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Satie et Cocteau:

A Rehearsal of a Play of a Composer by a Poet

By

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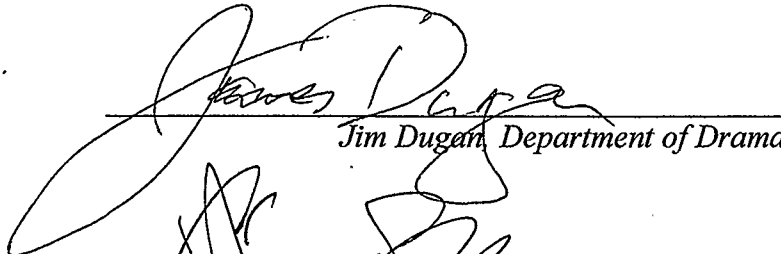
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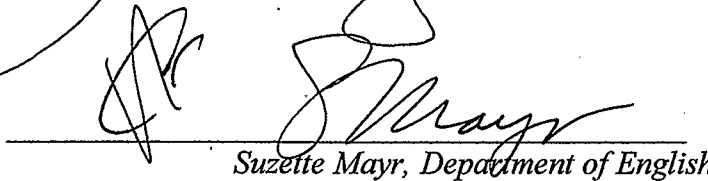
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Satie et Cocteau: A Rehearsal of a Play of a Composer by a Poet* submitted by Mike Czuba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Fine Arts.



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Abstract

SATIE ET COCTEAU:

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By Mike Czuba

The following manuscript and the accompanying artist's statement examine the process of creating and developing the play *Satie et Cocteau: A rehearsal of a Play of a Composer by a Poet*. The play is about the complex relationship between the classical composer Erik Satie and the surrealist poet Jean Cocteau, the reality of memories, the possession of art, and the 'truth' of the theatre.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND THE EVOLUTION OF AN IDEA

Introduction

“A literary monthly once posed this familiar question to several writers: if your house were burning down and you could only take away one thing, what would it be? ‘I’d take the fire,’ answered Jean Cocteau.”

Ned Rorem (*The Difficulty of Being XVI*)

From the initial spark of an idea to the final draft, *Satie et Cocteau: A Rehearsal of a Play of a Composer by a Poet* was a 20 month journey filled with discoveries, inspiration, frustration and a seemingly never ending stream of possibilities. At times I felt each day brought new details that could be included in the text. This thesis will describe some of the possibilities and some of the roadblocks that were encountered during the research and writing process and I will outline concepts and ideas that created the foundation for this play. I will discuss the revelation that Cocteau became, the relationship between him and Satie, and how that relationship changed the course of the narrative. From there I will explain how the music of Satie was an influence not only on the tone and the mood of the script but how the musicality created a ‘scriptuality’, allowing me to adapt certain structural elements of his music into the text. I will then discuss the freedoms and difficulties experienced in dealing with actual historical figures, analyze the evolution of the script after hearing it at two different readings, and explain how I have dealt with feedback. I will conclude by considering what I wished to achieve with the play, whether or not I felt I was successful and how the success or failure may

best be judged. Finally I will comment on how the process has affected me personally, academically and professionally.

I must first offer a little background on Mr. Satie (1866-1925) and Mr. Cocteau (1889-1963). Erik Satie was a composer who refused to be categorized throughout a thirty-plus year career. From 1887 to 1925 he created his own music, a music that *was* Paris at the turn of the century. He rejected the imposing musical presence of Wagner and might very well have been the originator of ‘Musak’. Little known outside music circles today, Satie was intimately connected with many of the most famous names in art: Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, Picasso, Man Ray, Picabia and of course Cocteau. There was humour in this man and he never seemed truly concerned about how he was perceived, often writing absurd (but ultimately true) biographical descriptions of himself to his publishers, calling himself:

The strangest musician of our time. . . . Short sighted at birth, I am long-sighted by nature We should not forget that the master is considered, by a great number of “young” composers, as the precursor and apostle of the musical revolution now taking place. (Davis 11)

Satie was an invisible giant of a figure who was as unknown then as he is now. In spite of his fringe status he cast a shadow over the more recognizable names in art. In his biography of Satie, James Harding says that in his own time Satie was “an obscure and ridiculed musician” and “No other minor composer is the object of so many picturesque legends” (xi).

Jean Cocteau, on the other hand, was anything but invisible. He was a poet, but to end the description there would be criminal as he was also a novelist, playwright, filmmaker, painter, musician, boxing manager and mentor/lover to many young writers and actors. If he is not well known today to a wider public it is because he did so many different things, and as Williams explains, “the French adjective *versatile*, applied to Cocteau, carried a particular negative charge” (8). Just like Satie, Cocteau never seemed to be taken seriously. Neal Oxenhandler writes in *Scandal & Parade*, “Cocteau has been seen by other critics as an inspired clown, a carnival magician, a dilettante and a faker; in short anything but a serious writer” (3). These are harsh words and they follow Cocteau throughout his career and into posterity, but the sheer number of biographies that exist about him makes the truth of the previous quote somewhat dubious. Cocteau was driven to create in many forms and he was experimental with a wide range of media. If Cocteau has no masterpiece, as Satie does not, it is not the quality of the work that is the problem, but the fact that Cocteau worked in so many different art forms that the critics and the academics could never fully grasp what he was doing or fully claim him as their own.

The Evolution of an Idea

“Before writing a work I walk around it several times accompanied by myself”

Erik Satie (Shattuck 114)

I was officially introduced to Erik Satie in a class I took in my last year at Concordia University called *Introduction to 20th Century Music*. The professor could not have spent more than a half an hour discussing him and played a few random selections of his compositions, namely *Vexations* and *Furniture Music*. The professor was a fan of John Cage upon whom Satie had an enormous influence. The music I heard that day, so simple and so minimal, stayed with me for months. However, it was the description of Satie’s apartment that immediately captured my imagination. Satie’s final apartment, in the Parisian suburb of Arcueil, was a refuge and a prison and for 27 years no one but Satie set foot inside and everyone knew to not even ask to be invited in. The professor explained that buried under mountains of papers and garbage were four pianos, two back to back and two turned upside down, balancing on top. This description was enough for me to begin imagining the world, seeing a stage design and a character with his bowler hat, ‘pince-nez’ glasses and umbrella, dressed like a schoolteacher, playing, writing and creating beautiful music. The number of pianos changes from account to account, but as I began my research, the reality of Satie’s apartment, discovered after his death, only fueled my interest. Jean Weiner, pianist, composer and friend of both Satie and Cocteau remembered it like this:

For years on end he never opened his windows and there

were objects on two grands that were so thickly covered with dust it was impossible to identify them straight away. I discovered a box containing an incredible collection of writing paper, cards and envelopes engraved with his name and the name of an imaginary order that he'd invented from nowhere. (*Remembering Satie*, Orledge 63)

Robert Caby, another composer who was with Satie during the final days of his life, described the scene this way:

After his death Milhaud, Satie's brother and I finally entered his room. . . . The state Satie's room got into between 1898 and 1925 was quite unbelievable. We were BLACK with greasy dust. How *could* Satie leave there each morning clean, neat and tidy? (*Remembering Satie*, Orledge 208)

Finally composer Darius Milhaud, original member of Les Six and Cocteau's frequent collaborator remembers that day like this:

What a shock we had when opening the door! It seemed impossible that Satie lived in such poverty. The man, whose faultlessly clean and correct dress made him look rather like a civil servant, had literally *nothing* to his name. . . . In each corner of the room were piles of old newspapers, old hats and walking sticks. On an ancient, broken-down piano with its pedals tied up with a string there was a parcel whose postmark proved it had been delivered years before: he had merely torn a corner of the paper to see what it contained. (Davis 147)

These descriptions lead directly to my original idea; a play that existed in two different times simultaneously. One showing Satie in his apartment, creating, playing, organizing this bizarre world and the other showing us Darius Milhaud, Robert Caby, and Conrad Satie (Erik's brother) entering the apartment after his death attempting to make sense of what they found. I was interested in the themes of interpretation, expectations and contradiction in the artist and of how the artist was perceived. The previous quotes offered different truths and posed many questions but as I dug into the research I began to feel as if this initial response might be too limiting. There were just so many details, quirks and famous acquaintances that would have to be left out and as my supervisor Professor Clem Martini noted, this initial idea was lacking any direct conflict between the characters on stage. As interesting as a situation or an individual might be, once you decide to put it on a stage other rules apply. Without drama, without conflict, there is no theatre. Still this setback was not enough to make me drop the idea of writing about Satie because I knew if I kept digging I would find what I needed. I did not believe that this man could have lived a life without conflict. I had no proof to support why I believed this, I just did.

The research continued and the first of many obstacles arose. Satie himself was trying to create music that had no drama! In Daniel Albright's *Untwisting the Serpent* he writes:

For Satie, music was not expression, but a barrier against expression. . . .

In some sense, his music even aspired to be a barrier against sound itself, as Satie remarked in describing his 1920's project for musique

d'ameublement, music as furniture: "You know, there's a need to create furniture music, that is to say, music that would be part of the surrounding noises and that would take them into account." (191)

In this description you can see the seed idea for John Cage's 4:33, which is four minutes and thirty three seconds of silence designed to make you listen, not to the silence, but to all the ambient sounds that exist in every moment. Cocteau often quoted Satie when he said: "Look, a property tree doesn't go into convulsions when a character enters the stage" (Albright 193) in which Satie tried to explain that music for the stage should be nothing more than the equivalent of "The cut out trees and two dimensional house" (193), and should not get in the way or over-power the story. Regardless of how Satie felt about his music I needed to find that singular conflict that would define and drive my play.

I bought recording after recording of Satie's music and listened to them over and over, from the early, hauntingly simple and very popular *Gymnopedies*, to his later more obscure orchestral music. I looked for as many images as I could find and four different pieces jumped out at me. The first was *Parade*, which introduced Cocteau into the mix for the first time as well as Picasso. The second was *Relache*, which included a short film called *Entr'acte* that was scored by Satie. The third was *Mercure* with a text by Picasso and finally there is *Uspud*, a bizarre Christian ballet that Satie and librettist J.P.

Contamine presented to the Paris Opera after a successful shadow puppet version at the Auberge du Clou. When Opera director Eugene Bertrand didn't respond, "Satie challenged him to a duel, upon which a frightened and apologetic Bertrand agreed to look at the score" (Davis 56). All four works are classified as ballet, but not in the traditional

‘White Swan’ sense or even Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*, instead these were unique, contemporary works that were influenced by surrealism and Dada and were incredibly bizarre.



1

Discussing the ‘plots’ of these ballets is unnecessary as they are quite thin, but they do reveal a wealth of incredible characters from circus performers, cubist costumed carnival barkers, Chinese conjurers, Dada artists jumping up and down on a roof top or playing chess, religious animal masks, ladies and men in evening dresses and Greek costumed dancers posed in front of abstract/cubist artwork. This mélange of imagery led directly to the second idea for a narrative structure.

I have always had an interest in meta-theatricality, of theatre aware of itself. When I envision a production, the playing space envelopes the audience and does not stop at the first row of seats. I believe this results from my early involvement in music,

¹ Donlan Dance Company, *Parade* © Holger Badekow, 2009.

both as performer and manager and also the beginning of my writing career in film. There is no disconnect between performer and audience at a concert, but rather there is a shared space and time, none of the equipment is hidden, there is an energy in the concert hall and the crowd is acknowledged as an active participant. In cinema, plunged into darkness at the movie theatre, the sound envelops the house and with the sheer size of the screen, editing and close-ups the audience feels 'in' the film. I have always wanted my theatre to be this way. If Satie's life was so theatrical, then a play about him should not pretend to be anything else.

With Satie's image continuously evolving from Monsieur le Pauvre, where he dressed in tattered clothing on purpose, to the Velvet Gentleman, where for a number of years he wore 7 identical velvet suits, and finally his 'civil servant' look, I felt I could get away with just about anything. Who was he? What was he? "He was twice a composer" (Shattuck 113), "A strange, multifaceted personality who continues to delight, confound and bemuse" (Gillmor ix). "Twice forgotten in his own lifetime, discovered, and once again forgotten" (*The Apollonian Clockwork* 139). These descriptions kept him vague and mysterious. Composer and Satie scholar Robert Orledge has left these questions open, "Satie would have been delighted by the confusion caused by the many conflicting interpretations of his career, for it would appear that a credible overview can be devised to fit any theory a writer happens to favour" (Satie the Composer 1). I felt the 'conflicting interpretations' gave me license to go beyond the facts and use Satie's ever changing, amorphous qualities to create the meta-theatrical world of the play.



2

The second idea was going to be a circus filled with the bizarre characters from his ballets and his life; re-enacting scenes from his work including all three versions of Satie. The ‘civil servant’ Satie would be sitting in the audience at the beginning of the play as a poor representation of the American Girl from Parade opened the show on the stage. Unable to stand the performance any longer, Satie jumps up and heckles the actors. The American Girl would stop the show and invite Satie onstage to let the performers and the audience know what they were getting wrong and why. Satie would storm out of the audience; exiting the theatre only to have one of the younger Saties emerge onto the stage seconds later. The concept was that every time he attempted to leave the theatre he would return to the stage as another version of himself until he finally succumbed and explained

² Images: Ramon Casas: *El Bohemio*, 1891 (Davis p. 44), *The Velvet Gentleman*, 1895 (Wilkins p.60), Robert Caby: *Erik Satie*, Arceuil 1909 (Volta *L'Ymagier D'Erik Satie* p. 45)

himself. Just as in life and history, he was always being re-invented and re-discovered. I liked this idea but I was dealing with several problems: one, with a cast of possibly over 15 performers, who would have the budget to produce it? - and two, a still maddening lack of conflict. There was also the matter of his music that was taking a back seat to his eccentricities. Again I faced the question about whether or not to continue. There was more than enough time to develop a completely new idea but that was not an option. As odd as this sounds, I became protective of Monsieur Satie and did not want him to be forgotten yet again.

The third and final idea, consisting of Jean Cocteau and an actor playing Satie rehearsing a play called 'Soyons Vulgaire' provided conflict, economy in the areas of production and the container to layer in the strongest elements from the original ideas. This structure freed me from historical fact, returning me to my original themes of interpretation, expectations and perception. When Cocteau met Satie, he thought he had found a collaborator who would be easy to control. That discovery turned out to be a nightmare for him. Cocteau wanted a composer he could prop up and take credit for his success. In *The Apollonian Clockwork* by Andriessen and Schönberger, they write:

Satie, either directly or indirectly, influenced all his contemporaries – at least west of the Rhine. He did not want to establish a school, but was constantly being declared spokesman or master of this or that movement. That is why he continually had to be innovative. He kept making history by composing without history. (141)

Satie did whatever he wanted and the growing reputation of Cocteau as a 'leader' in French art held little interest for him. As Volta writes:

If he was able to associate himself with the most varied of trends, while maintaining a rare consistency, this was because, on the one hand, Satie was wise enough not to fear his own contradictions and, on the other, he always deliberately placed himself away from the center of things. (*Satie Seen Through His Letters* 12)

The personality of Satie could be amplified with Cocteau involved, as these two struggled to collaborate. What I had not anticipated was how much Cocteau was going to influence the direction of the play.

CHAPTER TWO: DISCOVERING COCTEAU

“Astound me! I’ll wait for you to astound me”

Serge Diaghilev (Williams 49)

As I continued researching both Satie and Cocteau I discovered a publication that would make all my concerns go away. Staring me right in the face was a book by Ornella Volta, one of the preeminent Satie researchers along with Robert Orledge, called *Satie/Cocteau, les malentendus d’une entente*, which translates into ‘Satie/Cocteau, the misunderstandings of an agreement.’ Jean Cocteau was a name I knew peripherally from film and from some photographs but not much else. As I began to read the book, the very first page of text gave me the missing piece of the puzzle, Volta writes:

S’il n’avait pas rencontré Jean Cocteau, Satie n’aurait sans doute pas atteint, au-delà d’un petit cercle d’initiés, le renom qui a été la sienne dans l’immédiat après-guerre. S’il n’avait pas rencontré Erik Satie, Cocteau ne serait sans doute pas devenue le théoricien de l’esthétique musicale des années 20, ni la caution indispensable, quelques années durant, à tout jeune compositeur en quête de reconnaissance. Mieux encore, sans Cocteau, Satie ne serait sans doute pas devenu un personnage de légende; et sans Satie, et plus précisément sans l’épisode <Satie et les Six>, le mythe de Jean Cocteau en tant que phare de la Jeunesse d’entre les deux guerres éprise d’art et de poésie (pas forcément de musique), ne se serait sans doute pas aussi solidement établi. (9)

If he did not meet Jean Cocteau, Satie undoubtedly would have not attained, outside of a small circle of initiates, the fame that was his in the immediate post-war period. If he had not met Erik Satie, Cocteau would not have become the theoretician of musical esthetics of the 1920's, nor the indispensable supporter, for several years during the '20s, of all young composers in search of recognition. Better still, without Cocteau, Satie would have no doubt not become a person of legend; and without Satie, and more precisely, without the episode <Satie et les Six>, the myth of John Cocteau as leader of the youth between the two wars infatuated with art and of poetry (not necessarily of music), would not have been so solidly established.

Here were two legends of the art world interconnected, needing each other, and if one is removed, the other is lessened, but was there conflict?

Originally, the project was about Satie; his music, his singularity, his influence, but when Jean Cocteau became part of the cast, a shift in power occurred. I fought it for months as I continued to write and develop this new idea, almost feeling protective of Satie. Cocteau was taking up more and more of my attention and I had to finally admit that Satie was not the only madman in my play. I laughed when I discovered that Cocteau not only brought conflict into the narrative of the play, but into my writing process as well.

