN

Yo, CAFE?

PAUL

I'm not down. I had a bad day.

JOHN

Yeah, me too! Let's meet at CAFE and talk about it.

PAUL

Alright fine. I'll see you in an hour.

JOHN

Word!

INT. CAFE - DAY

This is the cafe PAUL watched AMELIA come out of that morning; across the street is her bookstore. JOHN is sitting at a table by the large window, facing away from the street. PAUL enters, greets JOHN, goes to the counter and orders a coffee. He sits opposite JOHN, facing the street.

JOHN

Hey. I got to tell you this, man. This morning, taking the metro, I'm sitting, reading some studies in the process of individuation, minding my own business, when these three friars come up --

PAUL

Friars? What?

JOHN

Yeah, dude, like Friar Tuck. Anyway, they come up and start bothering me, telling me that I'm the son of God or something. A couple stops later I'm about to disembark when this chick comes up and starts talking to me.

PAUL

How hot was she?

JOHN

Like a 7.5 cutie. She comes up to me and starts talking to me all sweet, like.

PAUL

What does "sweet, like" actually mean?

JOHN

Well, you know. All sweet, like.

PAUL

I don't know.

JOHN

Just, think about it! Anyway! We talk for a while, and it turns out that she works at the same place as I. So we're walking along....

PAUL stops paying attention to JOHN and his voice fades out. He continues telling his story, gesturing and waving his hands around. AMELIA comes out of the bookstore across the street, locks the door behind her and walks across and into the coffee shop. PAUL tries to ignore her, but he fidgets as she orders at the counter behind him. She exits, stopping on the street in front of the window. We see her take out a package of cigarettes: it's empty! Snatching JOHN's pack from his breast pocket, PAUL hurries outside and offers her one. JOHN watches, amused, as AMELIA accepts gratefully, but sighs when PAUL insists she take the rest of the pack. When she's out of sight, PAUL grins at JOHN through the window.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DUSK

JOHN and PAUL walking home; PAUL is walking his bike.

PAUL

I've been in love with her ever since that bookstore opened.

JOHN

It's been like, a month?

PAUL

Yeah. Remember when it opened? Of course the first thing I check is the science fiction section, and there are like, five novels that I've been looking for for years. She wasn't working then, but I gave them to the guy 'cause I had no cash.

JOHN

I remember.

PAUL

The next day when I come back, there's this beautiful goddamn woman there. When she handed me the stack of novels, our hands touched a bit. It was like being blasted with magical energy.

JOHN

That doesn't sound pleasant at all. It's been over a month and you still haven't talked to her?

PAUL

I just did!

JOHN

For like, half a minute.

PAUL

My strategy is to establish myself as a familiar face she sees around, and build up small talk into full conversations. Then I'll ask her out on a date.

JOHN

No, I'm not going to let you do that. It'll take a year unless you stalk her. By then she'll be living with some lifeguard named Vincent.

PAUL

I discovered by accident last week that she works in the morning. Since then I've been taking a detour past her shop on my way to work.

JOHN

Oh, Lord, and doing what?

PAUL

Watching from afar, for like,
five seconds every other day.

JOHN

You need to realize that love is
bullshit: you hunt the wyvern,
not seduce it. I have, and I am a
much better person for it.

PAUL

That is a total falsehood. When's
the last time you got laid?

JOHN

Why do people keep asking me
that? It doesn't matter! I don't
pursue women!

PAUL

It matters because it was quite
some time ago, so your method
obviously does not work.

JOHN

Look...

PAUL

I'm sure you're totally prepared
to fall in love with that girl
you spoke to for a few minutes.

JOHN

I do not believe that love is
real.

PAUL

What about that last one of
yours?

JOHN

Simply a biological reaction to
how hot she was.

PAUL

Listen, man: it isn't healthy for you to go around telling yourself that romance isn't real. I know that you're lonely. I hear you cry yourself to sleep every single night.

JOHN

Whatever, that isn't true.

PAUL

It might as well be! We both need women. Don't worry: when you start spending all your money on flowers for this chick, I will totally understand.

JOHN

Well, I appreciate your understanding.

PAUL

I know you do. Hey, how's your mom?

JOHN

Fine. Why do you ask?

PAUL

I dunno, it occurred to me.

JOHN

I can't believe you gave all my smokes to that girl.

PAUL

How cool was that? I got it from The Third Man.

JOHN

I think it had more significance in postwar Vienna, but I do admit that was a super ballin' move. You totally have that on lockdown, bro, and it's time to move in.

PAUL

Yeah. I'll go buy some books tomorrow.

JOHN

More of your dumb science fiction, I bet. You should try reading some non-fiction for a change.

PAUL

Science fiction has just as many psychological insights as any Jung essay, and literature is more important to the evolution of the psyche than philosophy.

JOHN

How can you say that? That "Anton York, Immortal" is more valuable than, say, Spinoza's "Ethics?"

PAUL

The layperson does not read philosophy, so it is the responsibility of intellectuals to push them towards greater understanding and happiness. Not to luxuriate in conjecture! By writing articles for the Philosophical Quarterly, he is not communicating in any meaningful way. Art, especially film, is the only practical method of reaching the hoi polloi, and as intellectuals it is our responsibility to do so!

JOHN

Nowadays it's through Youtube that we will reach them. Philosophy, my friend, is the most essential thing: it is the quest for understanding. Anything of meaning is a philosophical work.

PAUL

That's not what I'm saying. I understand the necessity for people to philosophize, I just think that all philosophers who write for themselves are selfish, elitist bastards. They deserve to be cast out from the community.

JOHN

Isn't that elitist?

PAUL

In this case totally justified. Leibniz would have been a prime fantasy writer. If he had written fiction, everyone would know about monads.

JOHN

Monads are silly. Can't you use an example more relevant?

PAUL

I think this single, magical entity that forms the basis for the physical universe is pretty relevant to this conversation. You were insulting science fiction!

They arrive at their front door.

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (EATING AREA) - NIGHT

JOHN and PAUL sit at their table, eating a meal and playing chess. They don't speak for a long while, concentrating on their food and the game.

JOHN

I have you in five moves.

PAUL

Yeah right, pal. I have you right now!

JOHN

Ha! Ha, ha, ha! Is that the best you can do? You know what, I'm so confident in my plan that I'm not even going to respond to that. Take my piece if you so desire. It won't change a thing. Four moves now.

PAUL

You won't be so flippant when I fork your queen and your rook! Hi-ya!

JOHN

Again, you can not affect me.
Take whichever piece you want. I
have you in three moves.

PAUL

What in tarnation! I've taken
your queen, I can take your rook
in one move, and I have your
bishop blockaded. My king is
safely castled, and my pieces
spread across the board. You must
be bluffing! Here, now I'll take
your rook, and next turn it's
your bishop. What can you
possibly do?

JOHN

I do this! Two moves, now.

PAUL

All of your moves have been
incidental, advancing units that
I could sweep aside at any
moment! Allow me to demonstrate.
That knight you just moved? My
queen takes him like this! Now
what are you going to do?

JOHN

Ah, the pretensions of young
fools. PAUL, my dear, you have so
much yet to learn. In the next
move, all will be revealed: my
mate, and your blindness.

They are interrupted by the sound of the doorbell.

PAUL

Who in blazes is that? I'm not
answering!

JOHN

Fine, I'll get it. The game is
postponed, but only for a moment,
I assure you.

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (STAIRWELL) - NIGHT

JOHN opens the door leading outside, and lets in ROBERT.

JOHN

Impeccable timing. The jig's almost up!

ROBERT

What's going on?

They begin to slowly walk up the stairs into the apartment.

JOHN

I'm cheating at chess, kind of? He's destroying me, but he thinks I'm going to win with my next move. Somehow I convinced him. Anyway, you distract him from the game, so I can accidentally knock the pieces over later or something.

ROBERT

Why should I help you cheat my friend out of a well-earned victory?

JOHN

Because it's hilarious! Come on!

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (EATING AREA) - NIGHT

PAUL is sitting where we left him, studying the chess board. He turns but does not stand as they enter.

ROBERT

How's it going, PAUL.

PAUL

Pretty cool, ROBERT. I was just destroying JOHN at chess over here. Apparently he has some killer plan that'll get me with his next move, but he's bluffing, I know it.

ROBERT

Well the good thing about chess is that you can leave it for another day, right?

PAUL

Dude, that's not happening. Let's do this, JOHN.

