

Love letter to Mayakovsky in the form of a film treatment

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Lyrics! Not Facts!

This is Agit-Noir!

A wall with graffiti. It says: "1:01a.m. 101 FM. Past one is for you."

Pirate radio equipment. A mixer. A transmitter. An antenna.

Broadcast begins. A man starts speaking:

I didn't even think anyone was listening. I never told a soul. I only started doing it after I quit the movement anyway.

But I set my own trap when I switched on that illegal transmitter and broadcast "Machine Gun or Typewriter?"

No ruling class

In the whole of human history

Has peacefully abandoned

Its control over society

Don't you prefer a typewriter to a machine gun? Isn't that a better way to change the world? With ideas and images and poetry?

In fact, nobody--except maybe weapons manufacturers and war profiteers—prefers a machine gun to a typewriter.

But the machine gun

Exists

It is a fact

So when the shooting begins

You have the

CHOICE

Of being

In front of it

Or behind it

Serving the war machine

Or

Being its target

As soon as I finish the show, I get an email from an address I don't know. Four words long: "Machine gun of course."

I have no idea how you could have known who I was or how you figured out my email address, but of course I reply.

"Who is this?"

Then –before I even get an answer– I write again: "Meet me."

No name. No description. Just those four words. But somehow, across the crowded bar, I recognize you immediately. We begin speaking as if in mid-conversation.

I convince you to drive to with me to Griffith Park to try and find the mountain lion. We wake up from our first night together in a cage in the old zoo sharing a sleeping bag I had in my car.

I take you to the flower district. We wander through row after row. I lose all sense of time. I have never wanted anything so much in my life.

I buy you flowers.

You only want Black Dahlias.

I should have understood what this meant.

Finally, you come home to my apartment. We make love in the late-morning. We lose ourselves in each other.

It goes without saying I was bound to fall in love with you.

Later on, you disappear. And so I look for you. Each and every place I can remember being together with you. I return to the "scenes of our crimes." Because I'm a filmmaker, I take my camera.

Nothing is concrete without an image.

You never wanted your picture taken, ever. Does that seem strange now? I hate having my picture taken too.

So you've literally vanished without a trace. And so I return to the beginning--the radio.

After Mayakovsky's last poem, past one.

The broadcast is aimed expressly at you. It is for your ears only. Everyone else can fuck off.

On the wall is a map of their relationship; each of the places he visited and filmed is marked with an X.

I'm not the sort to name names, so I won't give yours. But if you're listening, and you recognize yourself these stories, then "past one" is for you.

Our story is defined by its borders.

I ask you to meet me downtown, in a bar near the library. The bar is full of books no one ever reads. The books are like props.

We walk from there to the LA Times building, in the belly of downtown. At certain times of day, city hall casts its shadow on the other building. In other cycles of light, the Times building casts its shadow back on city hall.

You tell me a story I think I've heard before but somehow don't remember any of the details of. About a bombing there that was blamed on the unions. The bombing marked the formal beginning of an official war against organized labor in Los Angeles.

Special units. Anarchist bomb squads. Red squads. Intelligence bureaus.

I say: the bombing changed the course of the city's history, but not in the way people think. Los Angeles became a place where violence against the people was tolerated and even cheered.

You look right at me: Became a place? Conquest. Settlement. War. Class War. That's a pretty straight line.

Violence is inscribed in the founding of this city. In every brick and every shadow. Can we get another drink now? We both say it.

You were so fucking beautiful laying me to shame.

At some point I become obsessed with the fragment of a song.

KILL THE BOERS, THE RACISTS!

You finally say, Jesus Christ. Can you stop playing that song?

You take me to Angel's Flight. You want to tell me something about Angel's Flight. But we kiss the whole way up and again the whole way down. You never get around to what you want to tell me about Angel's Flight.

Later on, a different night, a different month, I finish an article and say, you want to see something scary? I drive you to the old Rampart Division building.

The Rampart Division is eight square-miles, a densely populated, super poor, immigrant, just west of downtown.

The Rampart Division created CRASH:

COMMUNITY
RESOURCES
AGAINST
STREET
HOODLUMS

In practice, CRASH was the largest, most violent, most corrupt, and most protected gang in the city's history.

They were the source of eight square miles of terror.

They harassed, intimidated, assaulted, framed, beat, tortured, dealt all the drugs and stole all the money.

They'd get together at a bar near Dodger Stadium to celebrate shootings. They handed out plaques, with red or black playing cards. Killing people was more prestigious than wounding people; you'd get black cards instead of red on the plaque.

And then, without a breath, what bar was it anyway?