The smallest things can trigger the biggest ideas and writing this play has been a series of triggers shooting me in one new direction after another. Satie was too complex a

figure to present him completely on stage, but having him played by an actor allowed me to pick and choose the characteristics with which he would be represented. Cocteau was a “sublime jack of all trades” (Williams 8), and his growing presence in the play forced me to find key elements about him that would drive the narrative and provide the foundation for the mountain of thematic details that were going to exist in the text.

I began by researching their first and most famous project together, *Parade*, and it did not take long to find the conflict between them. In Volta’s book *Satie Seen Through His Letters*, I discovered correspondence written by both men to Valentine Gross, an artist, designer and future wife of Victor Hugo’s grandson, Jean Hugo. In these candid letters the truth of their collaboration becomes clearer. After Cocteau heard Satie’s *Morceux en formes de poire*, Cocteau found the perfect partner to ‘astonish’ Serge Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes. Volta writes, “Satie was certainly not opposed to collaborating with Cocteau. Every fresh opportunity to compose a new work was welcome to him. What he did not want was ‘to do something new with something old’” (109). The perfect partnership was rough sailing from the start as illuminated by this series of letters:

Jean Cocteau to Valentine Gross

3 may 1916

[...] Express letter from Satie. ‘Stunning’, he says. Does that indicate enthusiasm in his faun’s language? Try to find out [...] (111)

Erik Satie to Jean Cocteau

Thursday Morning, 8 June 1916

Cher Ami – Don't worry, don't be nervous: I am working. Let me get on with it, *bon vieux*. Be informed that I shan't show you the work until October. You won't see a note before then. I swear to that! (113)

Erik Satie to Valentine Gross

13 July 1916

[...] As far as I'm concerned, I'm not working: I'm overcome by a terrible depression I can't shake off. That's bad. I feel like playing dirty tricks on the poor world. (117)

Jean Cocteau to Valentine Gross

Paris, 13 July 1916

[...] I have a feeling of anguish and crazy loneliness... I beg you to give a sign, exorcise the devil, see Satie and find out. I'm dying of disappointment [...] (118)

Jean Cocteau to Valentine Gross

4 September 1916

[...] Make dear Satie understand, through the haze of aperitifs, that I do after all have some part in *Parade* and that he's not alone with Picasso. (120)

Erik Satie to Valentine Gross

Thursday, 14 September 1916

If you only know how sad I am! *Parade* is changing, for the better, behind

Cocteau's back! Picasso has ideas I like better than our Jean's. (121)

The naked truth about their relationship, of two strong willed, fiercely independent forces attempting to collaborate, is so palpable in these letters and would become the driving force behind the final concept of the play.

The conceptual narrative of Cocteau calling only Actor for this final rehearsal, and for Actor to 'become' Satie, is inspired directly from Cocteau's compulsion to consume everything around him in an attempt to generate a fresh identity. Williams writes of Cocteau:

He lived a perpetual identity crisis and by his own admission experienced continual anguish and turmoil, from the moment of his father's suicide when he was just nine to the tragic early deaths of his closest male friends and lovers. He experienced a profound need to identify and fuse with others simply to exist: 'I love others and exist only through them.' (9)

The idea of consumption for the purpose of identity made me wonder how he would handle someone as amorphous as Satie and in what ways this consumption might be dramatized. Williams wrote "So completely did Cocteau define himself through others that he would absorb them even to the point of mimeticism" (10), which made me immediately think of an acting class. If Cocteau believed he needed to become others, surely an actor whose job it is to inhabit others would serve as the perfect vehicle to

channel Satie. Cocteau, unable to fully absorb Satie, would force someone else to bring Satie back to life; and through this resurrection, Cocteau would discover himself.

The next element I developed was a recurring theme in Cocteau's oeuvre, mirrors. In *Scandal & Parade*, Oxenhandler quotes Cocteau's Orphée: "I shall tell you the secret of secrets. Mirrors are the doors by which death comes and goes. Tell it to no one. Besides, watch yourself all your life in a mirror and you will see Death working like bees in a glass hive" (91). In *Le Sang d'un Poet* Cocteau wrote: "the poet is forced to escape from the room through the mirror" (72), a photo essay of Cocteau by Julie Saul is called *Jean Cocteau: The Mirror and the Mask* and a biography of him by Elizabeth Sprigge and Jean-Jaques Kihm is called *Jean Cocteau: The Man and the Mirror*. There are returning themes in most of Cocteau's work, of duality, death, reality and these themes are easily shifted into the simplicity of truth and lies, "maybe he seems to say, death and happiness are the same thing" (Oxenhandler 98). When Cocteau says, "I am a liar who always tells the truth" (*Souvenir Portraits* vii), I understood that Cocteau himself is a reflection and reality to him is only a matter of perception. In *The Theatre Esthetic of Jean Cocteau*, Crowson writes:

If, as Cocteau thought, the theatre is spectacle, magic, a place where a lie – the action on stage – becomes truth at least for a while; if it is defined to be unreal by standards applied to daily life, then what it presents must be unreal in order to appear real within its own definition of reality.

Therefore, the décor is oversized and sets the mood for the action: it establishes "truth" for the presentation. (241)

Lies, reality and reflections, Cocteau was creating a world where ‘truth’ was irrelevant. Or to Cocteau, truth was whatever could be presented on stage, regardless of the ‘truth.’

How would Cocteau write ‘Soyons Vulgaire’? What elements would need to be involved for this ‘real’ play to seem real? What would be metaphor and what was going to be reflection? I built the play as a bio-play within a bio-play with Cocteau’s memory front and centre. Judging by some of the research, his memory was going to be a hindrance and a help.



3

Cocteau liked to imagine his past as he remembered it, if a fact or two had to be borrowed or ignored, so be it. Cocteau contradicts himself in *Souvenir Portraits* stating:

³ Man Ray “Cocteau with empty picture frame” 1922, Saul, Julie. *Jean Cocteau: The Mirror and the Mask*.

Writing memoirs seems to me an impossible task. First of all, I get my periods confused. I sometimes leap ten years forward and place people in surroundings that belong to others. Memory is a dim and appalling night. I would fear to venture into it at the risk of incurring the punishment of those archeologists who desecrate Egyptian sepulchers. (3)

It is clear with this passage that Cocteau does not wish to travel too far into the landscape of the memoir. The contradiction arises when he said he would ‘fear to venture’ writing a memoir, asking what is the point if it is not accurate, then he proceeded to write a hundred and sixty pages of ‘memoirs.’

The idea of Actor grew out of a combination of many men in Cocteau’s life: the young writer Raymond Radiguet whom Cocteau met when he was only a teenager; Jean Marais, an actor of limited training but whom Cocteau called “an Antinous sprung from the people” (Williams 165); and finally there is the boxer Al Brown, whom Cocteau ended up bringing to Paris, managing, and making a champion again. The fact that he had relationships, sexual or otherwise, with these and many other men is not what lead to the creation of Actor but to the fact that Cocteau felt compelled to raise them up and make them famous, always with himself at their side. It was not enough for Cocteau to simply encourage them and say a few positive things in public, no, for Cocteau they became missions, it was his responsibility to make them stars and only he was capable of doing it. These men became his creations and would only be remembered as he envisioned them. In 1925, after Satie’s death, Cocteau wrote, “Raymond Radiguet, from fifteen to twenty, and Erik Satie, from fifty-four to fifty-nine were of the same age and followed the same

road” (Crosland 340). The truth of that statement is irrelevant because Cocteau used them both to boost himself up. It was in his best interest to continue to eulogize these men lest anyone forget who was responsible for their careers.

To deal with Cocteau effectively and honestly I brought attention to the idea of Art with a Capital ‘A’. Cocteau spoke about it constantly, and he was always attempting to define and re-define it. In *Cock and Harlequin*, Cocteau’s rambling manifesto on art and music (mostly inspired by Satie), there are countless attempts to define what exactly Art and an Artist are, “Art is Science in the flesh” (Crosland 305), “When a work of art appears to be in advance of its period, it is really the period that has lagged behind the work” (305) and “A true artist is always on the move” (307). In a foreshadowing of theories Antonin Artaud was trying to express with his Theatre of Cruelty and what Satie was already doing with his minimalist compositions, Cocteau writes, “A poet always has too many words in his vocabulary, a Painter too many colours on his palette, and a Musician too many notes on his keyboards” (307). As a writer, I have this inner argument all the time. What is the value of Art? How can I define what I do? Should I define it? In this sense Cocteau became my voice within the narrative, allowing me to ask the questions I needed to ask or say the things I needed to say. As a writer and more so a theatre artist these are important questions to grapple with. Can one word say more than ten?

Within Cocteau’s concept of Art there was a giant ego and a driving ambition. Regardless of what he might have said, for Cocteau, there was never ‘art for art’s sake’. Art was sacred and beautiful, but it was also a tool towards the next ‘work of art’ and a

metaphorical key to open the next exclusive closed door. In 1912, after working for Serge Diaghilev for almost a year making posters and being a ballet groupie, Cocteau wrote the libretto for the Ballets Russes' *Le Dieu Bleu*. Cocteau believed this was going to be his coming out party and he would be amongst the Who's Who of the Paris art world. The ballet was not a success and Cocteau continued to harass Diaghilev with new ideas. In *Picasso's Parade*, Deborah Menaker Rothschild writes that Diaghilev's "patience was pushed to the limit by the twenty three year old Cocteau's repeated bids for praise and encouragement. Diaghilev finally exploded; 'I'll wait for you to astonish me'" (30). Five years later with the opening of *Parade*, Cocteau wrote, "Finally, in 1917, the opening night of *Parade*, I did astound him" (30). Cocteau wanted the premiere of *Parade* to be as riotous a night as was the opening of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in 1913, but "it was far from being the great scandal Cocteau later claimed" (Williams 72) even though the audience at the premiere "had been hand-picked by Cocteau and they half expected a showdown of some kind" (72).

Cocteau had a humorous side and a desire to question and challenge, but it was more to antagonize the world than a defense against it. In the creation of *Parade*, "Cocteau's most delicious joke is that this humiliation of high-art takes place within the most elevated venue of all, Diaghilev's Ballets Russes" and that "Cocteau enjoyed dissonance within spectacles; and the dissonance between brow levels served him well" (Albright 200-201). Cocteau wanted to take the expectations of high-brow art and turn them on their head by elevating low-brow art, like the circus. This was very much what Brecht was doing in Germany around the same time, mixing his poetry with Music Hall

devices. The difference between the two is that Cocteau had no interest in “*gestus* (at once gesture and gist)” (Mumford 55), Brecht’s term for movement and meaning in his work. *Gestus* was about infusing gestures with socio/political meaning while Cocteau was more interested in stripping gesture of meaning by not imposing some larger purpose on it. It was what it was and nothing more. Cocteau’s joke was that the ‘Esthetes’ would look for the deeper, sub-textual, artistic meanings in movements and Cocteau was being artistically literal. His sub-texts, his ‘gists’ were always within the work as a whole, asking an audience to not get lost in the details but to take in the larger image.

Since life and art were inseparable to Cocteau “a play which is restricted to a ‘message’ is clearly bounded in its scope” (Crowson 48). But here we have another contradiction; Cocteau did have messages, but he left them vague so as not to constrain the possibilities of his art. He wanted the art to continue to live in whatever shape the viewer wanted to see it as. He did not want to impose a thought, but he did want to impose his art and have it live on. Crowson exposes this contradiction when he writes, “he does not write plays whose goal is to teach a lesson, he cannot champion something which has an ethical validity beyond the limits of production” (47). Cocteau wanted to have it both ways; he wished to have the art live on, but the message remain inside the walls of the theatre.

The ‘what’ of the story as depicted with the on-stage action was not the way I was going to bring Satie and Cocteau to life, but it would be in the ‘how’ that they would truly exist. How was I going to present them? What were they going to be surrounded by? What manifestations of their art needed to be present? I answered many of these

questions with Cocteau, in his need for control, to consume, his theories, his contradictions, his selective memory and in his opium use that he tried to exorcise and embrace simultaneously. In Cocteau's book *Opium* he asked the question "*refumerai-je ou non?* (Will I smoke again?) To which he replied "*Inutile to prendre un air d'insolite, cher poète. Je refumerai si mon travail le veut ... Et si l'opium le veut*" (Useless to take a flippant air, dear poet. I'll smoke again if my work wants it ... and if the opium wants it) (268). But what of Satie? Beside the eccentricities, how was he going to be manifested? The answer was simple, if he wasn't going to be physically on the stage, but played by an actor, his music would have to filter through every aspect of the play.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SHAPE OF MUSIC

“During his walks, Satie was also observed stopping to jot down ideas by the light of the street-lamps he passed”

Robert Orledge (*Satie Remembered* 70)

Satie was music. He created, influenced and foreshadowed. He was a precursor, a thorn, a distraction, a jester, and a magician. I teased myself with these grand notions of breaking down and analyzing his music and then taking those discoveries and layering them into the play. I set out to read different books on musical semiotics to decode the significance of his music. That all ended in a little under a week when I realized I was out of my depth. Music has been an integral part of my entire life, but I never learned how to read music or felt I needed to know the larger cultural significance of a suspended ninth chord. I decided the musical influence on this play was going to have to flourish through impulse. I deciphered what Satie said about his music (which was very little) and what others said about it, then distilled that information to permit those impulses to inform me, letting the music tell me where it wanted to go.

One idea that came from the semiotics books was by John Shepherd, where he writes in his book *Music as Social Text*, “It can be asserted that because *people* create music, they reproduce in the basic qualities of their music, the basic qualities of their own thought process” (Shepherd 12) or in the case of my play, Satie’s music was Satie. This worked out well within the conflict of Cocteau attempting to lift Art above even its creator, and demonstrate how he himself needed external input to create his art. Satie was entirely self-sufficient, and this is what I used to create the tension between Cocteau and

Satie. Cocteau needed to talk about his and everyone else's art hoping he would be able to understand it, or make others believe that he knew the secrets that lay behind its creation. Satie would not talk about his music and refused to analyze it. So how do you communicate with someone who refuses to explain his own language? Just before he died, when he and Cocteau were no longer on speaking terms, Satie wrote, "Music requires a great deal from those who wish to serve her. . . . A true musician must be subjugated to his Art. . . . he must put himself above human miseries. . . . he must draw courage from within himself. . . . from within himself alone" (Orledge, *Satie the Composer* 2). By staying true to the music, I would be staying true to the man, allowing the music to act as another layer of antagonism within the structure of the dramatic conflict.

The obvious top layer materialization of the music was going to be found in Satie's actual pieces. As the concept of the play developed, presenting various elements of Satie's life, the easiest part was simply narrowing down the time periods and then matching them with an appropriate piece of music. Even though Satie would have approved, I knew it had to go beyond just dropping in a track here and there to provide a backdrop. I was not going to receive a musicology degree before finishing the writing of the play so I investigated how Satie composed to determine what he was trying to achieve with his music. I seized structural elements from the music to use as structural elements in the play.

I adapted Satie's musicality and created a 'scriptuality,' a non scientific, completely instinctual interpretation of the musical shapes, from notes to words, script +

structure + musicality = scriptuality. In his book *Erik Satie*, Alan Gillmor writes, “Satie’s music, with its characteristic mosaic structure and its collage-like juxtaposition of familiar musical (and extramusical) elements, suited Cocteau’s purpose admirably” (200), and it now suited my purposes perfectly. I did not want to break down and analyze the music to simply place it into individual scenes, but to have his musical ideas of simplicity, beauty and honesty live and breathe through the entire play. I began to think of Cocteau and Actor as two hands on a giant metaphorical piano.

Mosaic, collage and juxtaposition were ideal words to describe how I envisioned the set with bits and pieces from time periods and ballets and his apartment all blended into one space. The ‘scenes’ would be a collage just as Actor was a collage of different men from Cocteau’s life. Then I read a word that would be the scriptual guide for the play, repetition. Gillmor wrote, “Repetition and juxtaposition of musical ideas was to remain a Satie compositional technique, serving for him ... as a substitute for Dramatic development” (42). I knew I could not do away with dramatic development in the text, but repetition added a tension within the play as the characters attempted to move forward only to repeat central conflicts. The fact that the play is a rehearsal is the first layer of repetition, of working a scene over and over to find its different edges. Having Cocteau involved with yet another of his leading men, always trying for a different result, was another. There is the repetition of Actor threatening to leave and Cocteau continually bringing him back, always with a slightly different intent. And, as well, there was the compulsive ritual of Cocteau’s opium use, which also fell into the category of repetition.

I embedded this idea of repetition into the actual dialogue. Using the same word to unlock new meanings and intentions for an actor and for an audience. There are several sections in the play where I used repetition in successive lines, as on page 28, when Cocteau reveals too much of what he truly thinks about Actor:

COCTEAU: This once great actor reduced, unbeknownst to him, to a clown.

ACTOR: A what?

COCTEAU: A clown.

ACTOR: A clown?

COCTEAU: A clown.

ACTOR: ...Is that truly what you think of me?

Another example is on page 83 when Cocteau is begging Actor for forgiveness:

COCTEAU: I could have done more for him. I *can* do more. I will... You, it must be you... He's gone but you're still here, in front of me... Will you forgive me?

ACTOR: No.

COCTEAU: No?

ACTOR: No.

COCTEAU: NO??

ACTOR: No.

Actor puts his hand up before Cocteau can say 'No' again.