JOHN

Come now, PAUL. We have guests.
It's not hospitable, and I don't
want to embarrass you.

PAUL

Ah-ha! I knew it, you charlatan!
You were bluffing all the while!

JOHN

Like hell I was!

PAUL

Then prove it!

ROBERT

PAUL, don't make me smack you.
End-games last forever in chess.
I came over to watch this movie
with you guys.

PAUL

Ugh, fine! We'll leave it 'till
you're gone, but I swear, JOHN --

PAUL moves to stand up, but moves too suddenly and bumps into
the table. The pieces scatter. JOHN laughs loudly.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Oh, Goddamnit!

ROBERT

I guess now we'll never know.

JOHN

I wasn't bluffing, by the way.
Ha!

PAUL

I don't believe you. I'm marking
this down as my win. You had no
plan; it's impossible that you
would have won.

JOHN

Not happening, bro!

PAUL

Oh it's happening alright.

PAUL walks over to a piece of paper taped to the wall and
pulls out a pen. JOHN jumps at him, and they begin wrestling.

JOHN

It doesn't count!

PAUL

Cheater!

JOHN

Tell me how I cheated! Did I make any illegal moves? Did I switch the pieces around when you weren't looking? No!

ROBERT pulls them apart, easily holding them both.

ROBERT

Boys, boys! No fighting! Just mark it as a stalemate?

PAUL

Absolutely not.

JOHN

Yeah, screw that. I would've won if you hadn't knocked the board over.

ROBERT

You know, to be perfectly honest, I don't give a damn. Now, I came over to watch this movie with you boys.

(he pulls out an
unmarked DVD box.)

Should we stand here arguing like children, or should we absorb some quality entertainment?

PAUL

Oh, cool. This is that one you told me about, right? I've been wanting to see this. Who's in it?

ROBERT

I don't know, a bunch of Austrians. They made a remake with the guy from Pulp Fiction.

PAUL

Oh, and that blonde chick! She is a super-mega-babe.

JOHN

She kind of looks like my mom.

PAUL

I should think of that the next time I'm having sexual intercourse with her. Maybe it'll make it less painful.

JOHN

Painful? What? Why would you have sex with if it's painful? Is my mother raping you, PAUL?

PAUL

I...shut up.

ROBERT

What happened to you guys? You didn't always used to be this gay for each other.

PAUL

Look, would you go fuck yourself?

JOHN

It happened so naturally! Two dudes spend enough time with each other, they start getting a little homo, you know?

PAUL

(angry)

Fuck you!

ROBERT

Hey, take it easy, bucko.

JOHN

Yeah, we're just playing.

PAUL

Whatever! I don't want to talk about this!

ROBERT

Uh, oh...

PAUL

What?

ROBERT

Someone's having a hard time coming out. Come on, PAUL, join us. It's nice, not having to hide anything.

PAUL

I fuck bitches, okay. Now let's watch this stupid movie.

JOHN

Totally! Let's watch this stupid movie. Let's do it up!

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (LIVING AREA) - NIGHT

ROBERT has left JOHN and PAUL alone. They're sitting on a couch in their living room, in front of the television. Abrasive noise music plays very faintly in the background.

PAUL

That was fantastic. I can't believe ROBERT likes that film, haha.

JOHN

Yeah, especially since it directly insults the audience. I'm not offended, because, you know, I get it, but if someone watched that film without understanding everything, that is just the director being a huge asshole.

PAUL

It's true that if you're going to make something like that, your intentions better be hella clear. How about that last conversation, though. I really like that concept, of being able to make reality conform to us.

JOHN

That's a different concept entirely. He was saying that fiction is as real as anything -- like this couch or this music, because you perceive it just like you perceive everything else.

PAUL

Bullshit!

JOHN

Why? By perceiving the story with our senses, as happens when we turn the page of the book or skip between scenes on the DVD, then it's as real as anything else that we perceive with our senses, isn't it? Science, bro.

PAUL

Those are just physical objects, man. The story isn't the DVD or the book. Also, fiction isn't real because some guy wrote it. It can't change. The characters have no will.

JOHN

Well, I guess the implied argument is that there's no such thing as free will. And, the ideas exist in the words? No, that's stupid: language is just an expression of symbols and ideas, which exist in our minds.

PAUL

We've brought ourselves around to what we always knew. Stories are stories.

JOHN

I guess you're right. I don't get it either. I was just arguing with you.

PAUL

Dick. By making those two characters claim to be as real as I, I who undeniably think and therefore am, that director is putting himself on the same level as our creator.

JOHN

Bro, I don't think that was his intention.

PAUL

I'm sure he was laughing to himself as he wrote it. That movie sucked. I hate it.

(beat)

Being the antagonists in that film would be truly horrible. I don't understand how they can find the energy to be sociopathic; I'd be too busy agonizing over the nature of my existence.

JOHN

What do you mean?

PAUL

They have no will, and they know it. At least, that one guy does. He knows what's up. Not even an all-powerful God, just some Austrian dude. If anyone ever became truly aware of God, they'd lose their minds to the horror of it all.

JOHN

It's a good thing there's no such thing as god.

PAUL

But imagine it. Imagine the horror of it. Everything we're saying, written in some celestial version of Final Draft. Our reality premiering at some low-budget film festival. The whole of our life is being watched not even by a crowd of people, but by like, ten nerds who are going to go home and post a review on their blog that only the same ten nerds will ever read.

JOHN

Okay, that's definitely a recurring theme with you. This idea that your actions are being dictated by someone else. You're dreaming about it, and it's coming through in your conversation.

PAUL

Maybe it's true!

JOHN

It's definitely not true. It is true that sometimes when we talk it sounds like we're reading off a page, but that's just because we're both awesome, smart guys.

PAUL

No-one would think it's good dialogue. It doesn't make sense for people to talk like we do. Our conversations are all really long and rambling, and our jokes aren't really gags, they're sort of jabs directed at each other.

JOHN

Maybe it could pass as really naturalistic.

PAUL

And you aren't funny enough. You don't make enough jokes, dude.

JOHN

I make jokes! Up yours, wanker.

PAUL

If we were being filmed right now, how do you think it would look?

JOHN

I dunno, we're just sitting here; it's kind of boring. It would probably be the standard shot/counter-shot, with the occasional wide- or medium- shot, for balance.

PAUL

Unless the writer is a complete idiot, we'd be approaching some climax. The camera would start moving, or the pace of the editing would speed up.

PAUL stands up and begins walking around, indicating the position and movement of the camera, framing JOHN in his hands.

PAUL (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Now, I'd have a close-up on you looking bored as I ramble on, and I'd cut to a medium shot of me doing shit. Then, I'd go back to a wider shot of you, so your whole body's in the frame. I get shot or something, off-screen, and you jump up, reacting.

As PAUL delivers this last line, he moves out of frame. JOHN is sitting on the couch with his feet up, looking really relaxed.

PAUL (CONT.) (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Then I'd slo-o-owly zoom out to show what's going on, so we're both in the frame. And our faces are like, "oh shit!"

JOHN jumps up, an expression of shocked disbelief on his face.

JOHN

Holy jumping Jesus Christ
almighty!

PAUL

Aaah! What the Goddamn!

Both characters are on-screen, looking into it, expressions stunned.

JOHN

Suddenly, where there had been nothing. I didn't blink or anything. It just appeared there.

PAUL

I see. I see it. I can see it. It's there. There's a camera, and a tripod and everything. It's there.

Another moment of long silence, neither character moving, only staring into it.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm going to move towards it, and pick it up.

JOHN

Oh, man. Be careful, man. Oh, Jesus. I'm coming with you. Be careful.

They both inch forward slowly. PAUL disappears to the side and JOHN positions himself in front of it, his hands ready to grab the camera.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Okay, on three. I'll hold the tripod and you take the camera.

PAUL

Okay. One...

JOHN

Two...

PAUL

Three!

There is a rush of movement. JOHN is the only person visible; his expression is scared, but determined. PAUL picks up the camera.

PAUL (CONT'D)

It's heavy. This is terrifying. I don't understand what's going on. What's going on, JOHN. What the fuck is going on!

JOHN

There is some kind of explanation.

PAUL

Is it...what we were talking about?

JOHN

Shut up. Don't be stupid. It's obviously not that.

PAUL

What if it is? How is that obvious?

JOHN

Idiot! It's a trick or something.
There's a rational explanation.
This is not God, asshole.