I tell you. The Short Stop.

I like that bar, you say.

And then you make me take you there. Even worse, you made me dance.

You say, it goes without saying that if I can't dance, I won't be part of your revolution.

Outside in the streets, while I fumble for my keys, we start kissing, and kiss for so long that my lips are still red the next morning.

There's a coyote watching us the whole time.

We go to the oldest museum in the city. We look at immortal animals. Conquest taxidermy. I can't stop looking at the buffalos. There's a coyote upstairs, with a cat in his mouth.

In the basement, we stop in front of a redwood tree turned into a bench. You say something in German. I didn't know you could speak German.

You say, pointing to the circles on the redwood, "this is where I stood, and this is the size of the blast I set off."

I can't tell whether you are joking.

I take you to Mt. Zion. I had to take you to Mt. Zion. I had just written a film about it. There is a graveyard in East L.A., Mt. Zion. It is more or less abandoned. Locked up and forgotten. You have to climb the fence if you want to get in. Mt. Zion lies in ruins.

It sits in the heart of an overwhelmingly Spanish-speaking neighborhood. But that's not why it's abandoned.

Next door is the "Home of Peace," another Jewish cemetery. Only that one is meticulously maintained, with a large grounds crew working every day.

What's different about Mt. Zion is that it's a graveyard for the poor.

It was founded for Jews who died in abject poverty and who barred from burial in most so-called "white" cemeteries. And it's in this wretched pauper's cemetery that

you'll find the grave of Lamed Shapiro, whose remarkable writing is nearly as forgotten as the graveyard.

Once you've read them, you can't possibly forget them. They are filled with sudden, inexplicable savagery. They are abjectly radical: filled with rape, murder, cannibalism. Redemption is a bitter farce. Violence begets nothing but more and more monstrous violence.

By the time he dies in '48, he's living in a friend's garage in Echo Park. He'd stopped writing and was a terrible alcoholic. He and his writing had more or less been forgotten already.

In 1969, the burial society folded and care was placed in the hands of the Jewish Federation. No one even knows who owns Mt. Zion anymore.

Where else could he possibly end up, this poor Jewish radical, then a place such as this, a landscape of radical violence equal almost precisely to his writing, where nothing and no one is redeemed, and where even the tiniest infants have been forgotten and abandoned under garbage, broken concrete, and filth?

That night, we make the saddest, most beautiful love imaginable.

You say, "I think perhaps you are even more apocalyptic than I."

And I can swear you are falling in love too.

The moments that change everything are barely noticed in time.

I give you a book. The writings of the German Red Army. I give it to you almost as an afterthought, from piles of books I've collected but never read. Like props in a movie. I give it to you mostly because you like Bonnie and Clyde so much.

The book is like a time bomb. It changes the way you look at everything, me most of all.

It unfolds like a slow-motion nightmare.

For example: We find ourselves at a bar. Someone's running his mouth about baseball. The bar is mostly empty. A couple of guys are playing pool.

A girl at the bar flips backwards off of her stool, hitting her head hard on the concrete floor. She's having a seizure.

We move to help her. No one else in the bar even moves. The guys playing pool resume their game as if nothing happened.

The bar manager comes out looking scared as shit. He won't call an ambulance. He's worried the cops will look around the bar.

We sit with her on the floor until she finally comes to, then help her to our car.

On the way out the door, you shout back at the bar, at no one in particular, "you're fucking despicable."

The girl asks, can you take me home?

You say, you need to see a doctor. You hit your head hard.

The girl says, please just take me home. I don't have any insurance. I don't have any money.

You say, you really need to see a doctor.

We drive her to the hospital anyway. Everybody is quiet except for the sounds of the girl crying.

On the way back home, now in the middle of the night, we come across two police cars stopped in the downtown streets. In fact, it is in the middle of the Rampart district.

In the shadows on the edge of one of the car's headlights, at least two cops are beating the hell out of a man lying face down.

Jesus Christ, you say, stop the car!

I could swear I make eye contact with one of the cops.

Are you fucking crazy, I say. Are you seriously fucking crazy?

You say, stop the fucking car!

But I speed up and drive off anyway.

You're no fucking different from anyone in that bar, you say.

I'm not answering and I'm driving fast.

I swear to god a mountain lion runs in front of the car, near downtown Los Angeles, and I nearly hit it. I slam on the brakes and the animal runs off.

That had to be a dog, you say.

That wasn't a fucking dog.

Later, I'm sitting in the living room watching TV, trying to calm down.

You walk out of the bedroom holding the book and start to read:

The primacy of practice

They are more embarrassed when they are caught misquoting Marx than when they are caught lying in their practice.