ACTOR: No. You push aside all that is real and call it poetry or art.

Each time ‘Clown’ or ‘No’ is spoken it comes from a different intention, a different place within the speaker. Shattuck says of Satie’s compositions “There are obvious grounds for comparison of this procedure with that of the cubists ... Out of this sameness comes a subtle variety” (141). The sameness that Shattuck is referring to is obvious in the *Gymnopédies* and the *Gnossiennes*, where the differences are subtle so you have to truly listen to hear them. I used similar phrases throughout the play to achieve the same goal. One of Cocteau’s usual responses to Actor is ‘Of course’ spoken with a small, sometimes not so small, layer of contempt, but as the play unfolds and Cocteau unravels, the line is switched to Actor who uses it as sarcasm. These scriptural additions were minor and might not have been necessary to the narrative, but I felt they added a deeper connection to the shape of the text.

The idea of the mirror was not limited to Cocteau; Satie’s music also included many ‘mirroring’ elements. Chapter eight in Orledge’s book *Satie the Composer* is entitled *Questions of form, logic and the mirror image*. In this chapter Orledge goes through many of Satie’s compositions and discusses the structural mirroring that occurs within them, but for my purposes I would focus on *Parade*. Orledge writes that in *Parade* “the recreated order is so symmetrical that each single movement, and the sequence of movements that make up the whole, is built on a mirror structure that gives the work its remote objective self-sufficiency” (172).

Questions of form, logic and the mirror image		173
INTRODUCTION		
Bars		
1 - 19	<i>Choral</i>	
20 - 34	<i>Fugal Prélude du Rideau rouge</i>	
35 - 44	Transition	
45 - 86	'Entrée des Managers' (3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4)	
The PARADE. Part 1: <i>Prestidigitateur Chinois</i>		
87 - 104	Entrance of conjurer	
105 - 199	Conjuring tricks (disappearing egg: 105-83/breathing fire: 184-99)	
200 - 217	Exit of conjurer	
Part 2: <i>Petite Fille Américaine</i>		
218 - 225	Entrance of American Girl (cf. 144-8)	
226 - 295	Dance of American Girl (inspired by silent films)	
296 - 319	'Ragtime du Paquebot' (the Titanic) in ABA form	
320 - 335	Trio (B)	
336 - 343	Reprise of bars 312-19 (A)	
344 - 364	The sinking of the Titanic (with giant wave effect)	
365 - 380	'La voix' (bars 369-77 were originally a short song: 'Tic, Tic, Tic, le Titanic s'enfonce, allumé dans la mer')	
381 - 388	Exit of American Girl	
Part 3: <i>Acrobates</i>		
389 - 412	Entrance of acrobats	
413 - 524	Acrobats perform (subdivided: 413-64, 465-92, 493-524 in a sort of ABA form, with B being a smooth section between two brittle ones)	
525 - 549	Exit of acrobats	
550 - 571 'Suprême effort et chute des Managers' (2/4, 3/8: metre order reversed, and new ostinatos added)		
Part 4: <i>Final</i> (condensed reprise of Parts 2, 3 and 1)		
572 - 587	Condensed reprise of 230-51	
588 - 603	Reprise of 'Ragtime': 296-311 (reharmonized in G, theme in bass)	
604 - 607	Varied reprise of 284-7	
608 - 623	Varied reprise of 421-8, 409-12, plus augmentation of 413-14	
624 - 655	Reworking of ostinato section 105-63 (cf. 105-8 and 630-33)	
656 - 676 Final appearance of Managers' theme (2/4 section only, extended)		
677 - 684 <i>Suite au Prélude du Rideau rouge</i> (counter-exposition)		
8.9 Formal reflections in <i>Parade</i> (final version, 1919).		

Could I construct the play in this fashion? I was going to have two acts, so could I construct each act to be a mirror of the other, however distorted? Gillmor writes:

Like the grand illusion of the circus world itself, *Parade* is an elegant structure of mirrors within mirrors. Not only is the ballet framed by the

⁴ Robert Orledge *Satie the Composer* p.173

music of the Prelude du Rideau rouge and the Manager's theme, which functions like a frame within a frame, each of the central episodes ... is itself a mirror form, a series of ternary structures whose recapitulations reflect the opening episodes. (207)

Orledge went as far as recreating the score for *Parade* with bar numbers and titles (figure 4). Here we see the obvious mirroring structure Satie used. My mirroring efforts were not as mathematical as Satie's, but I attempted to use this model.

Act One of the play would be all about Cocteau controlling the situation, trying to convince Actor to do what he wants, while Actor remains on the defensive attempting to compel Cocteau to admit to something yet unknown. This act takes place in a suggested reality with Cocteau manipulating all of the lights and puppets himself. Act Two begins after Cocteau has left the stage to smoke his opium pipe. The mood and reality of Act Two is the mirror image of Act One. Cocteau begins to lose control and Actor is more of an active agent while the lights and puppets are being manipulated on their own. The first act ends with Cocteau leaving to smoke his pipe and the second act begins with Cocteau returning under the influence, in the meantime Actor has not left the stage.

The play itself opens and closes with mirror images, opening with the Actor alone on stage finishing his monologue with the line "My name is Erik Satie like anyone else" followed by Cocteau's entrance. The play closes with Cocteau alone on stage, beginning a monologue with the same phrase after Actor has exited. If you measure each act from those lines, they are roughly the same length in homage to *Parade*.

In between the acts is a form of intermission. I say a ‘form of intermission’ because it is and it is not an intermission. I took inspiration from Satie’s *Musique d’ameublement* or Furniture Music. Satie created this music to be played at the intermission of a play by Max Jacob. He was quoted as saying: “We urgently beg you not to attach any importance to it and to act during the intermission as if the music did not exist” (Shattuck 168) and when the people did not go about their business “Satie rushed around the gallery exhorting them to appropriate behaviour. ‘Talk, keep on talking. And move around. Whatever you do don’t listen!’” (Shattuck 169) Satie described his furniture music this way:

There’s room for a musique d’ameublement, that is to say, music which would be part of the noises around it and would take account of them. . . . It would fill in the silences which can weigh heavy between table companions, It would banish the need to make banal conversation. (*Satie Remembered* 74-75)

I constructed my intermission in this fashion, having Actor stay on stage, practicing the piano and running his lines, all the while telling the audience that they can go about their business, that this is not part of the show. The intermission became a blind spot between mirrors, where the reality of the play and the reality of the performance became one, always leaving a touch of ambiguity as to which reality we, as the audience, were actually in.

Another element of the music I wanted to utilize was its power as an entity. Yes, Satie wanted music to resemble a chair and not “go into convulsions,” but for my

purposes I wanted the music to carry a certain amount of antagonism between the characters. Music was Satie's art and the thing that Cocteau could never fully penetrate, so it already had an element of violence. An example of this is found on pages 50-51 of the script:

COCTEAU: Diaghilev told me to astonish him and I did.

ACTOR: Not until I arrived.

COCTEAU: If I had not / found you...

Actor sits at the piano and cuts him off by playing 'Prélude du Rideau Rouge' from Parade. The sound that emerges is the full orchestra version.

Cocteau is trying to keep it together.

ACTOR: Do you remember this? For Picasso, not you!! As long as you are surrounded by the beautiful people you don't care about anyone but yourself. You played one world against the other... Do you even like art?

COCTEAU: I've dedicated my life / to art.

ACTOR: Now everyone wants to see / what Cocteau is up to.

COCTEAU: Do I need to apologize / for being popular?

ACTOR: Except the dead whose heads you stand on.

COCTEAU: Shut up! Shut up, / shut up!

In this section of text Actor/Satie is using music as a weapon. It would not have been enough if all Actor did was 'talk' because Cocteau is a poet and words are his domain. Playing the music, with the added orchestral version coming through the speakers, forces

Cocteau to confront the fact that Satie was never fully consumed or controlled. By creating a sonic entity that could not be ignored, Cocteau was reminded of the reality on the stage and not the one he was trying to create in his head. Actor used certain pieces as metaphorical punches when he felt words alone were not making his point. In the first act he played a 'sarcastic' version of *Gymnopédies* to get Cocteau's attention when he was not watching a scene they were working on and, as the previous example demonstrates, using *Prelude du rideau rouge* to remind Cocteau that Satie was more impressed with Picasso than he. A final example of this musical antagonism is Satie's *Vexations*, which I included as the intermission's music. The piece is a repetitive, slightly dissonant work that Satie recommended be played 840 times and can cause "hallucinatory effects" (*Satie the Composer* 144). The title alone is antagonistic, hinting that Satie knew this would drive the player mad. Actor played the piece as we watched a puppet of Cocteau smoking opium setting up the 'madness' of the second act.

The final element of the music that I was interested in investigating was the idea of 'sketches' or unfinished pieces of music by a composer. Satie abandoned many unpublished, unknown and unfinished pieces in his apartment. I decided to look at the play as a series of sketches, of unfinished moments in time, because Cocteau was never finished 're-writing' them. I also used a literal version of sketches within the play when Cocteau hands Actor a pile of music that he wants to be performed during the show and Actor notices that none of the pieces are actually finished. I, in turn, took sketches of Cocteau and Satie and finished them in a way that I hoped remained true to their respective characters. Each of the ideas discussed has allowed the music of Satie to exist

as its own character and the concepts of music as man, collage, repetition, the mirror, as physical entity and sketches have given the play its scriptuality. Early in the development of the play, before the research into repetition and mirroring, I scribbled a narrative equation into my notebook: 'Actor needs Cocteau - Cocteau needs Satie - Satie needs Cocteau - Cocteau needs Actor'. When I returned to review my old notes, I was struck by how this 'doodle' had become the actual shape of the play and how it fit so easily into the concepts that were bubbling to the surface. Satie's music was burrowing in deep.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEATRICAL HISTORY

“There is no Truth in Art ... If there is an artistic Truth, where does it begin?”

Erik Satie (*A Mammal's Notebook* 117)

Satie et Cocteau is my second play written about historical figures. A few years ago I wrote a play about the Polish revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg entitled *Red Rosa, Bloody Rosa*. The lessons learned from that experience greatly influenced how I proceeded with this new project. Writing about history offers you many benefits as well as a few drawbacks. The wealth of information already at your fingertips and the hints at pre-existing narratives make entrances into the worlds of the characters feel more straightforward. There are real relationships and characters to choose from, entire worlds and authentic environments already created. The historical details can offer you a head start into creating your play. The drawbacks are, at least in my experience, similar to the benefits. There can be too much information, and it is important to not let the ‘truth’ get in the way of the drama.

The challenge for me was to create a piece of theatre about historical figures, place them within an imagined narrative and have them grapple with specific struggles that in the end could be understood by an audience that might not have any knowledge of who Satie and Cocteau were. I assumed, in fact, that most people would not know who they were and made sure that the struggle between the characters on-stage, Cocteau and Actor (not Satie), had enough depth and tension so that audiences could empathize with them. The relationship between Actor and Cocteau within the play needed to ‘mirror’

(however distorted) the relationship between Satie and Cocteau. I blurred the reality of the relationship between Cocteau and Satie and had Actor manifest many of the same characteristics as Satie. Including Actor into the historical mix afforded me more freedom as I used him to question and comment on what Cocteau believed to be true. Actor, in a sense, became the audience, and helped to guide the audience through this possibly unknown past.

Is it enough to simply restage the past? Writing a new work about historical figures forces you to ask the question “Why this play now?” What is it about these characters, this time period, the chosen narrative that compels investigation? What is it that makes the play relevant? To clarify the question, I had to discover exactly what statement was I trying to make. The research progressed and I discovered that I related to the way both men talked about their Art and I decided to employ Satie and Cocteau to explore some of my own theories about Art and Theatre. Cocteau had *Cock and Harlequin*, Satie, posthumously had *A Mammal’s Notebook*, I had this play that would investigate the nature of theatre.

The framework of a rehearsal of a play within a play allowed me to take theories from Cocteau and Satie and comment on them, letting the characters voice some of my own thoughts and aesthetic partialities. I never wished to turn my back on Aristotle and his elements of Tragedy (Story, Character, Thought, Diction, Music and Spectacle), but to ignore his descending order of importance, flatten them all out and let them exist in the same time and space. So in the end, Spectacle became just as important as Story. Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty had already been expressing this (in theory at least) and

Brecht appropriated Aristotle's term 'Epic' to fit his own complete theatre, where the stage itself narrates the story. Lee Jamison in *Antonin Artaud* writes:

Evidently, Artaud did not want to remove all text from the Theatre of Cruelty, but simply to reduce its importance so that it was of equal significance to everything else in the theatre space. In this sense, every aspect of a performance must contribute towards the overall intention of the piece. (27)

I chose not to reduce one element in relation to another, but to elevate all of the theatrical elements so that they had an equal importance. I described the set and the scenic elements to specifically connect them to narrative and character. I eliminated the possibility that musical selections could be randomly chosen, but fixed within the text because the music was its own character.

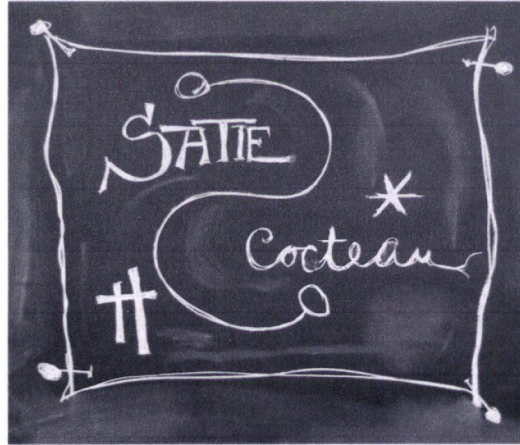
The framework of the play would confuse the realities of past and present. By having Actor seemingly address the audience while keeping the certainty of that connection vague it places the audience in an uncertain position. Having Cocteau manipulate all the lights and puppets in the first act, and having him bring set pieces on stage himself, removed the ease with which the audience could be mesmerized by the reality of the set. Having the music played live and at times through a sound system added yet another question mark. Ignoring these conventions in the second act with the direct intention to have the audience swept up in the spectacle, added yet another level of uncertainty. At the end of the play, after viewing all the theatrical magic of the lights and puppets moving on their own, the set falls, revealing the mechanics of the theatre itself,

ripping the audience out of the imagined world and back into the present. The magic of what was happening within the narrative continues by introducing the circus tent door and the promise of what is *beyond* it. History is fixed in time but a play should never be predictable. The *truth* of Satie and Cocteau allowed me to create the *make-believe* on stage, and history was not permitted to limit the theatrical possibilities.

CHAPTER FIVE: READINGS AND REVISIONS

"I respect that determination to shine, with that light so long in reaching mankind, the light of the very stars themselves"

Jean Cocteau (Souvenir Portraits 91)



5

In October of 2010, I organized an informal reading, drafted two professional actors to read and invited a mix of theatre professionals and faculty from the university. This was a ‘cold-read’ and although their reading was animated and quite strong, there were choices that I felt did not fit the text. Experiencing this first reading prepared me for this fact: *Satie et Cocteau* is a multi-layered, interdisciplinary play and the full impact of the text would not be truly understandable without the presence of all of the elements (set, costumes, lights, music, actors off-book). I am not writing this as an excuse, only to suggest that a play cannot be fully developed without seeing it at its full potential.

As I approached the staged reading at the university’s Taking Flight festival I focused on three elements of the script. First and foremost I considered the pace of the

⁵ Chalk board drawing created for the staged reading.

dialogue and the narrative itself. Did the text advance with growing energy towards its climax? The second element I turned my attention to was the resonance of the story itself. *Beyond* Satie and Cocteau. I needed to know if the story of Actor and Cocteau was strong enough to induce an audience to the journey with these characters?



6

Finally, I paid very close attention to the music. The staged reading allowed me, for the first time, to simultaneously hear the music and dialogue, enabling me to get a sense of what the play might sound like in a full production.

When I sat in rehearsals the main element I focused upon was pace. I listened to the actors read through scenes, sometimes with my eyes closed, so that I might focus on sound alone, searching for moments when the energy of the scene might slow down or

⁶ Staged Reading Dress Rehearsal. Actors: Kyall Rakoz and Daniel Wagler. Photo by Kara Sturk.

change direction wildly. Because this is a historical play I wanted to include hard facts to construct the world of the play without sacrificing tension or conflict. During the staged reading some elements seemed a touch didactic, but I hesitated to simply re-write those moments. I was not sure whether or not they would be solved through a full-scale performance. The moments in question are when Cocteau or Actor describe certain truths or set up scenes by listing facts and dates. Simply reading the text, it could come across as obvious exposition but I felt within a production these moments might prove beneficial. After letting the staged reading settle I decided to re-visit these moments and I am still unsure whether my concerns were a reflection of the mechanics of a reading or truly in the text.

Listening for pace was something I could do on my own, but in regards to the story, I needed feedback. I was curious to know if the story of Cocteau and Actor and their imploding relationship was strong enough to hook an audience and persuade them to follow the journey of the play. This led to a second question of whether the mirroring of Cocteau and Actor's relationship with that of Cocteau and Satie's was clear enough for an audience to understand that they were actually watching two separate relationships simultaneously. After I received feedback from audience members, I felt that this element of the script was as complete as it could be. The reactions were a mix between those who knew a little about Satie and Cocteau and invested themselves in the historical and those that knew nothing about them and focused on the relationships. I am satisfied with the response because I feel this type of play needs to operate on multiple levels between pure

entertainment and something more philosophical. Feedback is tricky and I needed to balance my desire to please while staying true to my vision.