PAUL

But --

JOHN

Look, here is what this is: it's
a trick by someone we know, it's
a government or corporate
experiment, it's mobsters, or
it's aliens. It isn't God. This
does not mean we don't exist.

PAUL

But we both saw it come out of
nowhere. Why would it be
mobsters?

JOHN

Fuck you. I don't know what I
saw. I can't talk about this.
Fuck you. I'm going to bed.

PAUL watches JOHN go into his room. He puts the camera down on a low surface, and crouches in front of it for a while, examining it. The image goes through several variations as he tests the features. After looking into the lens one last time, he turns out the lights and goes into his room.

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (HALLWAY) - LATER THAT NIGHT

The light is extremely dim. JOHN is sitting cross-legged, his hands tightly clasped between his legs, staring wide-eyed into the lens. His cheeks are wet. He stares for a while, then slowly backs away into his room.

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (EATING AREA) - MORNING

JOHN has placed the camera on one side of the dining room table so that he's on the edge of the frame. He's smoking a cigarette and looking angry. PAUL sits next to him. They don't speak for a while.

PAUL

I don't feel so scared anymore.

JOHN

I think it was aliens. It's the only thing that makes sense. I can't lie to myself. I very vividly recall it appearing out of thin air, so there must be technology involved that humans don't have.

PAUL

But it's like, a not very advanced looking camera. It's kind of big and heavy.

JOHN

I can't explain that. But who else would be recording us? Aliens. They randomly picked us as their...test subjects. They're studying human behaviour or something.

PAUL

Well, whoever put this camera here must know that we've found it by now. They've got to be on to us.

JOHN

What? Why? How? What makes you say that?

PAUL

Well, I don't know. I just imagine that "Whoever" has magic powers and can watch what the camera's filming. The footage is probably being beamed back to their homeworld and played on giant public televisions.

JOHN

Oh, god, you're probably right. Oh, god.

The doorbell rings after a moment of silence. JOHN and PAUL look at each other, terrified.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I'm getting my machete.

JOHN runs into his room and PAUL picks up the camera. JOHN returns with a machete.

JOHN (CONT'D)
What are you doing with that!

PAUL
I...I don't know....

JOHN
Well, put it down!

PAUL
I feel like we should film it.

The doorbell rings more aggressively, and loud knocking is heard.

JOHN
Whatever! Let's do this. Please,
Zeus, Thor, YAHWEH, Hecate,
please let it be someone
innocent.

PAUL
I'm going to wait at the top of
the stairs.

JOHN
Yeah as if. You're coming with
me. Let's do this!

They slowly make their way downstairs, JOHN in front holding his sword out.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You open the door.

JOHN raises the sword over his head, and PAUL slowly reaches out and opens the door. POLLY is standing on their stoop. She looks shocked by the raised weapon.

POLLY
Woah!

JOHN
You!

PAUL
Who! Who is that! Tell me right
now!

POLLY

What the fuck!

JOHN

Are you in on this?

PAUL

Tell me who that is!

POLLY

(to JOHN)

I'm so sorry. I am, sort of. I'm sorry.

JOHN

Oh, thank heaven! At least that means it's corporeal! Thank you, God! Thank you!

PAUL

What in blazes is going on!

POLLY

Can I come in?

JOHN

Yeah, sure. Sorry about threatening you with a machete.

PAUL

No, you can't come in! Identify yourself, woman! JOHN, who is this person?

JOHN

Calm down. It's that girl I met at work yesterday. I told you about her.

PAUL

What's she doing here?

JOHN

Evidently she has a hand in this foul affair.

PAUL

And why are we letting her inside?

JOHN

She has answers. Right?

POLLY

Right. Don't worry, I'm a good person.

JOHN

That remains to be seen.

PAUL

Hell yeah it remains to be seen. You applied some serious pressure to my mental stability. I was like, 75% convinced that nothing was real.

POLLY

Uh, yeah, well, let's talk about this inside.

INT. THEIR APARTMENT (EATING AREA) - MORNING

The three of them are sitting at the dining room table. The room is flooded with natural light. PAUL places the camera on the table, but it's pointed away from the action; the frame is empty.

POLLY (O.S.)

Hey now, don't put it there. That's an empty shot. Where's the tripod?

PAUL (O.S.)

What? Who cares? What are you talking about? Can you please explain to me now what is going on.

POLLY (O.S.)

Just wait a minute, alright? I'm going to get the tripod and set up a nice shot first. In the meantime, don't just leave it there pointed at nothing.

JOHN (O.S.)

Here, I'll get it.

JOHN picks up the camera.

JOHN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The tripod's over there.

POLLY walks off-screen. PAUL stands close to the lens and whispers to JOHN.

PAUL

Dude, what is going on? I really don't trust this chick. How does she know where we live? How does she know my name? What's her role in this?

JOHN

Everything is okay. She'll explain; and anyway, just be glad it's --

POLLY returns carrying the tripod. She places it by the table.

POLLY

Here, give me that.

She takes the camera and places it on the tripod.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Now sit over there. I'll sit here. PAUL, you sit there.

They are seated at their round dining room table. POLLY is directly opposite the camera; JOHN sits to her left, and PAUL to her right.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Now. I can explain to you what's going on, but it may be difficult for you to accept.

JOHN

Is it aliens? 'Cause that's what I was thinking, but you don't look like an alien.

PAUL

This better be good.

POLLY

It isn't aliens, or the government. Look...this is hard for me, alright? I'm really sorry.

PAUL

Quit stuttering and speak!

POLLY

You and everyone you know, and the world you live in, are...a film? I'm a production assistant on set, but it's not a big crew so I have to do a lot of different things. The director's name is Marc. Everything you say and think and all that you are, is something he wrote.

JOHN

(beat)

Well I don't believe you.

PAUL

Yeah, neither do I. I was fully convinced this was the case last night, but hearing you say it has now convinced me of the opposite.

POLLY

Well, it's true. I'm sorry, I really am. What can I do to convince you? I can tell you intimate details of things that happened to you yesterday, but before that you didn't really exist.

PAUL

I remember breaking my arm when I was seven.

POLLY

It's just a part of your character.

JOHN

Tell me something that I thought yesterday and I'll believe you.

POLLY

You went back to your desk and thought about how the thoughts just bounce around in your head, locked there forever. Even if you could express yourself, what's the point? Someone better has already said the same thing.

JOHN is silent. He looks out the window, expression thoughtful.

PAUL

Jeez. What about me?

POLLY

It occurred to you that you've never seen what's past that wall. You thought that there might be a beautiful meadow with flowers and streams, that heaven may very well be located 20 feet from hell. You walked over to it and jumped and grabbed the top and pulled yourself up, but you didn't see Paradise. It was just an empty lot.

PAUL

Oh....

PAUL stands up, begins to pace around. POLLY picks up the camera and follows PAUL.

POLLY

It'll be an ugly film if you don't change the camera angle.

PAUL

Why the hell should we care about that?

POLLY

It's your life, but it's also your life's work. As artists, don't you want your work to be appealing? Don't you want people to be entertained by it?

PAUL

Frankly, no.

JOHN

Were you just doing your job, then? Is that why you started talking to me?

POLLY

I don't know what made me start talking to you; I didn't think, I just did. I expect I'll get in trouble for it.

PAUL

Oh, for.... I'm going to make some breakfast. You guys hungry?

POLLY

Yes, please.

JOHN

Good idea. I'll make coffee.

PAUL

You stay here with that thing. No magic video cameras in the kitchen. Sorry, it's a house policy.

They both move into the kitchen and begin to prepare a cooked breakfast. POLLY watches, but can't hear what they're saying.

CUT-TO:

JOHN, PAUL and POLLY sit at the table, the camera positioned as before. All three smoke a very liberal amount of cigarettes.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I think I've come to terms with it.

JOHN

Really?

PAUL

No, not really. It's interesting and I can't help considering the dilemma, but my brain can not fully comprehend the notion that the entire composite of my being was thought up by some asshole named Marc.

JOHN

It's like I can see God, but he's so big I can't perceive him. I feel like I do after reading a book by a really good writer: they convince you that their belief is correct. In this case, I've been convinced that nothing is real.

POLLY

It'll probably take some time to sink in.

JOHN

Regardless: I can appreciate with my critical mind (while not actually believing it), that nothing is real, and I feel liberated. I don't have to worry about bullshit like people I dislike, or girls, or paying for my phone bill.

POLLY

You don't worry about girls?

JOHN

No, I don't.