Talking is their practice.

That's not a revolutionary method of intervention.

Without political practice, reading Capital is nothing more than bourgeois study.

Without political practice, political programs are just so much twaddle.

Without political practice, proletarian internationalism is only hot air.

Adopting a proletarian position in theory implies putting it into practice.

Fuck you, you say. And slam the door.

I'd like to tell you it gets better but it only gets worse.

Three days later, there is a knock at my door. Agents from the FCC. They serve me with a letter. My pirate radio station has been detected. I must cease broadcasting effective immediately. If I don't, they'll return with a warrant, seize the transmitter and charge me with crimes. That is the end of my station.

We begin to fight constantly. You accuse me of cowardice and hypocrisy--the worst things imaginable to you. The fighting gets worse.

You're reading to me again.

It was an error, however, to make their own propaganda dependent on supply and demand: no transmitter because they had no license for it, no sabotage because capitalism wouldn't collapse immediately as a result.

You say, she's talking directly to you here, then explode like a storm, then leave for the night.

But it was even after that when you noticed the small passage on Ulrike Meinhof's brain.

In 2002, it came to light that the government had arranged for Ulrike Meinhof's brain to be surreptitiously removed during her autopsy and delivered to a state neurologist. The state was still curious as to whether "left-wing terrorism" might in fact be the result of some kind of neurological disorder Meinhof's brain was then stored away in a cardboard box where it remained untouched for twenty years.

After you read that story aloud you looked at me with bombs in your eyes.

They could take my brain out and cut it up and you wouldn't even do anything about that, would you?

Occupy. Occupy. Occupy...

So at the first it seems to offer us a respite.

It appears out of nowhere like an army walking out of a fog.

I don't even remember when you first when down there. It took me at least a month.

You start sleeping there. I never slept there once.

I don't even know what you're saying. You sound to me like you've joined a cult.

Of course we drift further and further and further apart.

But where on earth are its fucking demands?

I don't see you for days at a time.

It seems to me like maybe you've started using again, too.

One time when I meet you down there, I see you talking to a guy in a way that makes me uneasy.

It's been a free fall. After months and weeks and days of rehearsal, it's finally the moment.

You say, of course we're getting arrested. Of course. It doesn't even occur to you that we might disagree on this point. How could you possibly think that?

I have to leave town the very next day. I'd scheduled that screening for months. You've known about that for months.

Are you kidding me? Are you fucking kidding me?

And so we walk separate paths. You walk towards the police. I walk out of the park.

I'm rationalizing non-stop.

But the fact is that I don't even wait to find out if you get bailed out of jail.

I just leave town.

I'm thinking about you, and a woman in the bar falls down and cuts open her head.

I try not to think about you, afraid the plane might fall right out of the sky. But of course I can't stop. The plane lands anyway.

I call and text and email a thousand times each. I must have sounded like a lunatic.

By the time I finally gets back, I'm out of my head. And you've disappeared completely.

When they publish in the paper the names of people arrested at the eviction, your name isn't even on the list. It doesn't make sense.

I spend time calling hospitals. It doesn't lead to anything.

I'm downtown when I see someone I recognize from Occupy. It's the guy I'd seen you with in a way that left me uneasy. I ask him if he's seen you, knows anything about where you might be. The guy looks kind of stunned. Uncomfortable. He says, don't you know? She OD'd. I thought you knew.

It can't possibly be true.

I call the hospitals again. Check with the county but I can't find anything.

You disappear without a trace.

I read in the paper that the Occupy encampment was infiltrated by at least 19 agents from the LAPD. I try to imagine which people they might have been.

I have a nightmare about agents. There are agents everywhere. In my closets, and under my bed.

When I wake up, while I'm still lying in bed, I suddenly wonder if the Occupy guy I ran into could be an agent.

Then, for split second, I wonder...

How did you find me to begin with anyway?

No.

That can't possibly be true either.

Where did you go?

Where did you go?

Where did you go?...

Please give me a sign. Please.

What's the point? I'm sure you aren't even listening. No body is.

You're gone...I named my show after a poem. I probably should finish with it.

Past one o'clock. You must have gone to bed.

The Milky Way streams silver through the night.

I'm in no hurry; with lightning telegrams

I have no cause to wake or trouble you.

And, as they say, the incident is closed.

Love's boat has smashed against the daily grind.

Now you and I are quits. Why bother then

To balance mutual sorrows, pains, and hurts.

Behold what quiet settles on the world.

Night wraps the sky in tribute from the stars.

In hours like these, one rises to address

The ages, history, and all creation.

The broadcast ends.