7

The musicality of the piece continues to develop and I do not feel this element will be completed until the play receives a production with a full rehearsal schedule. I have envisioned that the actors are playing the music live on stage so anything less than this leaves too much room for guessing. Finding actors for the staged reading to play live was not possible so the exact timing and feasibility of the music will remain theoretical for now. Hearing the music played with the text during the reading did open the world up and I believe there are improvements which can be made matching the moments of textual repetition with a musical equivalent. In addition to the specific musical selections,

⁷ Staged Reading Dress Rehearsal. Actors: Kyall Rakoz and Daniel Wagler. Photo by Kara Sturk.

which I am confident about, there are possibilities for ‘extra-scriptual’ musical additions in the form of soundscapes, separating them sonically from the live pieces played by the actors. Matching the emotional tenor of the music and the text will also require more investigation, but again, this investigation needs to happen within a full production or a very committed workshop.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

“In the end, everything is resolved, except the difficulty of being, which is never resolved.”

Jean Cocteau (*Difficulty of Being* 8)

When I began writing this play, I wanted to build a spectacle that would introduce and celebrate the magic and influence of Satie and Cocteau to a new audience. On a larger thematic level, I wanted to explore the relationship between creators of art and spectators. I believe I have a play that accomplishes those goals. From the time I embarked on the initial research, through the many drafts and revisions, I have become a more patient writer. I learned to question the smaller moments in a play and not simply the larger arcs. I have developed an understanding that the initial sparks of an idea can fuel a frenzy of writing and inspiration but only through craft can a story begin to take shape. I have come to fully appreciate how the craft of compressing dialogue and action creates a tension within the text that’s necessary in addition to the tension of a situation or scene. This is also an area of my writing that I must continue to develop. My excitement about ideas can sometimes blind me. I can lose focus by looking too far ahead to a production and all the details that surround it. This experience has forced me to continuously step back and return to the text, to what is on the page, and not what might end up in a press release or set design.

If the goal of the play was to introduce Satie and Cocteau to an audience, I needed to make sure that the inherent structure of the play matched the larger than life figures. I believe using the device of placing Cocteau with an actor in a rehearsal opened up the

possibilities of Satie and Cocteau's history and created a container for their personalities to be truly connected within the structure of the play. This device also allowed me to dig into my own philosophies about 'Music and Art' and to embed them between, under and over the lines of dialogue spoken by Cocteau and Actor. Without the research and time spent developing the play, I would not have accomplished this. Spending a significant amount of time and energy on a single project has pushed me to constantly question my choices. The writing of this play, matched with the course work and my research, has given me a deeper theatrical vocabulary and a stronger foundation to stand on when defending those choices.

Beginning with those initial magical sparks and ending with the staged reading, the journey has not been easy but I hesitate to call it difficult because I enjoyed the process from start to finish. I was interested in creating a piece of theatre that challenged audience's expectations of what theatre is and could be. The spirit of Erik Satie and Jean Cocteau are within the pages of *Satie et Cocteau: A Rehearsal of a Play of a Composer by a Poet* and I hope to continue their work by challenging conformity and to never, ever become predictable.

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Satie et Cocteau:

A Rehearsal of a Play of a Composer by a Poet

A play by Mike Czuba

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Characters:

Jean Cocteau - Fifty years old.

(Will play other roles as necessary)

Actor - Early Thirties.

(Playing the part of Erik Satie)

Location:

A theatre.

Time:

New York 1939.

Set-up:

We are watching a rehearsal for a play called *Soyons Vulgaires* about the composer Erik Satie, directed by the poet Jean Cocteau that was ultimately never produced due to an artistic misunderstanding and financial difficulties.

(No copy of the original script has ever been found. The following events have been reassembled using the Actor's own journal written during the rehearsal process. The journal was purchased for a dollar at a barn sale in Ohio in 1972 and was only recently re-discovered... Maybe.)

**If possible, a score/soundscape should be created by pulling out, distorting, deconstructing or elongating individual chords from Satie's music.*

The stage is lit. Two old, rough looking, grand pianos sit Centre Left. One is stacked upside-down on top of the other. The top piano is filled with un-opened or partially opened packages.

Up Stage is lined with large cardboard, abstract skyscrapers in different stages of completion in the middle of which is a large shadow screen.

Behind the pianos is an absurdly oversized bed fashioned to stand up on end. Its sheets and pillows firmly secured.

There's a clothes rack filled with costumes Centre Right (including several velvet suits) along with a table and some props. Stage Right and Left are boxes of papers, sheet music, wing collars, handkerchiefs and umbrellas.

A chalkboard with "SOYONS VULGAIRES" in Cocteau's famous scrawl is Stage Left.

Two black 'legs', one on each side, intrude a few feet into the playing space. Everything is Black and White, like a film.

The stage is clean at the beginning of the play, everything neatly in its place, but as the story unfolds, papers, clothing and umbrellas will litter the stage.

The house-lights remain on as...

Actor enters and sits at the piano wearing a long dark coat, pince-nez glasses and a bowler hat. He has a long (fake) goatee that he strokes when he's thinking.

There's an air of clownish pomposity to him. He looks out into the audience, clears his throat and settles himself as all great actors do. He begins to play 'Satie's Nocturne #1'.

ACTOR

Everyone will tell you that I am not a musician. That is correct. From the beginning of my career I classed myself as a phonometrographer. My work is completely phonometrical. Take my 'Flabby Preludes for a Dog', or my 'Furnishing Music', it is evident that musical ideas played no part whatsoever in their composition. Science is the dominating factor. You see, I enjoy measuring sounds more than hearing them. I use my phonometer and all is possible. What haven't I weighed? I have measured all of Beethoven, all of Verdi, all the grand maîtres, it's fascinating... The first time I used the phonoscope, I examined a B flat of,

we will say, medium size. I can assure you I have never seen anything so revolting in my young life. On my phonoscale an F sharp weighs 93 kilos. Although it did come out of a fat tenor, whom I also weighed..

Actor gets up from the piano and picks up his script, but the music continues into Nocturne #2, 3, 4 and 5.

He consults his script, tries a new tactic.

ACTOR

An artist must organize his life! Here is the exact timetable of my daily activity. 7:18, get up. Be inspired from 10:23 to 11:47. Lunch from 12:11 to 12:14. Exercise out on the grounds from 1:19 to 2:53. More inspiration from 3:12 until 4:07. Various miscellaneous activities from 4:21 until 6:47 which might include: fencing, reflection, immobility, swimming and or contemplation. Dinner from 7:16 until 7:20. Symphonic reading, preferably out-loud, from 8:09 until 9:59. I breathe carefully, a little at a time. I rarely dance. When I walk, I hold onto my sides and look rigidly behind me. My sleep is deep, but I keep one eye open. I never talk while eating for fear of strangling myself.

Actor tosses his script on top of the piano. He looks out into the audience, takes out a flask and drinks in a mock toast.

ACTOR

Hello... Yes, I'm talking to you. Welcome. What you are about to see is a re-creation of a memory of a memory of actual events. This wall, this barrier between us was torn down before you arrived so you, sitting there in your seat, are an important part of the memory.

Cocteau enters unseen by Actor. He's very thin and looks taller than he is. He's wearing his usual thin suit. His hair is standing up in the front and he has very long fingers. He's in rough shape from the night before. He stays back and listens.

ACTOR

Even if the events represented on this stage did not actually happen in history, they will indeed happen tonight, making them quite real to you. We are dealing with a composer who always seemed to know more than he offered and... a poet, need I say more?

Another sip from the flask.

ACTOR

As for me? Everyone will tell you that I am not an actor, that is correct. Because as far as you're concerned, my name is Erik Satie, like anyone else...

He tries this line a few more times. Suggesting that this monologue was not to the audience at all, only written that way.

ACTOR

My name is Erik Satie, like anyone else. My name is Erik Satie, like anyone else...

Actor sits back down and continues to play the Nocturnes. We can audibly hear the overlap from recorded to live sound.

Cocteau makes an entrance with tightly wound energy, ignoring the music.

COCTEAU

Good, you're here.

ACTOR

You're late.

Cocteau moves across the stage pushing the legs away, opening the space, revealing the large "Resistance Dimmer" light board against the wall Stage Right.

Actor finishes the piece and gives him a look of annoyance.

COCTEAU

Your playing seems to be getting better.

Cocteau meticulously arranges his mess of papers on the director's table and looks for the right scene.

ACTOR

Where is everyone else?

Cocteau walks to light board and by moving the levers up or down, turns off the house-lights and turns the stage work-lights on.

COCTEAU

Today it's just the two of us. I want to run through some of the more, uh, troublesome scenes. I need to see them differently. Without clutter.

ACTOR

Which ones are troublesome?

COCTEAU

Uh, most of them.

ACTOR

I'm glad you feel that way because / there are a few that..

COCTEAU

You must understand what we are trying to achieve here, a deeper connection to character.

ACTOR

I have no doubt I will be able to give a realistic / portrayal of the man.

COCTEAU

Realistic? No, realism is... boring. It holds no truth. We, no, you are going to move beyond these simple things like Realism and Naturalism and find poetry, the poetry of the theatre, find the, how would you say, essence of the man. Do you know what surrealism means?

ACTOR

Of course / I do.

COCTEAU

'Sur' means beyond, on-top of.

ACTOR

I said / I know.

COCTEAU

Anyone can look at or take a photograph, but what is beyond it?

ACTOR

...The background?

COCTEAU

NO! The truth! And since theatre is all lies, anything 'real' is a lie and only the lie is real.

ACTOR

The lie is real?

COCTEAU

In a theatre. I called Parade a Ballet Réaliste because Satie, Picasso and myself ignored myth and presented real life, just not realistically. Do you understand the difference?

ACTOR

Realism is not real, but a lie, therefore surrealism is the truth? So in order to present the truth, I have to find the poetry of the theatre.

COCTEAU

Because the poet is a liar who always speaks the truth!

ACTOR

I hate it when you quote yourself.

COCTEAU

We're wasting time.

ACTOR

We were making progress yesterday, the whole cast, I thought we found some things.

COCTEAU

Many things were found but unfortunately most of them were useless. You, Satie, do not have it yet.

ACTOR

I have my own process. I'm not interested in these new Russian acting theories.

COCTEAU

There's nothing Russian about this. Satie was Paris.

ACTOR

What?

COCTEAU

Do what I ask and we will find him.

ACTOR

I did know how to act before I met you.

COCTEAU

Of course you did.

ACTOR

What more do you want?

COCTEAU

For you to do as you're told!

ACTOR

--

COCTEAU

Je m'excuse. I realize this is unorthodox, but I think that it simply follows the content, does it not? And you are, uh, doing some very good work and I want to use today to take it even further.

ACTOR

Further! Beyond! Can't anything be right in front of you?

COCTEAU

There you go, the same stubbornness, now you are starting to behave like him. Except, he would never have waited if I was late, he would have been in a café somewhere half drunk

talking about Parisian history and showing off yet another handkerchief he just bought. So there is still work to be done. Can we please begin?

ACTOR

You don't look very good.

COCTEAU

What does it matter what I look like? I'm not the one on stage. Why is everything a fight with you?

ACTOR

I'm concerned.

COCTEAU

Don't be.

ACTOR

May I ask about the final scene?

COCTEAU

What about it?

ACTOR

I was re-reading it last night and I don't think / I understand it.

COCTEAU

I haven't finished writing it.

ACTOR

Oh, ok, that makes sense because now it reads more like a eulogy that you didn't get to give.

COCTEAU

Why would you say such a thing?

ACTOR

You don't have / to get upset.

COCTEAU

Do you know how many friends I've had to bury? You should think before you speak. Or better yet, only say the words I have written for you. But now the door is open, tell me, why didn't I get to give my eulogy?

ACTOR

Because he refused / to see you.

COCTEAU

He refused nothing. I was respecting his wishes. I stayed away so he would be saved the circus that followed me around back then. I gave him dignity.

ACTOR

Oh, so it wasn't because he had had enough of you?

COCTEAU

I pulled him out of obscurity! *Because* of me, everyone knows his name and now *because* of me everyone will know his genius.

ACTOR

Genius?

COCTEAU

Yes genius... Just because *I* decided not to see him in the end, doesn't mean what he created has lost any of its beauty. I will champion him for the rest of my life. Art is more important than ego.

Pause. Cocteau is visibly upset.

ACTOR

Where would you like to begin, mon cher?

COCTEAU

At the beginning, the Conservatoire. Change your costume. I'll play the instructor.

Actor changes next to the clothes rack. He takes off the hat and glasses and puts on a simpler jacket, slightly too small for him. Cocteau puts on a long jacket and a pair of glasses.

ACTOR

I have another question.

COCTEAU

So many questions.

ACTOR

...They're about your notes from last week?

COCTEAU

Quickly.

ACTOR

They're not making any sense to me. "Behave yourself please, a monkey is watching you", "Do not look disagreeable", "Take your hand off and put it in your pocket"?

COCTEAU

Those are Satie's directions. He wrote them directly into his sheet music. I want you to use them.

ACTOR

How?

COCTEAU

Alors, come, stand here center stage. Good. Now put your hand in your pocket. Look out into the seats and do not move.

*Cocteau starts to look through his notes,
ignoring Actor...*

*Actor is getting impatient, trying not to move
until he throws his arms in the air and turns.*

ACTOR

This is ridiculous!

COCTEAU

There! When you did that, did you think of your hand?

ACTOR

No!

COCTEAU

Exactly!

ACTOR

How is that related to my acting?

COCTEAU

Do not think, be.

Actor opens his script.

ACTOR

How am I... How am I supposed to "Possess myself completely"?

COCTEAU

That is what we will hopefully discover today.

ACTOR

I don't even have any lines in the Conservatoire scene.

COCTEAU

Are words the only tool to express an idea?

Cocteau walks to the light board and starts pulling levers up and down.

COCTEAU

Lights for the second scene.

The work-lights turn off and a harsh, angled spotlight hits Stage Right. Another spotlight is pointed straight down on top of the Actor's head as he sits at the piano.

ACTOR

I can't see.

COCTEAU

Exactly. You cannot see this music, because it is not for you. And at this point in your life, you are leaving no shadow.

ACTOR

No, I mean with that light, I can't see.

COCTEAU

Try harder.

Cocteau takes his place within the other spotlight causing his shadow to ominously stretch across the stage.

ACTOR

Don't you think I'm a little old to be playing Satie at 14?

COCTEAU

Satie was born old and he never grew up. Are you ready?
Scene 2. 1880.

Cocteau assumes the character by ceremoniously setting his feet and looking over the glasses. Actor waits.

COCTEAU

Hiller F Sharp minor Piano Concerto...

Actor begins to play each selection as it's called out. Cocteau stands still, listens to each piece for a moment then cuts him off.

COCTEAU

Stop. Gifted but indolent. Next 1881, Herz Concerto #5 - Stop. Lazy, empty. 1882, Moscheles, C Major Piano Concerto - Stop, stop. Mediocre, passable, uninteresting. Beethoven, A Flat major, Piano Sonata opus 26 - No, no, no!! What is the matter with you?

ACTOR

Me?

COCTEAU

It's obvious you have talent but why do you insist on wasting it?

Actor isn't sure where this is going.

ACTOR

That's how you told me / to play them.

COCTEAU

No, not you, him! Why do you insist on wasting your talent?

ACTOR

I don't have / any lines.

COCTEAU

Take your hand off! There is no "I", only Satie!

ACTOR

I... I play the notes as I feel them.

COCTEAU

But they're not yours.

ACTOR

They're not anyone's. It is sound. It does not *belong* to anyone. How can you be so arrogant to tell someone how to play the notes?

COCTEAU

So what will you do? You're a terrible student, 3 months to learn a single piece of music! You can barely sight read. You have a pleasant touch, but you put nothing into it. Do you wish to be an artist or a simple cabaret musician?

ACTOR

I wish to play music.

COCTEAU

My wife wishes to be a singer, it will never happen.

ACTOR

Your wife?

COCTEAU

I'm acting! Focus!

ACTOR

Everything you teach me destroys creativity. You would not understand the notes in my head.

COCTEAU

You are not good enough.

ACTOR

Who are you to tell me what music is?

COCTEAU

And who are you?

ACTOR

I am Satie.

COCTEAU

No, you are France.

ACTOR

Ahh! Make up your mind!

COCTEAU

Good, good, how did that feel?

ACTOR

For me or Satie? Or France?

COCTEAU

Everyone.

ACTOR

Why am I France?

COCTEAU

Because you are not Germany.

ACTOR

And obviously not Russian.

COCTEAU

Obviously.

ACTOR

I don't really know how to play a country.

COCTEAU

You're an actor, you should be able to play a table.

*Cocteau walks to the light board and roughly
resets the work-lights. He removes the jacket and
glasses.*

ACTOR

Let's run it again.

COCTEAU

No, we move on. It was fine.

ACTOR

You just told me I didn't have it?

COCTEAU

You can say the lines, you can play / the music but...

ACTOR

So we should do / it again.

COCTEAU

You have no idea what's beyond them.

ACTOR

Again with 'beyond'. You're giving me nothing to connect to. These 'scenes' feel more like tableaux. Why don't I just pose and you can recite all the lines through a megaphone.

COCTEAU

Enough! I'm trying to create continuity, a progression if you will, so you can fully understand his greatness. Please, stop thinking about how you will look up here and start thinking about how Satie will be seen!

The lights flicker as Cocteau turns too quickly back to his notes and loses his balance. He has to hold himself up on the table. Actor watches, curious.