He moves closer to her, smiling.

PAUL

Anyway, POLLY, I don't understand your role in all of this.

POLLY

What do you mean?

PAUL

You're a production assistant on the film set that is our life? What does that even mean? You're here, perceivable to me, so you're just as real as I. That is, not at all.

POLLY

No, I'm not supposed to be talking to you guys. I've read the script. There's no character named "POLLY."

PAUL

I don't get it. All I can say, or "think," is what's written. But I can interact with you. Which means you aren't real at all. If you were what you say you are, it makes no sense that we'd be communicating. It's one thing for the characters to jump out of the screen and start talking to you, but to talk to the characters on-screen is just plain crazy.

POLLY

No. I'm from the real world. Marc, the director, sent me here to keep an eye on you guys.

PAUL

What? What does that mean! Did you step through a magical portal or something? It just makes no sense.

JOHN

The woman says she's from an alternate universe. Accept it and shut up.

POLLY appears to be hiding worry from the others.

POLLY

That's right. I'm from an...alternate universe....

PAUL

Total, total science fiction. It makes no sense. It makes nonsense, in fact. What could he possibly be trying to say?

JOHN

We certainly aren't your average characters: for the past ten minutes, all we've done is examine our conflict.

PAUL

Exactly! So what's it all about? An experiment like this must have a point. It's gotta be trying to say something. What can it be?

POLLY

It was never clear to me, either.
I always suspected Marc of being
a bad writer.

JOHN

Nothing matters, so we can
fearlessly do anything.

PAUL

We can still feel pain.

JOHN

(passionately)

But why would we feel pain? Let's
live now and feel uninhibited
pleasure. Everything that affects
how we behave has lost all
meaning. Everything is
meaningless, except what we can
feel right now, in this moment
now. Why experience doubt, pain,
fear, when we can experience free
and wild joy?

He kisses POLLY on the mouth, but she moves away.

POLLY

Give it some time. I'm still
human.

JOHN

Then what am I? I like you. Why
shouldn't I kiss you? I know you
like me, too.

POLLY

I'm not ready. I still live in a
world where actions have
reactions.

PAUL

Yeah...uh....

JOHN

Shut up, PAUL.

POLLY

I think I should go. There's
something I have to do.

JOHN

I don't want you to go. I want to spend all my time with you, and seduce you.

POLLY

I'll see you guys later.
Remember, people are watching you through this camera. This is your life, your magnum opus. Make it interesting.

JOHN

Oh baby will we ever.

JOHN and PAUL high-five.

EXT. ATWATER STREET - DAY

JOHN is holding the camera. He and PAUL sit on their bikes at the top of Atwater street, on top of the mountain.

PAUL

Is this the best we can do? I've done this before.

JOHN

Me too, but it's so much fun.
Holy smokes. Okay. Are you ready for this?

PAUL

Yeah, I'm ready.

JOHN

Alright, help me with this thing.

They attach the camera to the basket on the front of JOHN's bike, using ropes and bungee cables.

PAUL

It's a good thing your bike has a basket, you old lady.

JOHN

This old lady's gonna beat you to the bottom. You know the route, right?

PAUL

Yeah.

JOHN

Don't stop for anything. I'll be
waiting for you at the bottom.
Go, go, go!

They both scream exuberantly and ride their bikes down the
entire mountain.

EXT. OUTSIDE AMELIA'S BOOKSHOP - DAY

JOHN and PAUL stand in front of AMELIA's bookstore. Curtains
are drawn over the windows.

JOHN

You have to do this, PAUL.

PAUL

I know that I do.

JOHN

It isn't a big deal. Just
remember: it doesn't matter at
all.

PAUL

Then what's the point? I don't
get that part.

JOHN

What else are you going to do?
Sit in fear and boredom? Kill
yourself? Why not take control of
the world, and do what you really
want?

PAUL

I'd like to be as happy as
possible, but I'm unhappy with
this pressure.

JOHN

You'll be unhappy not having
acted; and, in the long term,
your happiness will increase as a
result, no matter the result.

PAUL

Yeah, whatever alright. Fine, I'm
doing it. Come on.

INT. AMELIA'S BOOKSHOP - DAY

The light is dim. PAUL is in the doorway; JOHN has the camera. At the cash register ahead, AMELIA is bent over a printer, trying to make it work. She looks up as PAUL enters.

AMELIA

Hi, can you help me? I know
nothing of machines.

JOHN follows PAUL. AMELIA looks briefly into the camera, and at JOHN holding it, with a sort of confused smile. For the remainder of the scene, all ignore his and the camera's presence.

PAUL

Let me see. Ah, a printing
machine: my specialty.

AMELIA smiles, steps back; PAUL does something and it prints several sheets of paper.

AMELIA

Thank you so much. I only needed
one copy, but I think that was my
fault.

PAUL

My pleasure.

AMELIA takes books from the boxes around the desk and begins shelving them, occasionally glancing at the paper. PAUL follows behind her.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Excuse me, I was wondering if you
could point me towards your
poetry section?

AMELIA

It is right here, in front of
you. Is there something I can
help you find?

PAUL

That's alright, I was just going
to browse your selection of
Swinburne's works.

AMELIA

(beat)

Were you the one who gave me
cigarettes yesterday?

PAUL

Oh, yes, that was me.

AMELIA

Thank you very much. That was
charming of you.

A pause; AMELIA continues shelving. PAUL pulls down a book of
poetry.

PAUL

"Though thou art as fire
Fed with fuel in vain,
My delight, my desire,
Is more chaste than the rain,
More pure than the dewfall, more
holy than stars are
that live without stain."

AMELIA

Very nice.

PAUL

Do you read poetry?

AMELIA

Yes, but I am no lover of
Swinburne.

PAUL

Oh, sorry.

AMELIA

I am the one who should feel
sorry for you. You should read a
true Romantic, like Blake.

She pulls out a book of William Blake's poetry.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

"Ah Sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the
sun;
Seeking after that sweet golden
clime
Where the traveller's journey is
done;
Where the Youth pined away with
desire,
And the pale virgin shrouded in
snow,
Arise from their graves, and
aspire
Where my Sunflower wishes to go!"

PAUL

"She binds iron thorns around his
head, And pierces both his hands
and feet, And cuts his heart out
of his side To make it feel both
cold & heat. Her fingers number
every nerve Just as a miser
counts his gold; She lives upon
his shrieks and cries— And she
grows young as he grows old,
Till he becomes a bleeding youth
And she becomes a virgin bright;
Then he rends up his manacles
And pins her down for his
delight.
He plants himself in all her
nerves
Just as a husbandman his mould,
And she becomes his dwelling-
place
And garden, fruitful seventy-
fold."

AMELIA

A bawdy selection. "The Mental
Traveller," yes? You seem to know
poetry well. What is your name?

PAUL

PAUL. What's yours?

AMELIA

AMELIA. I must go over there;
there is work to be done. Will
you come with me?

PAUL

Sure. What section is this now?

AMELIA

The letter "C," in Fiction.

PAUL

(pulls out a copy of
The Stranger by
Albert Camus.)

Have you ever read this?

AMELIA

Yes, I read it there, in Algiers.
It impressed me, and for some
years I was unhappy as a
nihilist; but then I realized
that although Camus is right, I
am not one to be defeated by my
own beliefs. So for me all of
life is fine things: things that
make me happy, and give me
pleasure.

PAUL

I like you.

AMELIA

I like you, though you are
strange and shy.

PAUL

Yesterday I learned that nothing
is real.

AMELIA

What convinced you?

PAUL

I saw the eyes of God. I know
that He is real, and He's just
some guy who thought I'd be
interesting to write about.

AMELIA

What am I?

PAUL

I guess you're my love interest.
I certainly hope so.

AMELIA

I must go to the plays now.
Shakespeare, Osborne and Brecht.

AMELIA goes over to another section, but instead of shelving books, she begins to read from one: The Cherry Orchard, by Anton Chekhov. PAUL hesitates for a moment, then walks over to her. He leans against the shelf and watches her read.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Leave me alone, I'm daydreaming.

PAUL

I'm sorry.

PAUL walks away; AMELIA follows him with her eyes over the book. His voice comes from off-screen.

PAUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"But as soon as the Mariner, who was a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity, found himself truly inside the Whale's warm, dark, inside cup-boards, he stumped and he jumped and he thumped and he bumped, and he pranced and he danced, and he banged and he clanged, and he hit and he bit, and he leaped and he creaped, and he prowled and he howled, and he hopped and he dropped, and he cried and he sighed, and he crawled and he bawled, and he stepped and he lepped, and he danced hornpipes where he shouldn't, and the Whale felt most unhappy indeed."