ACTOR

Spent the night with your pipe again.

COCTEAU

I promised you I'd stop and I have.

ACTOR

--

COCTEAU

Why didn't you come to the hotel last night? I waited for you.

ACTOR

People are starting to talk.

COCTEAU

Let them.

ACTOR

We've been over this. This play will re-ignite my career, put me back on top, no more begging for parts. I can't have anything informing that besides the work.

Cocteau watches him, hurt.

ACTOR

You know what I mean.

Cocteau turns away and goes through his notes looking for the next scene, talking to himself.

COCTEAU

What comes next, what comes next? That one isn't finished.

Actor pulls out his flask and takes a swig, unseen by Cocteau.

ACTOR

We're supposed to open in 12 days and you're still writing scenes... Jean? And when is the set going / to be finished?

COCTEAU

Yes this one. What?

ACTOR

The set?

Cocteau goes to the light board and pulls a few levers. The lights change to an even wash of warm amber tones to look like a sepia photograph.

COCTEAU
Scene 4, Le Chat Noir.

ACTOR
Where is / the set?

COCTEAU
We're in it. Look around you.

ACTOR
This is the set? This tells me nothing.

COCTEAU
But what does it suggest? We must leave something to the audience's imagination.

ACTOR
I've worked in this theatre before you know. There's an expectation of certain, decorative elements.

COCTEAU
We are in a theatre so it will look like we are in a theatre.

ACTOR
Jean, please, tell me what's going on. I'm not the only one concerned.

Cocteau stares at Actor as if looking for something.

COCTEAU
...Did you know he once stopped talking to René Chalupt for months?

ACTOR
Who?

COCTEAU
Satie.

ACTOR
No, René who?

COCTEAU
A Poet.

ACTOR
Relevance?

COCTEAU
They were close friends, well as close as anyone could be with Satie. Satie stopped talking to him because he passed Satie on the street without saying hello.

ACTOR
Again, relevance?

COCTEAU
He took it as a personal affront. Without even asking if he was even seen. No, to him, the perceived snub was enough. René had to get someone to intervene, to assure le Bon Maître that it was nothing more than a misunderstanding.

ACTOR
What does any of that have to do with the set?

COCTEAU
Mon Dieu.

ACTOR
God is finishing it?

COCTEAU
Satie made assumptions, let his imagination get the better of him. He didn't want to listen... Like you. The difference is you refuse to use your imagination, you simply make unimaginative assumptions.

Cocteau searches for his design drawings.

COCTEAU
I will explain it to you. Look here. There will be tables and chairs all around, mismatched, and back there inside the buildings, the shadow-screen will mirror the scenes with puppets.

ACTOR
Puppets?

COCTEAU
A metaphor.

ACTOR
For what?

COCTEAU
Satie, poetry... *Actors.*

Cocteau walks behind the shadow screen, a light fades in behind it and a Satie puppet is illuminated.

COCTEAU
Just like at the Chat Noir. You see?

Cocteau moves the puppets around, without skill. We can see his arms and hands and occasionally his head. We can also see that there might be strings attached to Cocteau's arms, hands and head like a marionette.

COCTEAU
The puppets ask us a question.

ACTOR
They speak?!

The light turns off and Cocteau re-emerges.

COCTEAU
Don't worry, you won't lose your job. It's a metaphorical question of existence. Are they real?

ACTOR
...Yes?

COCTEAU
Exactly! They as puppets are real, but what they represent is another reality altogether.

ACTOR
Something 'beyond' I assume?

COCTEAU

Very good. You might be learning something after all.

Actor points to the absurd bed.

ACTOR

And what's that?

COCTEAU

The death bed. For the final scene.

ACTOR

That you haven't written yet.

COCTEAU

I have it here.

Cocteau points to his head.

COCTEAU

It came to me late last night when I gave up waiting for you. I, playing myself, sit with Satie, you, and we begin discussing all those we have influenced, our impact and how art is really the devil in the form of a horse.

ACTOR

Another manufactured memory?

COCTEAU

NO! The way it should have been. A correction.

ACTOR

And a horse?

COCTEAU

And behind the bed on the shadow screen, will be Satie and I, but free, with the sun and birds, musical notes and words. Then the notes and words turn to rain and the umbrellas open, all over the stage, hundreds of them, one after another. The final image is of Satie and myself, sitting, waiting for death holding open umbrellas.

ACTOR

The horse is holding umbrellas?

COCTEAU

The horse is the devil. Don't confuse the metaphors. We are holding the umbrellas.

ACTOR

You can't just make up the past.

COCTEAU

I'm not, I'm creating art. Can we move on?

ACTOR

Avec plaisir.

COCTEAU

This space here, out front, will be the street. Aah! You will be happy with this, we have lampposts.

Cocteau runs off stage. Actor pulls out his flask, careful not to be seen by Cocteau. Takes a sip.

Cocteau wheels two tall lampposts back in with him. He sets them up Stage Right and Left. He displays them with pride and a touch of ridicule.

COCTEAU

There, a street. Lampposts, street, a set, very literal. Happy?

ACTOR

--

COCTEAU

Chat Noir over there, street over here.

ACTOR

Yes, yes, yes.

COCTEAU

Put on the cape and the tie.

Actor changes into a disheveled cape and string tie.

COCTEAU

You start on the street, over here.

ACTOR

I get it!

COCTEAU

1887, this world is all new to you. This is Montmartre, the lights, the people, the characters. Up until this point you have done nothing but disappoint.

ACTOR

I know the feeling.

COCTEAU

All of the things that you said in the first scene were internal, you *felt* them. French music is still struggling against Germanic influence, but with you, everything changes. Away from your family, from school, from the army, you, Satie, are transforming. You walk into the Chat Noir and... I will play Rodolphe Salis.

Actor starts to walk towards Cocteau.

COCTEAU

...Uh, non.

ACTOR

Non what?

COCTEAU

That is not how he walked.

ACTOR

I've been walking like this the whole time.

COCTEAU

And I am telling you now it is wrong.

ACTOR

How am I supposed to know how he walked!?

COCTEAU

Ask.

ACTOR

--

COCTEAU

Alors. Like this. Do it like this.

*Cocteau walks across the stage with short steps,
head up, arm behind his back. Actor laughs.*

COCTEAU

This is funny?

ACTOR

You want me to walk like that?

COCTEAU

That is how he walked. No wait, there is something missing.

*Cocteau walks to the pile of umbrellas, takes one
and slides it under his arm and tries the walk
again.*

COCTEAU

You see, much better. Here, you try it. But you never open
the umbrella, even if it rains.

*Actor takes an umbrella and tries out the walk.
Exaggerating it.*

COCTEAU

That's too big.

ACTOR

It's a big room.

COCTEAU

But not a big moment.

ACTOR

I'll find it.

COCTEAU

I just showed you how to do it. Do you *not* understand the
word subtle?

Actor points right at the absurd bed as if it was evidence in a trial.

COCTEAU

Fine, we'll work on the walk later. So, when you approach the café, look around, see the people, all new! Go.

Actor takes his time, playing with the walk, looking around. Taking his time...

COCTEAU

Very good, very good.

Actor continues his walk. Cocteau gets impatient, is about to speak up...

ACTOR

Bonjour Monsieur Salis. My name is Erik Satie, I am a Gymnopediste.

COCTEAU

That sounds like a fine profession.

ACTOR

I play the piano.

COCTEAU

Who doesn't? How well do you play?

ACTOR

As well as anyone, and better. I was trained at the Conservatoire.

COCTEAU

That will not help you here.

ACTOR

I hated it there.

COCTEAU

Good answer.

ACTOR

Then I am in the right place.

COCTEAU

Mmm... Now that I have had a chance to think about it... I just fired my piano player. He refused on principle to play a song that was requested. Now I must respect his honour as a man, as the song was a violation, but as the proprietor of this establishment and Grand Maître of Montmartre, I had to let him go.

ACTOR

I accept the position.

COCTEAU

It has not even been offered.

ACTOR

I accept anyway.

COCTEAU

Play for me. If *they* like you, so will I. Madames et Monsieurs... and the rest of you of course. Je vous presente, Esoterik Satie!

Actor sits at the piano and begins to play 'Je te Veux'.

Cocteau walks behind the shadow screen, the light turns on. We see him put on an old record then we see a 'round' Singer puppet emerge in the shadow screen.

FEMALE VOICE

(singing/recorded - scratchy album sound.)

J'ai compris ta détresse

Cher amoureux

Et je cède à tes vœux

Fais de moi ta maîtresse

Loin de nous la sagesse

Plus de tristesse

J'aspire à l'instant précieux

Où nous serons heureux

Je te veux

Cocteau continues to manipulate the puppet, poorly.

COCTEAU

Keep playing. Very good. Allez!! We are now at the Auberge du Clou. This is where you meet Debussy and you told him that French composers should try to be influenced by Cezanne, Toulouse-Lautrec and Gauguin and not Wagner.

Cocteau fastens the Singer puppet so it remains seen, moves to the light board and changes the lights from the warm wash to a cooler blue. Making more noise than he needs to.

FEMALE VOICE

Je n'ai pas de regrets
Et je n'ai qu'une envie
Près de toi là tout près
Vivre toute ma vie
Que ton corps soit le mien
Que ma lèvre soit tienne
Que ton coeur soit le mien
Et que toute ma chair soit tienne

COCTEAU

Good, good. Keep playing. Later you meet Maurice Ravel at the Nouvelle Athenes who plays your music in concert. All owe a debt to you! You are transformed from an angry young man into Mousieur Le Pauvre and this is the start of your life of poverty! You are surrounded by artists and painters. Some say you are the first musician to listen with your eyes!!

Actor is getting into in. Playing with passion.

COCTEAU

Are you there? Can you see it?

ACTOR

Yes!

As he continues to play, Cocteau walks to the table. He excitedly looks through his papers; many of them fall to the floor. He's making a lot of noise, not paying attention to Actor.

FEMALE VOICE

Oui je vois dans tes yeux

La divine promesse
Que ton coeur amoureux
Vient chercher ma caresse...

Actor stops playing and throws one of the packages from on top of the pianos at the record player. We hear the scratch/skip of a needle and the voice stops.

He starts to play a very sarcastic version of 'Gymnopédie #1'.

COCTEAU
Are you trying to be funny?

ACTOR
I was making sure you were paying attention.

COCTEAU
You're like a child. The scene was working, I wanted to keep the momentum going.

Cocteau walks in back of the shadow screen and turns off the light.

ACTOR
Usually a director needs to watch the scene / to know if it's working.

COCTEAU
I can hear it.

Cocteau walks over with a new stack of sheet music.

COCTEAU
I want you to try this music instead. With the puppets. His brother Conrad found them buried in his apartment under years of, uh... living.

ACTOR
The audience will want to hear what they know. / They expect...

COCTEAU

No, we are only using new music. Never heard!

ACTOR

Do you want this to fail?

COCTEAU

What does the audience know? They hear Les Gymnopédies, or Les Gnossiennes and they think they know Satie. They hear stories about his behaviour and they expect to be amused by him. He was 22 years old when he wrote the music that people expect. What were you doing at 22? This alleged good-for-nothing, ragged looking, music hall piano player changed the face of music and you want to imprison him into 3 minutes of expectations.

Actor is looking through the stack of music.

ACTOR

They're not even finished!

COCTEAU

Are you ever finished with a role?

ACTOR

I would like to think so.

COCTEAU

Art can never be finished.

ACTOR

But you wouldn't stage a rehearsal! If Satie didn't finish it, I think it means he didn't want it played.

COCTEAU

Why is this so difficult for you to understand? A life is more than what we can see, more than what we know.

ACTOR

I know / that.

COCTEAU

For the last two weeks I've been trying to explain / this to you.

ACTOR

So this is my fault?

COCTEAU

It is no one's fault! We cannot just present a perfectly encyclopedic / spectacle.

ACTOR

I know / that.

COCTEAU

We need to find the life that *is not* seen, not known, not *finished*.

ACTOR

Are *you* finished?

COCTEAU

...Yes.

ACTOR

What I was trying to say is that these are all just sketches of songs. There's no serious music here / and if we are to present a true representation.

COCTEAU

That is the kind of thinking that haunts him, haunts me! Elitist shit... Aaahhh! Satie loved chanson and Ragtime. 'Serious music', 'High-art', these are simply terms for intellectual cripples who are too afraid to embrace the simplicity of an emotion... Do you have any idea why I cast you in this role?

ACTOR

I haven't the slightest.

COCTEAU

When was the last time you worked in this type of theatre / or any other theatre?

ACTOR

What does that have to do with anything?

COCTEAU

You spent your nights in the bars, telling stories of past glory, talking about all that is wrong / with the theatre.

ACTOR

Don't get too high and mighty, it's where I met you.

COCTEAU

Your *audience* listened to you not because of what you were saying but because you made them laugh.

ACTOR

I can think of / worse things.

COCTEAU

This once great actor reduced, unbeknownst to him, to a clown.

ACTOR

A what?

COCTEAU

A clown.

ACTOR

A clown?

COCTEAU

A clown.

ACTOR

...Is that truly what you think of me?

COCTEAU

It is not what I think, but a statement of fact.

ACTOR

How could you say that to me?

COCTEAU

What have I said?

Actor starts to remove the costume.

COCTEAU

Let me finish / answering the question.

ACTOR

Believe me, you're finished. / I'm leaving.

COCTEAU

I'm giving you an opportunity.

ACTOR

I should be grateful / then?

COCTEAU

No.

ACTOR

So you're saying I need you?

COCTEAU

Écoute!

ACTOR

No, you écoute! I'm through. I can't do this anymore. This entire production is a disaster. And you, you're nothing but a shell. Walking around in a cloud of opium smoke / pulling ideas out of the air.

COCTEAU

I stopped!

ACTOR

My apologies to the great artist that I don't have the blood of a poet... I'm sorry I'll never be another Radiguet but I am not a clown. Your beloved Satie was a clown and you mon amour, are a clown.

*Cocteau walks to the light board and roughly
turns on the work-lights.*

COCTEAU

You are impossible.

ACTOR

I'm done with you!

Actor finishes removing the costume. Breathing heavily.

One of the large work-lights is having trouble illuminating and flickers. Actor doesn't see it, but Cocteau is mesmerized, watching the light struggle to turn on.

The light stops flickering but doesn't turn on.

Actor waits for some reaction and gets nothing. Begins to exit.

COCTEAU

..As beautiful as you are, you were never afraid to play the ugly parts.

ACTOR

--

COCTEAU

You always played the defective character, the outcast, the misfit and never the hero. Satie too was never the hero. He was never concerned with how he was received, but he was concerned with how he appeared.

ACTOR

What's the difference?

COCTEAU

He did whatever he did, without concern for consequence. But, he followed every little mention of him in the papers, cut them all out. His appearance, the costumes if you will, were not random but carefully manicured.

ACTOR

I never cared what anyone said.

COCTEAU

But you cared what people saw.

ACTOR

What did you see?

COCTEAU

I saw beyond the clown. I saw an artist.

ACTOR

Anyone can play the hero, the plays are written for them. But to make a lesser character, a more despicable character, connect with an audience and give them some humanity... For someone to stop pretending and tell the truth, without concern...

COCTEAU

I believe Satie spent a lot of time waiting for the rest of the world to catch up with him. What about you?

ACTOR

People stopped waiting for me a long time ago.

COCTEAU

Indulge me a moment before you run off offended.

Cocteau walks to the light board and turns off the work-lights. He then moves towards one of the lampposts. He reaches behind it and turns it on. A bright, golden, circle of light washes over them.

COCTEAU

This is where he would do his writing. Late at night, usually after spending hours holding court in the cafes. Under the streetlights of Paris, Satie would stop, write a few bars of inspiration and move on to the next light.

Cocteau walks across the stage to the other lamppost and turns it on.

COCTEAU

A few more meters, a few more ideas, he would stop again and write them down. Maybe he was drunk, maybe not... This was his ritual. He too pulled ideas out of the air. Tell me, does it matter where the ideas come from, or that there simply are any ideas at all?

Actor walks to the first lamppost.

COCTEAU

Are you any different, you and Satie? Look at the floor. Look at that circle of light. Imagine, that's all he needed, but I made that circle of light bigger, I made it surround all of Paris. I can do the same for you.

ACTOR

...Why me?

COCTEAU

This part, this role, Satie! The audiences, the esthetes will come, as they always do, and they will expect one thing and you will offer them something different. Stories will appear in the newspapers, maybe I will even write some of them, praising the fearless work presented on the stage. At that point it does not matter what they think of it, the work is alive and it will bring you back into the spotlight. If we are fearless, all of New York will want to work with you again.

ACTOR

Because of you?

COCTEAU

Because of Satie.

ACTOR

Satie's not here.

COCTEAU

Satie's always here, you simply have to look for him.

Cocteau turns off the lamppost he's standing under and walks to Actor. He steps into the ring of light, reaches out and caresses Actor's cheek.

COCTEAU

So beautiful.

Cocteau kisses Actor who returns his kiss.

Pause.

Actor lets out a deep sigh.

ACTOR

You're infuriating... Is it true Satie smashed a full plate of food over your head at a dinner party?

COCTEAU

Almost, he *almost* smashed a plate over my head. It seemed I was talking too much about his art.

ACTOR

And you're still talking about it.

COCTEAU

He held the plate up over my head and said "You are nothing but the reflection of beautiful things, and you will never be anything but that".

ACTOR

--

COCTEAU

Are you staying or leaving?

ACTOR

I'll stay on one condition.

COCTEAU

Of course.

ACTOR

Let the scenes play out. Give me a chance.