AMELIA laughs, then goes to another section. PAUL approaches her again.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Ah, now, science fiction. That's my sort of thing.

AMELIA

You, who know so much poetry? Why waste your time on this nonsense?
(she holds up a book
with a lurid cover)

PAUL

Listen: there's not much room left for growth. Almost all contemporary writing is a regurgitation of something older, and better. In genre fiction the emphasis is on the author's imagination rather than the usual suspects, of plot, character, et cetera. Therefore it is the most interesting and important field in writing now.

AMELIA

Is there brilliant wordplay, like Nabokov, or Steinbeck, or McCarthy's? Is there human insight, as in Hemingway and Shakespeare? Or the reflection of times in all literature of the ages? What about experimentation, as in Mrs. Dalloway or Finnegans Wake?

PAUL

There is all of those things, and a greater witness of human imagination, too.

AMELIA

No great writer of fantasy can compare to a classic master.

PAUL

Mark Twain wrote about time-travel; Gulliver's Travels, Frankenstein, 1984 -- these are all science fiction stories by literary giants. And yet, the taboo is retained, as by people who think comics aren't a legitimate form of art.

AMELIA

The setting is always secondary to the characters in a work of fiction. Writing based purely on imagination would be empty and shallow; soulless, but dressed in fancy clothes.

PAUL

Science fiction isn't always about people.

AMELIA

A human writing anything else is still affected by his humanity.

PAUL

(looks in a book of poetry)

"Some Poem."

AMELIA is impressed.

PAUL (CONT'D)

"The day had come again, when as a child
I saw—just once—that hollow of old oaks,
Grey with a ground-mist that enfolds and chokes
The slinking shapes which madness has defiled.
It was the same—an herbage rank and wild
Clings round an altar whose carved sign invokes
That Nameless One to whom a thousand smokes
Rose, aeons gone, from unclean towers up-piled.
I saw the body spread on that dank stone,
And knew those things which feasted were not men;
I knew this strange, grey world was not my own,
But Yuggoth, past the starry voids—and then
The body shrieked at me with a dead cry,
And all too late I knew that it was I!"

AMELIA

Strange....

PAUL

"We are the soldiers at the edge
of time
The veterans of a thousand
psychic wars
We are the soldiers at the edge
of time
The victims of the savage truth
We are the soldiers at the edge
of time
And we're tired of making love."

AMELIA

Ugly. I do not like this. Wilde
was a fantasist. I like him.
"Did giant Lizards come and
crouch before you on the reedy
banks?
Did Gryphons with great metal
flanks leap on you in your
trampled couch? Did monstrous
hippopotami come sidling toward
you in the mist?
Did gilt-scaled dragons writhe
and twist with passion as you
passed them by? "

PAUL

Shakespeare was the greatest poet
of all time, and he was also a
fantasist: "The object and the
pleasure of mine eye, Is only
Helena. To her, my lord, was
bethrothed ere I saw Hermia: But,
like a sickness, did I loathe
this food; But, as in health,
come to my natural taste, Now I
do wish it, love it, long for it,
And will evermore be true to it."

AMELIA

"Fair lovers, you are fortunately
met."

AMELIA and PAUL are drawn closer and closer together.

PAUL

"Are you sure That we are awake?
It seems to me That yet we sleep,
we dream."

They kiss briefly. AMELIA moves away.

AMELIA

I must work. You are distracting
me. Will you buy anything?

PAUL

I'll buy this.
(He takes a random
slim, nondescript
book from the
shelves.)

They move to the cash register; AMELIA sells him the book but
doesn't hand it to him.

AMELIA

I want to read this. Come back in
the evening and get it. I close
at seven.

PAUL

Okay, I'll see you tonight. I
hope it's worth reading.

She leans over the table with the cash register, over piles
of books, and kisses him on the cheek.

EXT. OUTSIDE AMELIA'S BOOKSHOP - DAY

JOHN

Yo, PAUL! That was incredible! I
am so impressed with you right
now.

PAUL is standing a little bit ahead. He looks back with a
huge smile on his face.

PAUL

Let's go somewhere awesome. I
know a spot on the canal. It'll
be totally bromantic.

EXT. LACHINE CANAL (ABANDONED BUILDING) - LATE AFTERNOON

JOHN and PAUL sit in an open building. It looks very abandoned and is covered in graffiti. The camera is low on a tripod with both of them on either sides of the frame, sitting against the wall. A small portable chessboard lies between them, but they aren't paying much attention to it. There are beers being drunk and cigarettes smoked.

JOHN

I feel the desire to pursue my
romantic interest.

PAUL

So do I. Damn, we're playing
right into his hands.

JOHN

Whatever, I'm sure ours is a
happy story. It better be. No, it
is, I know it. How can it not be,
with characters like us?

There is a long silence. Someone moves a chess piece; a figure biking on the path next to the canal stops in front of their building and starts waving its arms and hollering.

PAUL

Speaking of your love interest, I
think she's pursued you. How did
she find us here?

JOHN

Let's go find out!

EXT. LACHINE CANAL (BIKE PATH) - LATE AFTERNOON

PAUL is holding the camera. JOHN walks ahead of him to POLLY, who is standing next to her bike, looking extremely upset.

JOHN

What is it? What's wrong?

POLLY

I'm just like you! I'm just
another character that asshole
Marc thought up. I am nothing,
and I can never escape it.

JOHN

Trust your instincts. The fact that nothing is real doesn't affect your experiences.

POLLY

Don't you get it? Nothing is real! There's no point! Nothing we do can have any affect because there's nothing to affect! Our bodies don't belong to us, and even less our thoughts.

PAUL

God, she's right, isn't she? What the hell's the point? We are nothing, floating in a vast void of nothing. Oh, my brain, I can't take it.

JOHN

No! Stop it! The experience is still the same!

POLLY

Give me that!

She takes the camera from PAUL.

PAUL

Run! Nothing is real! All your hopes and dreams were thought up by a teenager to give your character depth! Run!

JOHN and PAUL run away. POLLY follows on her bicycle. They run through many different locations. Eventually, they end up at AMELIA's bookshop again.

EXT. AMELIA'S BOOKSHOP - LATE AFTERNOON

AMELIA is playing hopscotch by herself. She looks up as JOHN and PAUL run up and fall to their knees in front of her.

PAUL

Help me, I can see the truth and it's driving me crazy.

JOHN

Please tell me something nice and optimistic. I can't handle this, it's too big for my soul.

AMELIA

Be calm, boys. Where I come from, there is something that we say, but...I can not recall it now. Everything is the same as it always was, and it will always be so.

PAUL

I can hear them laughing at me. It's driving me crazy. Everything I say is being edited to sound as naturalistic as possible. Am I a bad actor?

POLLY places the camera on a tripod pointing at PAUL and AMELIA. JOHN moves off-screen, and their voices can be heard murmuring in the background.

AMELIA

Think of the power this knowledge gives you. Why don't you kiss me? Why do you still hide, depending on something that you know isn't real?

PAUL stands, takes AMELIA in his arms and kisses her. She moves away again.

PAUL

Why!

AMELIA

It's not so easy for me to disregard everything.

PAUL

Bullshit! You're European. I know you're all a bunch of free-loving Bohemians.

AMELIA

Alas, I am not so free. It is difficult to learn if you do not have faith.

PAUL

Let me teach you.

He kisses her again, and she returns the embrace. After a moment of kissing, PAUL moves over to the camera and points it at JOHN and POLLY, who are in each other's arms, whispering and smiling.

PAUL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Way to go, brother.

EXT. SOME WALL SOMEWHERE - DAY

AMELIA, PAUL, POLLY and JOHN sit in improvised furniture: a love seat found nearby, a tall crate for PAUL and a wooden spool for AMELIA. POLLY finishes setting up the shot and goes to sit with JOHN on the sofa.

PAUL

Now this feels like a film. I'm reminded of that Fassbinder one, Katzelmacher.

POLLY

Are you trying to tell me something?

PAUL

I didn't mean it like that. I was referring to the setting, and how we're all hip characters.

JOHN

(to AMELIA)

Do you know what they're talking about?

AMELIA

No, I don't watch many films.

POLLY

Fassbinder is not an easy place to start. The way he twists American genre films, and the way he directs his actors is in the classic German tradition of alienation. He is amazing, and there is beauty in his style, but not his characters.

AMELIA

What is beauty? Subjective, but
does it lie in equal proportions?

POLLY

There is sensory pleasure in
nature, but beauty lies in
understanding. Humans find humans
beautiful because they are
familiar, and we understand it.

AMELIA

And art? We find the constructs
of our species beautiful because
we understand what they are
expressing?

POLLY

I think so. I can not find beauty
in something randomly designed.
(she kisses JOHN)

PAUL

(to AMELIA)

Would you still like me if I
covered myself in tattoos?

POLLY

(to JOHN)

Come here, I want to fix the
shot.

POLLY and JOHN walk forward so that their faces fill the
frame, hiding PAUL and AMELIA.

AMELIA (O.S.)

(to PAUL)

Maybe I would find it sexy if you
tattooed yourself. But I doubt
it.

PAUL (O.S.)

Don't worry, I'm terrified of
needles anyway.

AMELIA (O.S.)

I liked this part in the book you bought: "Chapter 12: Floating through the clouds, I could tell right away that it was a dream. It's quiet up here; warm and peaceful. I floated with no direction, moving with no will, until he appeared. He looked just as I had always imagined him, but he still looked ridiculous. I knew now that I had fallen asleep at my desk. 'Where did she go? What new magic is this?' He demanded. The last thing I remembered writing before dropping off to sleep was a dramatic scene between him and --"

JOHN

Hold on a second. Do you guys realize what this is?

PAUL

Oh, I realize, alright. It's the most shallow attempt to communicate directly with us that I could possibly imagine.

POLLY

Amelia, keep reading. Just read the part you wanted to. That's the part he wants us to hear.

AMELIA

Who is he?

POLLY

He's God. I used to work for him. Now you boys be quiet: he is speaking.

AMELIA

Are you an angel? Ah, well. Now, where was I?

(beat)

"'Are you some new demon that I must kill?' 'I'm not a demon. This is a dream.' 'Then you must be someone I know but cannot recall, here to impart some lesson through cryptic symbols.' 'No, you're in my dream. It's difficult, but it is there: myself, in you. Everything I like about myself, and all the qualities I wish I had, filtered through what you are. A fantasy character. You and the girl both represent composites of myself, and there's the wish-fulfillment aspect. You're both bits of me and what I dream about being. She's every woman I wish there was.'"

PAUL

My goodness.

JOHN

I'm so confused. I hate his prose.

POLLY

I'm offended! What do AMELIA and I represent? His feminine side, and his ideal woman? In both cases we are reduced to nothing! Sub-characters!

AMELIA

This is narcissism. Everyone is the protagonist of their life, and everyone is perfect and complete. Who are we talking about?

PAUL

The guy who wrote this book, also wrote a movie. About us. Everything that happens was written, and the people who wrote it are watching through that camera.

PAUL indicates the camera in front of them.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Who knows what they're like. Our entire world could be made up.

JOHN

No, we just learned that we are very muchly based upon the writer; he wouldn't be basing alien creatures on himself.

AMELIA

How do we know that it's true?

JOHN

POLLY used to work for him, on the set. A lot of her character is to prove the case.

POLLY

Yeah, but now the fact is that life is as meaningless for me as it is for everyone else that exists.

JOHN

We've already been through this. The plot is moving forward now. Something important just happened.

PAUL

Right. He was talking directly to us. It could be that that was it, you know? He just told the critics what it's all about.

JOHN

No, I think this is just a smaller piece of the puzzle. Now we understand the origin of ourselves, and our personal relationship with him. But we still don't know why we exist. Why are we here?

AMELIA

I am sorry. I didn't mean to start this.

JOHN

As much as possible, I blame
PAUL, not you.

PAUL

What did I do? Nothing! It would
have been the same book no matter
what.

CUT-TO:

A small amount of time later.

JOHN

Quiet!

POLLY

Why?

JOHN

I don't know. I can't explain it.

PAUL moves towards AMELIA.

CUT-TO:

PAUL has finished his movement.

PAUL

(to AMELIA)

I like you, baby. You're good to
me.

JOHN

(to POLLY)

I am madly in love with you.

PAUL

(to JOHN)

Don't say that. She'll think
you're needy.

JOHN

Bother.

CUT-TO:

The light is lower; a greater amount of time has passed. They
are now all eating ice cream. A long take of inaudible
dialogue and giggling.

EXT. ROOFTOP SWIMMING POOL - NIGHT

The four characters are swimming in their underwear in a closed rooftop swimming pool, laughing and splashing. At some point, POLLY sets the camera on a tripod at the end of the pool and dives back in to play. Time passes until the four are gathered around the camera, studying it. JOHN and PAUL simultaneously get up and move towards it. PAUL reaches out and the screen goes black.

EXT. SOME STREET - DAY

PAUL walks angrily down the street. Ahead is POLLY, sitting on the curb. He starts running towards her. POLLY notices him and bolts, terrified. PAUL chases after her.

PAUL

Hey! Get back here, woman!

They run down a residential street. PAUL tackles her and pins her down, squeezing her neck with his hands. She manages to croak out a few words before dying.

POLLY

Ugh...JOHN's already...killed
her...there's
no...point...killing...me....

PAUL

No! You idiot girl. You idiot
girl!

He runs off, leaving her dead body behind.

INT. AMELIA'S BOOKSHOP - DAY

PAUL bursts in. At the far end of the store is JOHN, leaning over AMELIA's bloody body with a gun in his hand. His back is to the door, but he turns as it bangs open and we catch a glimpse of the pain in his expression before he leaps behind cover.

PAUL

I'll kill you!

PAUL pulls a gun from his jacket and shoots towards JOHN. As soon as he is out of bullets, JOHN stands, clutching a wound in his arm, and fires back. PAUL is shot several times, and stumbles backwards out the door. He falls down in the street, fatally wounded. Concealing his actions from JOHN, who is still inside the shop, PAUL reloads his gun. JOHN arrives in the doorway.

JOHN

You killed her, didn't you? Now
I'm going to do you. I'll be
alone and you'll be together,
wherever. Bother.

He raises his gun to shoot PAUL, but PAUL fires first. JOHN falls dead on top of him. PAUL holds him, crying and screaming at the camera.

PAUL

You bastard! Why? Why?

INT. LOCATION "A" (OFFICE BUILDING - JOHN'S DESK) - DAY

JOHN's desk in the same cubicle in the same office from earlier. He is much older now, and looks unhealthy with a large belly, skinny arms and a receding hairline. The camera looks at him; he fidgets under its gaze, working up the nerve to look back. When he does, his eyes are bleak.

INT. HOUSE (MAIN ROOM) - DAY

JOHN and POLLY sit in armchairs around a table piled high with newspapers and magazines. It is the middle of a heatwave; they're both dressed in underclothes.

INT. HOUSE (BATHROOM) - DAY

PAUL lies in the bathtub. He has been spraying himself with cold water: his clothes stick to him and his hair drips. AMELIA sits nearby painting her toenails.

PAUL

(contemptuously)
What's that colour?

AMELIA

Turquoise.

PAUL

It looks horrible on you.

AMELIA

Why?

PAUL

Why? I don't know, I guess you're just not a turquoise kind of person.

AMELIA

I mean, why did you say that?

PAUL

I say what I think, and I think that colour looks horrible on you. But it goes with this new trend of yours, of looking like utter shit.

AMELIA

You don't need to be like this.

PAUL

What? Say that again?

AMELIA

Go to hell!

AMELIA leaves the room. PAUL picks up a trumpet and begins playing it badly.

INT. HOUSE (MAIN ROOM) - DAY

AMELIA walks behind POLLY and JOHN and stands at a dresser, lighting her cigarette. The sound of the trumpet squealing floats through.

POLLY

Oh, that goddamn racket again. I can't stand it. Someone has to do something.

AMELIA

Please, do.

POLLY leaves the room. AMELIA sits in her chair and looks at JOHN silently. He looks up from his newspaper, annoyed.

JOHN

What?

AMELIA

Nothing.

JOHN

Would you leave me alone? You
make me uncomfortable.

INT. HOUSE (BATHROOM) - DAY

PAUL is in the tub playing trumpet. POLLY bursts in.

POLLY

Goddamnit, stop that noise!

He doesn't, only looks at her as he continues to play. POLLY
moves closer.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Here!