COCTEAU

What scene would you like to do next?

ACTOR

The church scene. I don't understand it.

Cocteau turns off the lamppost, walks over to the light board and lifts a few levers and the lights change. Several bright white spots hit Centre Stage.

COCTEAU

Scene 7. Costume?

Actor goes to the rack, and puts on a long, flowing white priest's cape with two intersecting red crosses on the front, one longer than the other.

COCTEAU

You will stand at the edge of the stage as if you are giving a sermon to thousands. Connect with them, convert them, convince them.

ACTOR

Who?

Cocteau waves his long hands across the (empty) seats.

COCTEAU

Who would you like them to be? Who do you think Satie thought they were?

ACTOR

The people of Paris.

COCTEAU

Yes! But Satie never let these thoughts leave his apartment.

ACTOR

Then why say them now?

COCTEAU

Because they speak to his passion. That filthy fortress of an apartment was a mirror image of his mind, where fantasy and reality were one and the same.

ACTOR

His own theatre.

COCTEAU

...In 1891 he fell under the spell of the mystic Joséphin Péladan. These words were his private revenge against him and his 'Catholic Order of the Rose and the Cross'. Péladan believed he was Satie's inspiration. Another fool trying to control him.

Cocteau sits at the piano. Actor hasn't moved.

COCTEAU

Satie was trying to protect the people of Paris. When he was in that apartment he saw himself as their savior. Go, out into the space, experience it, slowly release the words. I will play 'Les Danses Gothiques'.

Actor turns and stands at the lip of the stage.

COCTEAU

Submit! Submit!

ACTOR

Let me play the scene!

Actor takes a breath, looks out into the audience, submits and in a commanding voice we haven't heard yet...

ACTOR

...Welcome one and all. My name is Erik Satie, master of the chapel of the Metropolitan Art Church of Jesus the Leader. I have gathered you here today so we may enter into battle against those who have neither conviction, belief in the soul, nor principle in the heart.

Actor walks out into the first few rows of the theatre.

ACTOR

We will be six hundred million strong. We will excommunicate all those whom we believe to be guilty of pride, impenitence and above all guilty of the most serious crime against this church, that of bad art! As your High Priest I will censure all those I find to be in sin. I will write them very offensive letters filled with volcanic and extremely colourful language. This glorious church, I promise you, will be a refuge for the lost souls who need shelter from the distasteful, arrogant mistreatment of beauty.

Actor is frustrated. Cocteau continues to play, softly.

ACTOR
You're saying he wrote this?

COCTEAU
Would I lie?

ACTOR
Yes you would.

COCTEAU
Does it matter?

Actor makes it back to the stage.

ACTOR
How many joined the Church?

COCTEAU
None.

ACTOR
How can I find Satie if what I'm performing isn't real?

COCTEAU
It was real to him and poetry is about a greater truth.

ACTOR
You want to show the man, right?

COCTEAU
Of course.

ACTOR
Then why are we presenting these ridiculously eccentric details?

COCTEAU
It is the details that make up real life, thousands of peculiarities that make up a whole.

ACTOR
Why don't you include his relationship with Suzanne Valadon instead of this? Or is love too bourgeois for you?

COCTEAU

...What can love explain? Does love tell stories? No, love can destroy. Love can negate, but it cannot show all a man is. It shows all he is not. Love is not drama.

ACTOR

What is more dramatic than love?

COCTEAU

Art.

ACTOR

Can one even exist without the other?

COCTEAU

Here's the story if you must have it. This is all hearsay, Satie himself never spoke of it.

Cocteau walks in back of the shadow screen and the light turns on.

ACTOR

Is that necessary?

COCTEAU

If you want it to be true.

A Satie puppet and a Suzanne puppet emerge on the screen and start dancing. Cocteau has little skill in manipulating them.

He enacts their relationship as he tells the story. A meeting, a dance, a kiss, making love, fighting until the final moment...

COCTEAU

Satie could never do anything 'à moyen'. Everything was given his fullest attention. He proposed to her the first night they met.

Actor takes out the flask and has a large swig. He sits at the piano and accompanies the puppets with some of the new music Cocteau gave him.

COCTEAU

She would paint him, he would write music dedicated to her. They would drink and fight, and he would always crawl back to her, begging forgiveness. The last night they were together, they fought and he pushed her out of a window.

Actor stops playing. The Satie puppet pushes the Suzanne puppet and Cocteau drops it.

ACTOR

He what?

COCTEAU

He went directly to the police station and demanded that he be arrested for her murder. But as luck would have it she was also an excellent acrobat and managed to land safely.

Cocteau turns off the shadow screen and steps out from behind it.

ACTOR

Satie was in love with an acrobat.

COCTEAU

A beautiful acrobat. A week later she moved two doors down from him with her new lover. Do you find anything 'dramatique' in that story?

ACTOR

Love, violence, attempted murder. Yes, very *dramatique*.

COCTEAU

It's all so pedestrian.

ACTOR

Why am I not surprised?

COCTEAU

Women were not what drove him.

ACTOR

Men?

COCTEAU

No, he was constantly offended by my lifestyle. Relationships were simply too much for him. He loved his art and there was very little room for much else. That is why his friendships never lasted... Shall we try the church / scene again?

ACTOR

No, scene 14, when you met Satie at Valentine / Gross' home.

COCTEAU

Too soon.

ACTOR

Then when he moved to Arcueil with all his belongings? We could get a / wheelbarrow. I could act it out.

COCTEAU

We are jumping too far forward.

ACTOR

Fine, the church scene.

COCTEAU

No, I've changed my mind.

ACTOR

Of course / you have.

COCTEAU

If you are to find him, you need to be all the different / parts of him.

ACTOR

I'm trying!

COCTEAU

We have to do Uspud!

Cocteau pulls out a giant, papier-mâché mask of Satie's smiling head from behind a stack of boxes.

ACTOR
I'm not / wearing that.

COCTEAU
We are attempting to create magic / on this stage.

ACTOR
I won't do it.

COCTEAU
It is an important part / of the Ballet.

ACTOR
I thought we discussed this. No giant masks and no dancing.

COCTEAU
It's not real dancing, just simple movements. I created the choreography myself.

ACTOR
This isn't happening.

COCTEAU
The mise-en-scene for this is magnificent.

Cocteau goes back behind the shadow screen.

ACTOR
You're not listening to me!

The light turns on. A Jesus puppet on a cross is illuminated. Cocteau affixes the puppet and returns.

ACTOR
...Wow, that's not offensive at all.

COCTEAU
It's what he wrote. We will try it now, while the house is empty. If it doesn't work, I will cut it.

ACTOR
Promise?

COCTEAU
Of course.

Actor hesitantly takes the giant mask and struggles to put it on. It's a very tight fit. As soon as he puts the mask on, all his movements are large and indicating.

COCTEAU
You look wonderful.

ACTOR
I feel stupid.

COCTEAU
Use it. 1892. You are Uspud. Satie's first Ballet. You wanted the Paris Opera to produce it. Satie didn't understand politics.

ACTOR
I can't hear you.

COCTEAU
He figured if he wrote it, it should be performed. Unfortunately it was rejected, even after Satie threatened the head of the Paris Opera to a pistol duel just to make him look at it.

ACTOR
I can't hear you.

COCTEAU
Merde, lumière!!

ACTOR
What?

Cocteau runs to the light board and pulls on some levers.

ACTOR
This thing is heavy... Can we get on with it?

Odd, bright sidelights turn on creating bizarre shadows. Cocteau raises his voice.

COCTEAU

Yes, there. So we will do part of Act II and part of Act III. I will be the narrator. The 'Messe des Pauvres' will play behind you. You will start by praying, facing the audience, then a chorus of demons rise up and surround you. They have human form, but have animal heads. See them, try to avoid them. Heads of dogs, fish, oxen, unicorns, blue agouti goats, ostriches, caterpillars!! You try to escape, but they surround you. A massive crucifix will rise up from the floor and carry the demons off. You are now bathed in bright light as you fall to the ground in prayer...

Cocteau runs back to the light board. A few more levers and the sidelights turn off and footlights bathe the actor in white light.

COCTEAU

You fall to the ground in prayer. Fall to / the ground!

ACTOR

I'm trying not to lose my balance.

COCTEAU

You turn to face the Jesus puppet and beg for forgiveness.

Cocteau jumps behind the shadow screen to 'act' Jesus. He's getting out of breath.

COCTEAU

...Jesus magically removes one of his hands from the cross, reaches out and touches your head.

One of Cocteau's arms reaches out, through the screen.

COCTEAU

'Uspud, you are chosen'. Once touched, you are filled with the Holy Spirit and cannot contain the joy and the anguish. Uspud is once again surrounded by demons so you give your soul back to Jesus while they rip you apart in a final sacrifice as Jesus rises with Uspud's soul to heaven. Magical!

ACTOR

Ok, I surrender, what the hell does any of that mean?

COCTEAU

Art! Satie's art was his religion. Oh, he tried to dress it up in the usual Christian fripperies, but underneath, it was always the music. The demons are us, all of us that wanted a piece of him. He had no money and was driven away by his creditors. His apartment in Arcueil was his prison, his asylum. But also a blank canvas, a new reality no one entered for 27 years, no one but Satie.

Cocteau moves to the light board and turns off the footlights and turns on the work lights, accidentally turning on the sidelights behind Actor.

COCTEAU

Maybe inside those walls he was just like anyone else.

Cocteau gets lost in thought.

Actor is struggling to remove the giant mask. Backlit from the sidelights, Actor looks manic, aggressive.

ACTOR

Get this thing off me!!

Cocteau goes to help Actor.

COCTEAU

Stand still.

Now they both struggle to remove the Satie mask. It looks comical until...

COCTEAU

Stop moving.

ACTOR

I can't breathe!!

Cocteau loses his grip and falls backwards into the table knocking it over. Everything goes flying.

Actor walks up to him to help him up, still with the giant mask on.

ACTOR

Jean, Jean...

Cocteau backs away from him on the floor. Freaked out by the lighting and the mask.

COCTEAU

Get away from me!

Actor stands motionless, hovering over him.

COCTEAU

What's wrong with you? Say something.

Actor violently rips off the giant mask, he's breathing heavy, but still hovering over Cocteau.

COCTEAU

Fine, fine, we'll cut the scene.

Actor slowly bends down, reaching out. Cocteau tenses. Actor picks something up off the ground.

ACTOR

What's this?

Cocteau jumps up trying to get it back. He loses his balance and falls again. He's now on his hands and knees in front of Actor.

COCTEAU

It's nothing, please, give that to me.

ACTOR

...This is your opium kit.

COCTEAU

I don't know / why I have that.

ACTOR

You, you said you quit.

COCTEAU

And I have, please, give / it to me.

ACTOR

I agreed to do this play because / you promised.

COCTEAU

Stop being hysterical and...

*Actor threatens to smash it on the ground.
Cocteau looks on in horror.*

ACTOR

Hysterical says the man on his knees.

COCTEAU

...Go ahead if it will make you happy.

Actor lifts the kit over his head.

COCTEAU

No!!

*Cocteau leaps for it and Actor pulls it away.
Cocteau keeps his eyes on the kit.*

ACTOR

I knew your history. The lovers you tried to control... I believed you anyway when you said it was going to be different.

COCTEAU

And it is.

ACTOR

Look at me!! This is why everyone leaves you, why everything dies around you. All you do is consume, people, drugs, ideas, nothing can breathe around you.

COCTEAU

I made a promise.

ACTOR

Yes you did.

A horse head shadow emerges upstage. Cocteau is captivated by it. His breathing gets heavy.

ACTOR

Look at me.

COCTEAU

No, No!!

ACTOR

Jean. Look at me! I'm using every ounce of strength I have not to walk out and leave you here. Please, give me one good reason why I should believe anything you say.

COCTEAU

Because... Because I love you.

ACTOR

Do you?

COCTEAU

Of course. How many times must I say it?

ACTOR

Or maybe I'm just playing a role for you. A replacement for a ghost.

COCTEAU

Don't be cruel. It's ugly.

ACTOR

Isn't that what I do?

Actor holds out the opium kit in front of him. Cocteau is consumed by it.

ACTOR

I will make you a promise. If you take this back, if you use this, I will finish your play, but, you and I, are finished.

Cocteau pauses, looks at the kit, then at the Actor.

ACTOR

Is this too realistic for you?

COCTEAU

I do love you.

He reaches out with a shaking hand to take the opium kit. They face each other for a moment then Cocteau walks off stage. The horse head shadow grows and seems to follow him until it disappears.

Actor remains, his head and shoulders fall in disappointment, suddenly heavier. He takes out his flask and has large swig. He removes the priest's cape.

The House lights fade in slowly. A warm wash covers the stage. The shadow screen fades in on it's own and a Cocteau puppet emerges.

INTERMISSION

Actor sits at the piano, puts the flask on top of it and begins to play 'Vexations'. He stops occasionally to remind the audience that it's the intermission.

ACTOR

Go on. It's ok. Have a drink, go to the bathroom, talk amongst yourselves, read the program. It's all right, there's time... Really, it's quite all right, do what you need to do. I'm going to use this time to practice and run some lines, no need to pay attention... You'll know when we start up again.

As Actor plays, the Cocteau puppet begins to smoke an opium pipe. We watch the ritual; burning of the opium, preparing the pipe, the puppet lying down on its side and feeding the drug into the pipe.

As the smoke rises, the Cocteau puppet is met by different animal masks and finally the Satie puppet emerges, watches, then turns its back.

We cannot see who is manipulating the puppets and they are now moving with skill.

Actor stops playing, but the music continues, over and over. He grabs his script and the flask. Big sip. Grabs the bowler hat and pince-nez glasses.

Quietly he begins to run lines to himself. Eventually, the house lights fade out...

END OF INTERMISSION

ACTOR

Which do you prefer? Music or Ham? It seems this is a question one should ask oneself when the hors d'oeuvres arrive. In many places, sweet and excellent silence has been replaced by bad music. Most people hear falsely pretty things, and listen to silly, sentimental rubbish while they drink a beer or try on a pair of trousers and appear to appreciate the sonorous tribute of basses and bassoons and other ugly-pipes while thinking of nothing at all. Music or Ham? This kind of musical bastardization makes me choke. Like dressing a stick in a mink coat. The remedy? Heavy taxes, terrible vexations, severe repression and cruel torture.

Another sip from the flask. He puts on the jacket from the top of show, grabs an umbrella. Actor finds his script, looks for the right page.

ACTOR

Seriously, should people be allowed to just go ahead and make our poor life ugly? Why?? Business? Money you say? This kind of putrid money-grubbing makes me choke. But now that it is out in the open, might you have a few francs to spare? Which do you prefer? Music or Ham?

Another sip. He takes one of the overturned boxes, pushes it to the lip of the stage and sits on it. Relaxed, another long swig.

The booze is beginning to express itself.

ACTOR

When I first met Debussy, at the beginning of our friendship, he was completely impregnated with Wagner and was conscientiously searching for a way forward which was not easy to find...

He rolls up the script into a telescope and scans the audience.

ACTOR

...As if anything in this play is easy to find.

He stands on the box. Another sip, another tactic.

ACTOR

I explained to Debussy the need for us French to pry ourselves away from the Wagnerian adventure, which did not correspond to our natural aspirations. I explained to him that I was by no means anti-Wagnerian, God-forbid, who in their right mind would be, but that we needed to have our own music, without sauerkraut if possible.

Actor jumps off the box and starts to walk across the stage. Working on the 'Satie' walk. The shadow screen fades out.

He takes different umbrellas, walks with them, opens them, discards them.

Cocteau enters but stays out of sight of Actor, his hair is now standing up further in the front.

ACTOR

Last year, I gave several lectures on "Intelligence and Musicality among Animals". Tonight I shall speak about the "Intelligence and Musicality among Critics". It is more or less the same thing, with some slight modifications of course. I simply changed the title.

His physicality is changing. As Cocteau looks on, a transformation occurs. Actor is becoming Satie.

ACTOR

To summarize, the artist is nothing but a dreamer, while the critic has the conscience of reality. Watch, I will show you.

Actor spots Cocteau who's moving slowly, cautiously towards the table with his notes. Actor hides the flask but doesn't drop character or energy.

Actor approaches him and pokes an umbrella into Cocteau's back.

ACTOR

Why must you define everything?

COCTEAU

Excuse me?

ACTOR

I say something in jest, in confidence, for my own amusement and you write a book about it. Not only do you write the book, you dedicated it to George Auric! Coq et L'Arlequin! Was that some kind of passive aggressive public stance to crown one of my minions?

COCTEAU

What are you doing?

ACTOR

What were you doing before you met me? You were hanging around with Serge Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes. You were his little play-thing, you made him laugh. You were like his pet monkey.

On the shadow screen, a Diaghilev puppet is manipulating a Cocteau marionette.

Cocteau shakes his head, unbelieving.

COCTEAU

Enough, this isn't funny at all. Stop this / at once.

ACTOR

You tried so hard to take what I had and make it your own.

COCTEAU

Where is this / coming from?

ACTOR

I am putting an end / to this Parade.

COCTEAU

What?

ACTOR

Have you ever had an original idea?

COCTEAU

I've created genres!

ACTOR

In the name of the Metropolitan Art Church, I, Erik Satie, will make sure the theatre will remain dark.

COCTEAU

Wh-what have you been told?

ACTOR

That I was your passport into the world you wanted to live in.

COCTEAU

Someone needed to speak for you, uh, him.

ACTOR

Because the esthetes and the artistes knew you, but they would not work with you. I gave you credibility. I gave you Picasso / and Les Six.

COCTEAU

I knew Picasso / before you!

ACTOR

And he painted your portrait. He painted everyone's portrait back then! Big deal! I wrote my music to Picasso's Parade, / not yours.

COCTEAU

I saved you from obscurity / and ridicule!

ACTOR

You ruined me!

COCTEAU

You, he would have been forgotten.

ACTOR

I am forgotten! Look out there, to those confused faces staring back at us. Look!!

COCTEAU

I'm / looking.

ACTOR

Shall we ask how many of them know who I am? But I am fairly certain that most of them know who you are.

Cocteau looks out into the audience, seeing them for the first time, he scans their faces and contemplates asking.

COCTEAU

If it had not been for me no one would... No more games, let us / get back to work.

ACTOR

You are not the puppet master you think you are. Debussy had already orchestrated my work, Ravel was a disciple and gave his own concerts in my honour, even your precious Stravinsky learned a thing or two from me! A teen-age boy / managed to control you!

COCTEAU

Stop this!

ACTOR

What had you done? A perverted book of prose about the illicitness of youth and a libretto to a ballet no one saw. Diaghilev wanted to work with me, with / Picasso. Not you.

COCTEAU

Diaghilev told me to astonish him and I did.

ACTOR

Not until I arrived.

COCTEAU

If I had not / found you...

Actor sits at the piano and cuts him off by playing 'Prélude du Rideau Rouge' from Parade. The sound that emerges is the full orchestra version.

Cocteau is trying to keep it together.

ACTOR

Do you remember this? For Picasso, not you!! As long as you are surrounded by the beautiful people you don't care about anyone but yourself. You played one world against the other... Do you even like art?

COCTEAU

I've dedicated my life / to art.

ACTOR

Now everyone wants to see / what Cocteau is up to.

COCTEAU

Do I need to apologize / for being popular?

ACTOR

Except the dead whose heads you stand on.

COCTEAU

Shut up! Shut up, / shut up!

Actor lifts his arm and his hand is hidden inside the sleeve.

ACTOR

I've done it! I've taken my / hand off!

The lights shift slightly. Cocteau snaps.

COCTEAU

Ca suffit!!

Cocteau grabs another umbrella and points it in Actor's face.

COCTEAU

At Valentine's, when we met.

As the conversation moves forward they begin to fence with the umbrellas, poorly.

COCTEAU

You, he... Satie was there to play your, his music, his old music for her little crowd of bourgeois sophisticates and then you, he would ask her for money. The great Erik Satie, begging for money from the rich, fraudulent, ignorant philistines!

ACTOR

It's fascinating that your memory has a way of creating its own memories.

COCTEAU

I saw how great you were, he was. I could hear what they could not.

ACTOR

Must you insist on pretending I'm not in the room?

COCTEAU

I knew, then and there in her apartment that you, merde! He was going to be the future of French music. I gave birth to him.

ACTOR

Always you.

COCTEAU

The way he, you treated me, embarrassed me, acted as if I was a child! You are not my mother!

They stop, umbrellas up. Pause.

ACTOR

I most certainly am not!

COCTEAU

I'll prove it.

ACTOR

That I'm not your mother?

COCTEAU

Nooo!! That at Valentine's, you were nothing but a beggar.
Lumières!

Cocteau turns to the light board, but the lights change on their own before he gets there. He pauses, isn't sure what just happened. Actor has no reaction.

COCTEAU

Good, all right. Go to the piano... In another room / you are playing.

ACTOR

Trois Morceaux en Forme de Poire.

Actor jumps to the piano and starts to play. It's underscored by a strings section that doesn't exist.

Pause.

COCTEAU

It is 1915. Even though Ravel and Debussy have both orchestrated and re-introduced some of your old work, at this time you are alone, as far as the music world is concerned, you are finished... I have left the room to beg Valentine to introduce us. We listen for a moment... You finish / playing.

ACTOR

I walk in to meet / you.

COCTEAU

No, you're looking for Valentine.

ACTOR

Yes, yes of course.

COCTEAU

You don't find her, but you see me and say nothing. I will admit I was quite nervous. I approach... You are astonishing.

ACTOR

Thank you, no.

COCTEAU

Monsieur Satie.

ACTOR

Please, Erik. And you are?

COCTEAU

Jean Cocteau.

ACTOR

Ahh, the man of ideas.

COCTEAU

Erik... I have a proposal for you. Your music has inspired me. I want to bring something French to Diaghilev and Les Ballet Russes.

ACTOR

No sauerkraut?

COCTEAU

None.

ACTOR

I am listening.

Cocteau launches into his pitch. Acting out parts and recreating his scenario as Actor watches, amused.

COCTEAU

It is, it is a circus you see? But not inside the circus, we are outside, we never go in. The audience sitting and watching are being persuaded to enter, to see the show. But the show they are seeing is not even the real show... What are you doing?

ACTOR
I'm listening.

COCTEAU
Non, non. You never listened to me. You are tolerating me because all you want is for me to leave so you can ask Valentine for money.

ACTOR
Are you sure?

COCTEAU
Yes, you did anything but listen.

Actor looks around and busies himself with the set.

COCTEAU
This will be far removed from anything that has been presented to the crowd of Les Ballets Russes. I am fed up with the pretty poetry on the surface of things. Let us hide it under some buffooneries. So, the story is quite simple, three acts, a Chinese Conjurer, a young American Girl, an Acrobat. They try to get the public's attention to see their performances, but the audience does not understand what they should do, how they should react, so they do nothing, they sit. Are you listening?

ACTOR
Heard every word. Please continue.

COCTEAU
...The performers, after they all come back on stage to try one last time to rouse up some business, freeze in resentment and exhaustion. I want this work to distill all the energy of the music halls, carousels, factories, sea ports, film!! Then right before the final curtain, a card, a large card is flashed "The drama which did not take place for those people who stayed outside was by, Jean Cocteau, Erik Satie and... Picasso". Alors?

ACTOR
I like the circus.

COCTEAU

You are the only one who can do it.

ACTOR

Do what?

COCTEAU

The ballet, the music for the ballet.

ACTOR

I like the ballet as well.

COCTEAU

Will you do it?

ACTOR

Do what?

COCTEAU

The Ballet!!

ACTOR

You have Picasso?

COCTEAU

No, not yet. But he is painting my portrait next week.

ACTOR

Diaghilev has said yes?

COCTEAU

No, not yet. But with you / involved.

ACTOR

We were going to work together once before, you and I.

COCTEAU

We were? What happened?

ACTOR

There was a murder in Sarajevo.

COCTEAU

So will you...?

Actor looks around, unsure of something.

COCTEAU

What is it?

ACTOR

Have you seen my umbrella?

COCTEAU

...You are holding it.

ACTOR

Why yes I am! Alors. I have to go. It is a long walk back to Arcueil.

COCTEAU

It's dangerous at this time of night.

ACTOR

Don't worry. When I spot an evil-looking type, I lie down in the gutter and pretend I am drunk. I also have one of these!

Actor pulls a hammer out of the jacket, holds it up and pretends to hit people on the head.

ACTOR

Valentine? Valentine?

Actor walks off stage looking for Valentine.

ACTOR (off)

Valentine!

Cocteau waits. Actor doesn't return.

COCTEAU

That was very good... We should continue... As you said, the show opens in two weeks... Satie?

No answer. Cocteau goes to the table to prepare the next scene.

Odd, dream-like lighting transforms the set.

The shadow screen begins to lightly pulsate. Each time the light is on, the Satie puppet is interchanged with the Cocteau puppet.

COCTEAU

Is there anyone there?

Cocteau cautiously walks towards the screen. The final image is of a puppet with a horse's head smoking an opium pipe.

COCTEAU

Diab!e!

Shadow screen turns off.

Actor enters from the opposite side of the stage he exited from. He's very serious. He walks to the pianos and pushes them centre-stage.

COCTEAU

Why are you doing this to me?

Actor sits at the piano and looks at Cocteau. He lifts his hand to cover his mouth in a gesture Satie made when he laughed.

COCTEAU

It's really you.

Cocteau steps away from him, scared and fascinated.

Actor starts to play 'Pieces Froides: Dances de travers #2'. It's only the piano, but the sound is full, engulfing the theatre from every corner.

Cocteau listens. As he does, he becomes caught in a tight spotlight he cannot escape. The rest of the stage falls into darkness.

The music continues as Actor exits in the dark.

On the shadow screen, we see a Cocteau marionette manipulated to dance. Seemingly against his will, Cocteau matches the puppet's movements.

COCTEAU

...Dès qu'un poète se réveille, il est idiot. Le rôle du poète n'est pas de prouver, mais d'affirmer sans fournir aucune preuve. (*Once a poet wakes up, he is an idiot. The role of the poet is not to prove, but to affirm without providing any proof.*) The People who did not participate at the beginning of the show can remain seated. The rest of you enter! See the King of Dramas. The great success of laughter and fear!

The music cuts out and the lights turn back on. Actor enters again, now from the other side of the stage.

ACTOR

Who are you talking to?

Cocteau looks over to the pianos confused, dazed.

COCTEAU

You...

ACTOR

Are you all right?

COCTEAU

Yes!! And I despise being coddled. Would you like it if I asked you every five minutes if you were all right?

ACTOR

I'm perfectly / fine.

COCTEAU

You've been drunk for weeks and I have said nothing!

ACTOR

Don't turn this / around on me.

COCTEAU

I saw you sitting right there playing Pieces Froides. We ran through the Valentine scene, poorly I might add, and then you returned / and...

ACTOR

And you're worried about my drinking? You left with your pipes. I got locked out of the theatre!

COCTEAU

You've been playing with the lights / and the puppets.

ACTOR

Now you're seeing / things.

COCTEAU

Are you trying to punish me?

ACTOR

Jean stop!

COCTEAU

It must be hard being so beautiful and yet so completely void of actual talent.

ACTOR

--

COCTEAU

...I didn't mean that.

ACTOR

Yes you did.

COCTEAU

No / I've been...

ACTOR

The truth at last.

COCTEAU

I didn't / mean it.

ACTOR

I don't care anymore.

COCTEAU

Please... Don't leave me. I can't be / alone.

ACTOR

Relax Jean I'm not leaving. *We* are going to finish your play and when it closes, *I* will once again be the talk of New York. Forgetting you and this ridiculous process.

COCTEAU

I'm / sorry.

ACTOR

Let's just move on.

Cocteau can't move. Actor looks down at the mess of Cocteau's notes. He picks some of the pages.

ACTOR

What's this? A courtroom scene?

COCTEAU

I cut it.

ACTOR

Why?

COCTEAU

It's too obvious. We have the scene after the premiere, with the chorus of old ladies chasing and attacking us with their hatpins.

ACTOR

But this shows who he really is. This also shows how much you cared for him, or does that also fall into the category of art?

COCTEAU

--

ACTOR

You insist that you made him the talk of Paris. What says artist more than a scandalous arrest? Let's see it on its feet, that is *if* you want me to find Satie...

A small standoff ensues. Cocteau straightens himself out. Tries to regain some composure.

COCTEAU

...Once.

ACTOR

That's all I will need.

COCTEAU

...Very well. Go, stand on the other side of the piano.

The lights change. Actor doesn't notice, lost in the new pages. Cocteau pauses.

The 'Acrobates' music of Parade begins to play mixed with a faint heartbeat. Cocteau watches Actor.

ACTOR

And?

COCTEAU

...Who are you?

ACTOR

I'm... Satie and France.

COCTEAU

So it's really you?

ACTOR

Is there someone else I should be? A continent perhaps?

COCTEAU

No, we will proceed... Parade had just finished, it was chaos. You remember?

ACTOR

Of Course.

COCTEAU

There were people yelling, crying out 'Boche' which, given our intentions, seemed misguided. Apollinaire was there in his army uniform, head wrapped in bandages from the war,

saving us from the old ladies. This was the greatest scandal the Parisian art world had ever seen!

ACTOR

A few raised voices and some pushing and shoving can hardly be called a riot.

COTEAU

Yes it can! That is how I choose to remember it... A critic, Jean Poueigh, approached you at the theatre. He told you, to your face, that he loved the performance and the music specifically.

ACTOR

I hate flattery.

COCTEAU

No, you didn't mind the flattery. It's what happened next.

ACTOR

I pick up the newspaper.

COCTEAU

You read his review. He wrote, for all to see, that the ballet and your music offended French tastes.

The music cuts out, leaving the heartbeat exposed. Actor looks right at Cocteau, who looks away.

ACTOR

What I cannot stand is someone lying to my face.

COCTEAU

...Exactly.

ACTOR

I expect those around me to act as I do, with the utmost honour.

COCTEAU

Yes, you have been offended in a way that compels you to act!

Actor grabs some note cards, pen and ink. The heartbeat slowly begins to speed up.

COCTEAU

May 30, 1917. A letter from Erik Satie to Jean Poueigh.

ACTOR

"What I know is that you are an asshole, and better yet, an unmusical asshole. You may never offer me your dirty hand again".

COCTEAU

Feeling better?

ACTOR

Not quite.

COCTEAU

Another?

ACTOR

Another.

COCTEAU

Another: June 5th 1917.

ACTOR

"Erik Satie to Mousieur Fuckface Poueigh, famous gourd and composer for nitwits. You are a lousy asshole. This note is coming from where I shit on you with all my force".

COCTEAU

Now, move and stand in the middle here. We are in court. I will play Poueigh...

Cocteau puts on a red clown nose.

COCTEAU

You are on trial for libel. Because the notes you sent were open postcards and anyone could have read them. Poueigh is arguing you could have ruined him.

ACTOR

You were already ruined.

Cocteau speaks out to the audience.

COCTEAU

You see your honour! He has no sense. I am a respectable member of / the artistic community.

ACTOR

You are an insect, a fly to be swatted.

COCTEAU

He has damaged my reputation by sending me these obscene letters.

ACTOR

Your music is obscene enough.

Cocteau grabs a judge's wig from one of the boxes and puts it on, still wearing the nose. He finds a gavel and proceeds to pound on the pianos. The heartbeat continues to speed up.

ACTOR

Your Honor, I beg you, lock *him* up before it is too late. What if children were to hear his music!! Think of the children.

COCTEAU

I am not aware that Monsieur Poueigh has attacked any children / with his music.

ACTOR

I assure you, it is quite painful for their little ears.

COCTEAU

Monsieur Satie.

ACTOR

It is a matter / of decorum.

COCTEAU

Monsieur Satie!

ACTOR

A matter of decorum in a / polite society.

COCTEAU
MONSIEUR SATIE!

ACTOR
A polite society that needs to be protected.

COCTEAU
ASSEZ!

The heartbeat stops.

ACTOR
...I have been philosophically assaulted by the claim that he writes music! If his contention of composition is true, what is it that I do? I ask you Monsieur le Juge, is it enough to just call something art?

COCTEAU
Your language in an open note is what we are here to pass judgment on. Not the legitimacy of artistic proclamations. I have no choice, given the evidence...

Cocteau rips off the wig and jumps on one of the boxes.

COCTEAU
This is when I jumped up in the courtroom and yelled out in your defense. "Asshole!!"

ACTOR
Thank you.

COCTEAU
It didn't work. I was forcibly removed and beaten by the police.

ACTOR
Sounds delightful, I was fined 1000 Francs and a week in jail. I would have preferred the beating. Where was I to get that kind of money?

COCTEAU
Apollinaire saved you from going to jail. He knew the right people to contact. Now, look back at the pianos. They mock

you, they tempt you... Your poverty is too much, you need money.

Actor walks back and touches the pianos. He starts ripping open some of the packages and throwing them across the stage. He finds a letter and begins to read it silently.

COCTEAU

Where did you get that?

ACTOR

Chère Valentine. This is too much. I feel I am damned. This beggar's life disgusts me. I am looking for a job, however small. I shit on art! It has brought me nothing but problems. An artist's life is a Bugger's life...

Cocteau rips it out of his hands and looks at it.

COCTEAU

This is blank. Nothing.

Actor rips the clown nose off of Cocteau and puts it on. Slowly, but building in intensity, Actor begins to rip the top piano apart, exposing the 'guts' until it resembles an open ribcage, all the while 'reading' the rest of the letter.

ACTOR

Oh forgive me Valentine these crude descriptions, but they are true. I have written to everyone, no one replies. Please, I beg you Valentine, Could you find me a place where I could earn a little money. Not much, only to eat and have a few drinks.

COCTEAU

Stop that right now, you're / destroying it!

ACTOR

I promise you. I am at the end of my rope. Art! It is nothing, it has been a month since I have written a note. I no longer have any ideas and hope I am never cursed with them again.

With the piano now freed of its skin, a pulsating light shines out from somewhere inside. Actor falls to his knees, removing the nose and letting it roll out of his hand towards Cocteau.

Cocteau moves a few steps back, shocked at what he sees. A metronome begins its click-click in unison with the light.

The click-click of the metronome turns into footsteps, matching rhythmically.

COCTEAU

I did what I could to help.

ACTOR

Did you?

COCTEAU

Parade and the scandal made you famous.

ACTOR

Made me famous, not my work.

COCTEAU

There is no difference. A man is his art.

ACTOR

No!! A man is just a man.

Actor sits at the piano and begins to play "Cinq Grimaces pour le Songe d'une nuit d'ete".

ACTOR

You need to build everyone up so you can justify your own insecurities and play kingmaker. He was just a man, as am I, not some magical vessel. You, Jean, are just a man, nothing more. But you could never understand how this giggling, smirking clown could create so many beautiful things.