(she snatches the
trumpet away)

PAUL grabs her arms and pulls her close, his expression
concentrated. Both of them look only critically interested in
what they're doing. Mouths fixed, they kiss. POLLY falls into
the tub on top of PAUL.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Shots of the house at night. Most of the lights are out. PAUL
is lying on the kitchen counter, by an open window, listening
to the radio and reading a science fiction novel. POLLY sits
at a desk covered in notebooks and papers, writing dialogue
on a typewriter.

INT. HOUSE (LAUNDRY ROOM) - NIGHT

JOHN comes across AMELIA in the laundry room. She's sitting
on the washing machine eating a popsicle, wearing little
because of the heat. With the same critical expressions as
PAUL and POLLY, they come together in a kiss.

INT. HOUSE (MAIN ROOM) - NIGHT

The four of them sit in armchairs around a rotating fan, looking sullen.

PAUL
The resentment in here is
suffocating.

POLLY
If you weren't such an asshole,
we wouldn't resent you.

AMELIA
And if you weren't so unkind.

JOHN
(to PAUL)
Ha-ha!

AMELIA
Both of you.

PAUL
Were you unkind to my girl? Was
he, AMELIA?

JOHN
You don't know half of what I've
been to your woman.

AMELIA
(to JOHN)
Shut up.

PAUL
What does that mean?

POLLY
What does that mean?

JOHN
Nevermind.

PAUL
What are you talking about?

JOHN
Nothing.

There is a long pause. PAUL blurts out:

PAUL

I fucked POLLY.

POLLY

Oh, Jesus Christ.

JOHN

What! Well, in case you hadn't caught on, I fucked AMELIA.

PAUL

Goddamnit!

(to AMELIA)

What is wrong with you? Why would you do that?

AMELIA

How can you ask me why? You're so cruel to me; you said you would always love me, but now you hate me. You had sex with her!

PAUL

I only hate you because you despise me.

JOHN

(to POLLY)

And you! I didn't expect this from you!

POLLY

Me? Why am I the villain? You did it with her, too, let's not forget.

JOHN

I can't stand you. Any of you. I only fucked her because I was so bored. I'm going crazy.

PAUL

Why is this happening? It can't always have been like this, but I don't remember what it was like before.

JOHN

It's him.

JOHN and PAUL look into the camera for a moment, their expressions fearful.

PAUL

(beat)

Well, fuck him. I hate him.

JOHN

This shouldn't be happening to us. It's all his fault! We don't deserve this.

Together, they rise and advance towards the camera.

PAUL

Are you watching this, you asshole? Are you having a good time?

JOHN

I bet you enjoyed writing this part, you sadistic shit. You enjoy our misery, don't you?

PAUL

This scene is so contrived! What's it supposed to be, a play? Why are you doing this to us?

JOHN grabs the camera and begins to shake it.

JOHN

You're alienating everyone! Why?

PAUL

How can you justify your actions?

JOHN

I hate you!

PAUL

Leave us the hell alone!

INT. A LONG FLIGHT OF STAIRS - DAY

AMELIA, very late in her pregnancy, lies at the bottom of a long flight of wooden stairs. A pool of blood is forming. From her pose and the length of the stairs, it's obvious that she is dead. PAUL stands at the top, looking down at her, unable to react.

I/E. A CAR - DAY

POLLY drives while AMELIA reclines in the passenger seat, looking sexy and cool.

POLLY
Do you have the guns?

AMELIA
I have them.

POLLY
Good. Sorry. I'm excited.

AMELIA
I'm excited too.

POLLY
It'll be nice to have some money again.

AMELIA
(beat)
Are you afraid?

POLLY
No way! We've done this a hundred times. There's no reason for anything to go wrong, right?

AMELIA
Right you are.

They pull up in front of a movie theatre. AMELIA hands POLLY a gun. She hides it in her jacket.

POLLY
How long?

AMELIA
You tell me.

POLLY
About a half an hour.

CUT-TO:

AMELIA and POLLY looking bored.

CUT-TO:

The middle of a conversation.

AMELIA

It is not weak of me to admit
that I miss him, and that I hate
the director for writing this.

POLLY

But you're playing right into his
hands, don't you see?

AMELIA

He created me, and if he created
me to hate him, then that is his
own doing, and I do not
understand. It must be what he
wants.

POLLY

I don't get it, either, and I
read the script. I think he's
just a bad writer. Oh, it's time,
let's go.

They get out of the car and walk into the movie theatre.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE (LOBBY) - DAY

The lobby is empty, the last ticket-buyers disappearing
around a corner. There is only one person in the box office,
whom POLLY and AMELIA approach.

AMELIA

It is my worst nightmare, I
think, that God is only a bad
writer.

POLLY

(giggles)

They reach the booth. AMELIA pulls out a gun and points it at
the attendant.

AMELIA

Empty the register, bitch, and
make it quick. I woke up late and
I got a lotta shit to do today.

POLLY

Jeez! Wow!

ATTENDANT

Please don't hurt me!

AMELIA

Then hop to it!

A person comes around the corner, sees what's going on, and disappears again, but not before POLLY notices him.

POLLY

Better pick up the pace, Miss Underwood.

AMELIA

Una? That bitch.

POLLY

They're on to us.

AMELIA

(to ATTENDANT)

If we get caught here, I'm going to murder you, understand?

ATTENDANT

Here! That's all of it!
Everything we made today! Do you have any idea what that money means to this business? This is the off season! We're going to have to shut down. Thanks for ruining independent cinema, asshole!

AMELIA

Oh, shut it.

POLLY

Let's go, babycakes.

AMELIA and POLLY run outside, both with their guns out.

EXT. MOVIE THEATRE (THE STREET OUTSIDE) - DAY

A police car is turning the corner towards them.

AMELIA

This way!

They run into an alley.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

The alley is a dead end. The police car drives slowly after them, closing off the exit. The windshield reflects light and makes it impossible to see inside the car.

POLLY

Oh, bother. That was a total waste of time. I hate this didactic nonsense.

AMELIA

This is embarrassing.

The car door opens and a voice calls out.

POLICEMAN (O.S.)

Drop your weapons!

Slowly, they raise their hands, still holding their firearms.

POLLY

You know, this isn't even really our fault? We wouldn't be in this mess if it weren't for those boys.

POLICEMAN (O.S.)

(frantically)

Drop your weapons now!

AMELIA

Oh, those boys. And him too. It's all his fault.

POLLY

Who, God?

AMELIA

Yes. Our Lord, our Saviour. Ha!

POLLY

Goddamn his name, and goddamn our eternal lot!

They point their guns and there is an explosion of gunfire.

EXT. A PARK BENCH - DAY

It's Autumn. POLLY is sitting on a park bench, watching children play. JOHN sits next to her, kisses her on the cheek; she doesn't respond.

JOHN

I found this wonderful painting
in that antique shop. I think I'm
going to get it for your
birthday, I just know you'd love
it.

POLLY doesn't respond, and avoid looking at him.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Honey, are you alright?

POLLY

I'm fine.

JOHN

Tired?

POLLY

You could say that.

JOHN

What do you mean?

POLLY

It's over.

JOHN

What's over? You don't want to go
out for dinner?

POLLY

The wedding, the house, the kids.
All of it. Our life together.
It's all over.

JOHN

What? What are you talking about?

POLLY

I don't want to marry you, JOHN.

JOHN

What the heck has gotten into you? I leave you for fifteen minutes and you're calling the wedding off?

POLLY

I don't love you anymore, JOHN.

She stands and begins to walk through the park. JOHN follows her.

JOHN

What do you mean you don't love me anymore? It's not possible for someone to fall out of love in so short a time.

POLLY

It's true. I've been feeling this coming for a while now.

JOHN

Tell me what's the matter, baby. Is it something I've done? You've got to tell me.

POLLY

Yes, it's something you've done. It's everything you've ever done.

JOHN

This just doesn't make any sense! Fifteen minutes ago you loved me. I know because you told me so in between kisses. Now tell me what happened, because I still love you, and I'll never leave you alone.

POLLY

Nothing happened, I just don't love you anymore, and I'm calling it off. I want to be away from you. Can't you understand that, or are you such a narcissist?

JOHN

Don't try and turn this back around on me. It's you that has the malfunction here. Baby, I just don't buy it.

POLLY

Well you better, because it's true.

JOHN

It makes absolutely no sense...in fact, it's a complete non-sequitur! There's no logical explanation... and when there's no logical explanation, there's only one explanation at all.

JOHN begins to spin around, looking for the camera. It does not appear to him.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's you, isn't it?

POLLY

What are you talking about? Never mind, I don't want to know.

JOHN

POLLY, don't you see what's going on? It's all him! He's trying to ruin my life or something! Come back! You used to love me! We can do it again. Please!

POLLY

You actually can't believe that someone would just get sick of you? Get away from me, creep. Narcissist! I never want to see you again.

POLLY speeds up, leaving JOHN behind.

JOHN

No! No, you can't do this to me! What did I do? I hate you! Good job, you bastard, I hate you! Is that what you wanted?

(beat)

It's got to be you...it's got to...she used to love me. It's got to be....

INT. A SHED - NIGHT

A dirty, wooden room with rusty hooks and sharp things on the walls. Ominous sounds like the sharpening of metal and the whack of meat come from off-screen. JOHN and PAUL sit on chairs, bound back-to-back, with sacks covering their faces. They are both babbling in terror at the same time.

JOHN

I'm sorry, so sorry, sir, we promise not to tell anyone. I don't even know what I saw, to be honest, but either way, it's all PAUL's fault. He's the one that dragged me out here tonight.

PAUL

I am so sorry. I swear it wasn't my idea, it was JOHN's. He wanted to go out tonight. I just wanted to stay at home and watch a nice film or something, and mind my own business. I swear I didn't mean any harm. I'm so sorry.

Together, all at once, they stop speaking. Then:

JOHN

She still loves me. I know it. I know it.

PAUL

Oh, god. Not yet. She's fine. There's no baby yet. Not yet.

After another moment of silence, they begin to speak in their old, self-assured manner.

PAUL

Do you understand at all, what the hell just happened?

JOHN

I have no idea. It's really frustrating to me.

PAUL

I have all these memories, suddenly, but they're all out of chronological order.

JOHN

Me too. I'm pretty sure I remember you cheap-shotting me to death.

PAUL

Okay well that didn't happen.

JOHN

My whole life made total sense. I got older, learned things. I never died or anything. And now, all this nonsense is happening. I remember working at the same company for twenty years. I'm only 20 now. How does that work?

PAUL

He's breaking apart the narrative structure. This ain't your standard biopic, or rom-com or whatever.

JOHN

No kidding. What tipped you off? Was it when we became aware of God and started breaking the fourth wall?

PAUL

I thought we had achieved some meta-state where we are separate from the script, and we're actually making our own decisions.

JOHN

Bro, we did not become aware of God just by being really awesome guys. It was written, and so it must be.

PAUL

I know, I know. But the question remains: what in blue blazes is going on? What's the point? He's torturing us, basically.

JOHN

The macrocosm. He has to be saying something.

PAUL

Who's he saying it to?

JOHN

The audience?

PAUL

Holy smokes! I forgot about that! We're going through all this bullshit because some asshole thinks he has something to say to an audience of people that hardly even exists. Why should I care?

JOHN

By Jim, you're right! Those bastards. It's all their fault.

PAUL

They're watching us. I feel all self-conscious and gross.

JOHN

They're watching us? You're a bunch of morons, you know that? We shot each other to death. What the hell was that? It's your fault. The director of this film that you are watching right now (who, by the way, hates you; he told me), that dick feels the need to tell you something.

PAUL

Through our eternal fucking misery!

JOHN

I hope you can figure it out, because I sure as hell can't.

PAUL

It has to be about we mortals and he, God. Our sufferance now is just an example of the power he has over us. He's flexing his muscles.

JOHN

You can think that if you want,
but I prefer to imagine that my
creator is not writing purely to
bully me.

PAUL

All writers are bullies. It's
called conflict, and it's usually
resolved in the third act.

JOHN

Is that it, then? Is he just
saying that he thinks that if God
is real, He is a sadist?

PAUL

Or he's saying that he's a
sadist, and not necessarily
limited to his role in this film.
I hope you're all listening to
me.

JOHN

I don't want to think that we're
having such a hard time figuring
it out because he doesn't know.

PAUL

(beat)

We are parrots, repeating the
lines taught us. Our wings are
awareness, and they flutter
uncontrollably, yearning for warm
drafts and sunny skies. But all
we do is bash our heads against
the cage.

JOHN

The cage being reality.

PAUL

Oh, yeah.

A scary SERIAL KILLER rushes in, screaming inhumanly. He
grabs PAUL and pulls the sack from his head.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What? Oh, Jesus Christ, I forgot
all about that.

(screams)

SERIAL KILLER stuffs a gag in PAUL's mouth and replaces the
hood. He does the same to JOHN.

JOHN

(screams)

EXT. RIVERSIDE (STREETS) - AFTERNOON

JOHN and PAUL walk through cobblestone streets. The buildings
are all made out of brick. Everything is wet with rain.

JOHN

So the girls are inexplicably,
meeting us on the other side of
this river?

PAUL

That's right.

JOHN

And the only way to get there is
by rowboat.

PAUL

Looks like.

JOHN

I hate symbolism.

PAUL

They brought lunch. Champagne and
caviar, AMELIA said.

JOHN

Fish eggs? I've never tried, but
I hope there's real food. I'm
hungry.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

JOHN and PAUL climb awkwardly into a small rowboat on shore
and start paddling out.

EXT. THE MIDDLE OF THE RIVER - DAY

It's nice and sunny, and the water is calm. JOHN is rowing.

PAUL

You know, it's not really the audience's fault. I feel bad for getting so mad at them before.

JOHN

I thought we decided that it's entirely the audience's fault.

PAUL

He's doing this for them, but it's not like they asked for it. I suspect that no-one will end up seeing this, and all our misery will have been for nought.

JOHN

With characters as cool as us, and girls as pretty as ours, there's no way this film can turn out too badly.

PAUL

I don't want the people watching the entire span of our lives to feel like I hate them. I don't hate them. I hope they can learn something from all this.

JOHN

I guess you're right.

(to AUDIENCE)

If there's anyone there, if I'm not just talking to an empty room, I'm sorry for yelling at you. It's not your fault. I do appreciate you watching.

PAUL

Why would it be playing in an empty room?

JOHN

(laughs)

I don't know, stranger things have happened.

PAUL

I know whose fault it is.

JOHN

Yeah, so do I. It's that bastard Marc.

PAUL

(beat)

I think I've forgiven him a bit, also.

JOHN

Seriously? He killed your wife and unborn child.

PAUL

I know, but I feel really Zen about it all. If I exist solely to amuse, and as the vessel for some message, then I hope I did a good job.

JOHN

You know, I'm feeling really calm, too. I remember being super mad, though. He killed me, that Marc guy, and in many different ways. But such is my lot, right.

PAUL

I think because it's the last scene, he wants to go out on a nice, happy note, to try and get the audience to leave with positive feelings.

JOHN

Last scene, huh? Wow, that's deep. What happens to us?

PAUL

I guess we...cease to exist? I wonder what that'll be like.

JOHN

But every time someone watches this film, we have to live through it all over again.

PAUL

And I get to bang POLLY over and over....

JOHN

Yeah, and I get to shoot you to death.

PAUL

You died first. Anyway, how many times do you think this film's actually going to be watched? Also, we are immortal now.

JOHN

Sick. We get to live forever in the minds of all who perceive us. Kind of like anyone to ever live, I guess.

PAUL

But we'll also live forever as ink on paper, and as film stock, right?

JOHN

Hopefully they don't burn all the copies.

There is a long period of silence. The boat passes into a cloudy area, and PAUL takes over rowing. They pass back into sunlight. POLLY and AMELIA can be seen sitting on the green bank ahead, waving.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well, this is it. I feel really excited. I'm nervous, too.

PAUL

About the caviar?

JOHN

No, you dolt. For the end. I can feel it coming now, like a sneeze.

PAUL

Or an orgasm. Hey! Think of all the people who might, conceivably, watch this.

JOHN

What, like the Montreal
independent film community?

PAUL

Also, Woody Allen.

JOHN

Holy shit! Mr. Allen, if you're
watching this, I love you. Will
you read my script? Please? I
think you'd like it.

PAUL

Michael Moorcock might watch
this! I was reading some of his
poetry to AMELIA. Mr. Moorcock, I
just want you to know that you
are the single most important man
to....

JOHN

Yeah, okay, whatever.

They start waving and smiling.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hi mom!

PAUL

Hello!

We see them row the boat to shore and sit down with the girls
around a picnic blanket.