COCTEAU

He was not a clown.

ACTOR

Because that would mean you are a clown. Listen to the notes. They shouldn't work, but they do. They're not buried in some mess of virtuosity, no tricks, no sense of time, no... poetry. He spoke, plainly and clearly through his music. You, you bury everything in metaphor.

COCTEAU

Whatever I did, or did not do, is not important right now. This play is not about me.

ACTOR

Are you sure about that?

COCTEAU

We are celebrating Satie.

ACTOR

I want to believe that.

COCTEAU

--

ACTOR

When we first met, I didn't even know who you were talking about. I had never heard of Satie. I'd hit a rough patch and a good paycheck on a big stage with no less than the famous Cocteau himself, what else could I have said?... The way you spoke to me, about me, and the project, you made it sound... You made me feel as if I was the only person you wanted to be with, the only person that could do what you wanted. The only one who could play Satie.

COCTEAU

It's true.

ACTOR

But I see how you work. You fixate on someone, take them over so it becomes difficult to figure out where one ends and the other begins.

COCTEAU

You don't know what / you're talking about.

ACTOR

Now I understand why Satie has tortured you for so long.
You could never truly possess him.

COCTEAU

Never.

ACTOR

I understand Jean. You hear a piece of his music, you think you understand him. You hear another and he's gone. The man is a puzzle with missing pieces. I know how to act and he, Satie, makes me question if I know anything at all. I can't imagine what you're going through.

COCTEAU

I'm not going through anything.

ACTOR

All these years he's hovered / over you.

COCTEAU

I spent years attempting to put him somewhere, where I could look at him, see him, hear him, completely.

ACTOR

And he would just become something else, from one lamppost to the next.

COCTEAU

Yes!!!... When I met him at Valentine's, I was trying to create something that could not be denied. He wasn't even my first choice. I wanted Stravinsky. The Sacre du Printemps was still the talk of Paris and I wanted, I knew I could take it further. It was all so Russian.

*Actor finds an umbrella and walks to a lamppost
and turns it on precisely on the word "Russian".*

ACTOR

And I am France.

COCTEAU

You were Paris, I was going to make you France.

ACTOR

You had to prop me up, make me more than you thought I was.

COCTEAU

I wanted to show them, the Diaghilevs and the Stravinskys and even Debussy who was always so pleased with himself all the time, I needed to show them that I belonged in that world. Show them that I was more because I could bring in the painters, poets and dancers and I could walk through any door in Montparnasse and Montmartre. And you, you would go to the cafés and play anything the crowd wanted to hear.

ACTOR

For money. I was so hungry.

COCTEAU

No! I will not believe that. You understood. You knew where to find beauty. You never thought beyond a few moments. Life was something to write, like your music, no development, nothing predictable, in threes, so you could look at it from different perspectives.

ACTOR

What if I stood over here?

COCTEAU

What if?

ACTOR

Do I look different?

COCTEAU

Identical and indescribable all at once.

ACTOR

Why did I stop talking to you?

COCTEAU

I don't know.

ACTOR

What did you do after we worked together?

COCTEAU

You don't know?

ACTOR

I was busy. I had Socrate and there was this little film that I wrote the music for. I didn't know it then, but supposedly I was the first person to write music for film, one frame at a time... I was in it too, jumping up and down with Picabia and Duchamp was playing chess with Man Ray, great fun, people appearing and disappearing. They called it a photomontage, the meeting place of a thousand spaces.

COCTEAU

I know what it is. I saw it. It was, uh... Amusing.

Actor plays with the walk. Cocteau watches.

COCTEAU

You've almost got it.

ACTOR

Got what?

COCTEAU

The walk.

ACTOR

Why wouldn't I? It's my walk. How should I walk? Like you?

He drops the umbrella and mimics Cocteau, with much exaggeration. Placing his feet very carefully on the ground after taking long, slow steps, arms swinging at his side.

ACTOR

Hello, my name is Jean Cocteau. I am a poet, a director, an actor, a choreographer, an artist, a magician. I am anything you want me to be. Je suis Jean Cocteau. I love the theatre. My mother use to go the ballet, and I would watch her dress up like a queen, she smelled so good and I wanted to be her...

Cocteau goes to one of the boxes and pulls out a hat, glasses and fake goatee. Puts them on and does his 'Satie walk'. We now have two Saties on stage.

ACTOR

Why do you look like me?

COCTEAU

To finish the final scene, the deathbed, I need to become you.

ACTOR

Someone has died?

COCTEAU

You.

ACTOR

Very unpleasant. I will play you then?

COCTEAU

Yes.

ACTOR

Yes, the final scene. I, no, you, Satie, are near death.

Actor pushes the pianos aside while Cocteau pushes the absurd bed center stage.

COCTEAU

I, Satie, have not spoken to you in years..

Cocteau climbs a small set of stairs to be able to stand against the bed and have his head reach the pillow. Actor takes the sheets and fastens them very tightly on the side.

COCTEAU

I can hardly move.

ACTOR

Exactly, death is so close now.

COCTEAU

No, it's too tight.

ACTOR

We're going beyond reality!

COCTEAU

So we will run / this scene...

ACTOR

Excuse me. But am I not you? The director?

COCTEAU

I was only trying to / move things along.

ACTOR

You are Satie and I guess, France. Since this final meeting never actually happened, we will uh... Improvise. Satie, overcome with sadness and pain, finally looks at me, Cocteau, in the eyes, smiles as only he can and tells me that I am the greatest artist / he has ever met.

COCTEAU

That's not the scene.

*Actor snaps his fingers and the lights change.
Strong spots and side lights creating massive
ominous shadows.*

COCTEAU

Who is doing that?

ACTOR

You are. This is your play after all. You should be happy, you now have full control. Let us eliminate all subtext. Let us pretend this is an opera.

COCTEAU

Or we could rehearse the scene as written.

ACTOR

But it hasn't been written yet has it? I will exit, then enter...

Actor exits.

COCTEAU

Wait, this is not how the scene is supposed to start!

*Actor enters. He has removed the hat, glasses and
is enjoying his over-dramatic acting.*

ACTOR

Grand Maître, Mon cher. My master. So frail, so thin, I have missed you.

Cocteau gets into character, pretending to be ill.

COCTEAU

I am ill and forget what's important. Please come closer so I can look at you.

ACTOR

Anything for you, after all, you have done so much for me. You have given me the life I wanted, you have permitted the name of Cocteau to be talked about in all the Salons in France.

COCTEAU

No, no, I haven't done all that.

ACTOR

Oh but you have. Without you there is no Parade, there is no Les Six, there is no Auric to work with me. There's no 'Coq et L'Arlequin', there's no 'Blood of a Poet'. You have been the inspiration for all of my greatest ideas.

COCTEAU

It is you that deserves the praise. I was at my wit's end, destitute, unable to write, no music, nothing new, being invited to salons to play for the bourgeois esthetes.

ACTOR

They don't care about music and art, they only care about being seen caring about music and art to those who know nothing about music and art besides what the esthetes tell them about music and art.

Pause.

COCTEAU

...When you found me at Valentine's / and offered me Parade...

Actor holds his hand up to stop Cocteau.

Cocteau struggles to free himself. Actor puts his Satie hat back on.

A heartbeat fades in.

ACTOR

It's a strange thing to look at your own death. I guess I was always destined to die alone. It's the music you see, I am at its mercy.

COCTEAU

Let me down. / I can't...

ACTOR

The notes appear in my head, they get into my clothes, under my skin. That's why I keep moving when I write because the music will not let me sit still. Those moments of discovery are the only moments of peace / I have ever known.

COCTEAU

This has been a very / helpful exercise.

ACTOR

Everything slows down and sometimes, I feel like I can see the notes in the air in front of me and all I have to do is walk through them like falling rain.

On the shadow screen, notes begin to float across. With each new note we hear its voice.

He picks up some sheet music from the floor and hums the melody.

ACTOR

This is the difference / between us.

COCTEAU

Please, I can't / breathe!

ACTOR

I do not talk about art, I cannot theorize what I do, I do it. You take what is magical and create a text book. It is not science, it is breath... Now, to end this *charade*, I will

tell you what you want to hear. I will tell you what you've wanted to hear for the past 15 years. I...

Right at this point, Cocteau has managed to free himself and falls to the stage. The shadow screen fades out. Work lights turn on.

COCTEAU

What were you going to say?

ACTOR

I have no idea.

COCTEAU

What did Satie want to tell me!?

Cocteau grabs the sheet music from Actor and sees that it's script pages.

COCTEAU

Where is the music? These are just words! We switched roles. You were Satie, you were there. You were him. Well first you were me, I was Satie, then you became Satie again.

Cocteau is unraveling.

COCTEAU

Even in death you're insufferable.

ACTOR

I'm very much alive.

COCTEAU

I can't escape you!

ACTOR

...Jean, why is nobody else in the theatre.

COCTEAU

What do you mean nobody? Who is working the lights and / the puppets? The music?

ACTOR

The lights haven't changed. The screen / has been dark.

COCTEAU

More of your games. Maître, please, I beg you, go back to your place for the scene.

ACTOR

Not until you tell / me where everyone is!

COCTEAU

Shut up! You pretend you don't care, but I know better, I always knew better. You need the attention, you need the accolades, the applause, without them, who are you? A drunk? Do you exist? So do what comes naturally to you, forget about everyone else, forget real life, think about yourself and this next scene. / No one will see this anyway.

ACTOR

Jean you're not well... What?

COCTEAU

I'm fine.

ACTOR

You said no one will see this anyway?

COCTEAU

I said no such thing.

Actor walks to Cocteau with intent, firmly grabs him by the collar and drives him hard against the table, pushing him back over it.

ACTOR

You said "No one will see this anyway"... Admit it. ADMIT IT!

COCTEAU

Just one / more scene.

ACTOR

What does that mean!?

COCTEAU

We need to rehearse / the finale.

ACTOR
No, no, no!

One of Actor's hands grabs Cocteau's neck.

COCTEAU
Let go of me!

ACTOR
Is there a play or not?

COCTEAU
--

ACTOR
Is there / a play?

COCTEAU
No! There's no money!

Actor lets him go and backs away. Cocteau falls to his knees trying to catch his breath.

ACTOR
No, n-nothing?

COCTEAU
There was, th-then the financier got nervous.

ACTOR
Got nervous?

COCTEAU
He was under the impression that Satie was still alive.

Cocteau gets up off his knees.

ACTOR
Why would he think... He thought I...? You told him I / was...

COCTEAU
He wanted Satie, so I would give / him Satie.

ACTOR
Why would you / do that?

COCTEAU

Because he agreed to finance the performance before I finished my pitch, and who am I to correct the producer?

ACTOR

When did he find out?

COCTEAU

Last night. Some bourgeois society lady who happens to be one of his biggest benefactors asked him who was playing the part of Satie. When he didn't understand the question, she informed him that he passed away 15 years ago.

ACTOR

Last night! The same last night when you were heart broken waiting for me? The same last night when you were inspired to write the final scene!?

COCTEAU

You can't understand.

ACTOR

Is this how you love?

'Avant-dernières Pensées' begins to play from different points in the theatre.

Actor tries to have a drink but there's not a drop left. He holds up the flask and turns it upside down.

ACTOR

Nothing... Everything becomes nothing around you.

Actor walks over and tosses the empty flask into the pianos.

ACTOR

I trusted you.

COCTEAU

I can't do anything without his presence, his smirk, his music, always in my head.

ACTOR

I believed you.

COCTEAU

He was everything to Paris, surrealism, Dada, cabaret, opera, ballet, theatre, film... He influenced us all but he never cared, he would simply move on to the next whim.

ACTOR

I loved you.

COCTEAU

I wanted this play to finally let me be rid of him, build a monument to him and leave him inside of it.

ACTOR

You used me.

COCTEAU

He accused me of the same thing.

ACTOR

He was right!

COCTEAU

He was ungrateful!!

ACTOR

This wasn't created to purge him. This is conjury. Bring Satie back to life so you can finally control him, make him say all the things he would never say in real life.

COCTEAU

I gave / him everything.

ACTOR

You, you, you!! You deposit yourself into his life, you take it over, you rearrange the furniture, you turn everything upside-down and then what? You disappear. He dies with nothing!

COCTEAU

I never / disappeared.

ACTOR

It was curiosity not reverence that drew him to you. And then, as it always happens with curiosity, it fades and he moves on without you.

COCTEAU

It doesn't matter now, it's over.

Actor holds Cocteau in his gaze.

ACTOR

Not just yet.

The set pieces and the shadow screen fall flat onto the ground exposing a door into a circus tent. (Which should be theatrically lit).

COCTEAU

What have you done?

ACTOR

I am not doing anything.

Actor adjusts the costume, making sure it's just right.

ACTOR

This is the big finish!! Inside that door is where every good clown should perform. Which lies do you wish to tell?

COCTEAU

I have nothing left to say.

ACTOR

C'mon now, I have finally become who you have created. A creation of a creation. A re-creation of a memory about to become another memory masquerading as truth.

COCTEAU

Stop it, you're embarrassing yourself.

ACTOR

Oh! I see we have an audience now. I wonder how long they've been there?

COCTEAU

There isn't / anyone...

ACTOR

A room full of critics, artists and the bourgeois masses sitting, looking, waiting to pass judgment. Not on the show because that doesn't exist, but on you.

COCTEAU

I'm tired of your games.

ACTOR

But we are in a theatre so let's play.

Actor goes to one of the boxes and pulls out a circus blow-horn. A hard spotlight appears downstage with the crash of a dissonant piano chord.

ACTOR

Ladies and gentlemen... Uh, excuse me mon amour, but would you be so kind as to find your light?

Actor points to the spot and Cocteau reluctantly moves into it.

ACTOR

Merci. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Soyons Vulgaires! A celebration of the music and esotericism of... me. From the concert halls to the ballet and everything in between, I, your master of ceremonies, your Grand Maitre, am Erik Satie - There will be applause there, I can feel it - And this gentlemen, whom you've come to know and love, the magnifique Jean Cocteau! Step right up and come inside, through those doors behind me lies a world of wonder and magic! Where the lives of the dead are torn apart and re-assembled right before your very eyes!

Actor motions for Cocteau to enter the circus tent door.

ACTOR

Submit! Submit!

COCTEAU

You're as unbearable as he was!!

ACTOR

All he wanted was to create music.

COCTEAU

Yes, yes, yes... Live and create and exist and follow the inspiration as it arrived.

ACTOR

I detect a hint of jealousy.

COCTEAU

Everything becomes a joke to you? Just like him. I hated him in the end, hated him!! It was as if he was always laughing at me. Paris embraced me and he... He ignored me.

ACTOR

It's easy to believe you're benevolent on a full stomach.

COCTEAU

You talk and drink and complain but what you don't realize is that you need me. Without me, you're still at the bar telling stories of better days. Without me, Satie is just another forgotten composer. Without me...

The sound of the heartbeat fades in.

COCTEAU

What is that?

ACTOR

Listen.

The heartbeat is overlapped with the footsteps, matching rhythmically.

COCTEAU

...Why couldn't he see me? Why did he shut me out?

ACTOR

Listen.

The footsteps fade into the metronome.

COCTEAU

I worshiped him. His ability to follow the music in his head. All I wanted / to do...

ACTOR

Listen.

COCTEAU

I wanted to say that I was sorry. I wanted him to forgive me for trying to change him, for stealing his magic and calling it my own. He came first, I will always be second.

Cocteau turns to Actor.

COCTEAU

I could have done more for him. I can do more. I will... You, it must be you... He's gone but you're still here, in front of me... Will you forgive me?

ACTOR

No.

COCTEAU

No?

ACTOR

No.

COCTEAU

NO??

ACTOR

No.

Actor puts his hand up before Cocteau can say 'No' again.

ACTOR

No. You push aside all that is real and call it poetry or art. Why don't you let it sit with you before you exorcise it? Let it live inside you. Maybe you wouldn't be so empty.

The shadow screen rises off the ground, lifted by ropes and pulleys, the mechanics exposed.

The screen fades in revealing the Satie puppet framed within the circus tent behind it.

COCTEAU

What did he want to tell me?

ACTOR

--

COCTEAU

Tell me!!

Actor removes the hat, glasses, jacket and lays them gently on the stage. 'Pieces Froides #2' begins to play.

ACTOR

How does it feel?

COCTEAU

How does what feel?

ACTOR

To be toyed with, used, manipulated... People talk Jean. By the end of last night, the whole cast, I, knew something was going on but I could never have believed this.

COCTEAU

Then why did you stay?

ACTOR

I wanted to prove everyone wrong. I stood up for you last night. They wanted to walk away and I told them they were wrong, that you would never do something so... ugly.

Actor turns to exit, stops at the chalk board, erases 'Soyons Vulgaires' and writes 'Satie et Cocteau' in Satie's distinctive lettering.

ACTOR

And now I will leave you with your monument.

The music continues as he exits. Cocteau looks around the mess on the stage. He sees Actor's script. He picks it up, looks for the right page.

He turns to face the shadow screen.

COCTEAU

Forgive me.

He watches as it fades out.

He picks up the hat and an umbrella. He turns to the audience, clears his throat and settles himself as all great actors do. Looks out, scanning the faces, aware of being judged.

COCTEAU

We are... Excuse me. We are our illusions, our dreams, our memories and our flights of fancy. That is truly who we are. If we lose that, yes, we still exist, but we are no longer alive. My name is Erik Satie, like anyone else.

The umbrella opens and he politely bows. The lights fade out on stage.

The music fades out but the click-click of the metronome continues into the darkness.

Fin.