

Suppose Beautiful Madeline Harvey

Richard Foreman

Arranged for the stage by Kara Feely

One of Object Collection's earliest performances, in 2004, was an excerpt from my found text-collaged script *Is This a Gentleman?* performed at Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysteric Theater as a part of their downstairs work-in-progress series. This was the beginning of a long history of concentric circles of artistic activity which involved Object Collection, Foreman's work, his theatre at St. Mark's, and many of our collaborators. *Suppose Beautiful Madeline Harvey* began when we approached him in 2022 and asked if he had been writing anything recently that we might adapt into a new Object Collection production for our twentieth-year anniversary. This project marks the return of Foreman's work to the stage with a new play for the first time in ten years.

He sent us a large collection of texts, but one in particular stood out—about a woman named Madeline Harvey, who steps off a bus and encounters Roger Vincent, and in that moment sets off a seemingly endless spiral of deliberation, reflection, and paradox which lasts both an instant and an eternity. Reading the text, I was taken back to my experience of watching his plays in his theatre, which, for me, always managed to hover in that uncannily familiar zone of the perpetual present. The original text was composed in a kind of verse form without any assigned dialogue. As Foreman explained in conversation with the company, "Madeline was not written as a play, which is no reason not to do it as a play. I think texts that are not plays are better staged now than texts that are plays. I remember that there was a whole period there where I was just pouring out language and this was part of it." Where did the idea for Madeline Harvey originate? We know that the character of Roger Vincent references a Patrick Modiano novella *Suspended Sentences* (written in 1988 and translated to English in 2014). But the text, according to Foreman, was written quite instinctively, starting with the character of Madeline, whose story serves as the

unifying thread for an ecstatic examination of the relationship between existence and memory.

For the adaptation, I began with a lengthy process of mapping out the many iterative narrative coils. After this, I suggested a character breakdown—the main focal points of Madeline and Roger, along with their two reflections/doppelgänger Rita and Stephen, and an additional four members who form a sort of chorus. From there, I set out to distribute the text among them. Noting Foreman’s comment that “any good dialogue should be a dance,” I had the dominant narrative voice bounce and drift among all eight characters. Developed over two years, *Object Collection’s* production will be directed by me and the text itself fully scored in vocal notation by Travis Just, alongside an instrumental score. It will premiere in New York City at La MaMa ETC in the 2024–25 season.

Now as I write this, I sit waiting for our rehearsal to begin, staring at a disorderly pile of rehearsal furniture, scattered microphones, mirrors, and bins of mysterious props: the sacred relics of a theatrical ritual which we will configure and reconfigure, layer, and disperse. *Object Collection’s* work, while much influenced by Foreman, of course, has a very different look and feel. We share his inclination towards density, albeit with a different toolbox—musically notated speech and action scores, for example. However, the crafting of radical, unconventional experiences, and the insistence to do this project after project, is something we learned from him and endeavor to carry forward.

Kara Feely

CHARACTERS

Madeline Harvey
Roger Vincent
Rita
Stephen
Richard (voice)
Charles
Louise
René
Bertrand

ACT ONE

RITA: Suppose beautiful Madeline Harvey didn’t believe that she REALLY DID EXIST? Suppose she believed that she didn’t REALLY exist? Holding on to herself as her body starts shaking? Madeline Harvey imagines the following: she is walking down the sunny boulevard in her new polka dot dress with the skirt

that flares out, the way it should. And holding a small leather pocketbook which she anxiously clutches to the side of her body while smiling a faint smile? While simultaneously—in the crowd occupying a café along that wide boulevard . . . she catches the eye of an appealing someone? And she thinks to herself as she stops—with her back to the sun . . .

MADELINE: Here is the one who will certify to my existence.

RITA: Smiling faintly as she stands still, with the sun behind her head making her hair frizz like a golden halo? But the crowd on that boulevard is moving past in all directions at once while Madeline Harvey still not moving, with the eyes of that man still upon her, as slowly—very slowly . . .

MADELINE: . . . like honey dripping from a silver spoon into a cup of frozen tea?

RITA: Her physical self then and there dissolves like a slow fade in front of the motionless eyes of a seemingly paralyzed consciousness? But the actual disappearance of her physical body—could this INDEED HAPPEN?

MADELINE: My small and delicate body melting into that world of sunlight which is now blinding me, as I turn and it shines directly into my eyes? But so blinded . . .

RITA: Would Madeline Harvey exist at last? Or would it be necessary for her to keep telling the story of a much better life hidden inside her own lifetime—even when she didn't really exist?

RENÉ: But if that were true . . .

LOUISE: SHE DIDN'T EXIST?

RENÉ: Would those stories still exist? And who would it be who was actually then someplace still existing?

RITA: Imagine Madeline Harvey alone in a room, when suddenly and spontaneously, her whole body is on fire. And within seconds her entire body—consumed by flames burns down to pure ash. All but a single left foot in a singular red shoe completely untouched.

LOUISE: THIS COULD REALLY HAPPEN!

RITA: And it HAS already happened to a few fortunate bodies—burning to pure ash in a similar PURIFYING fire. And when that does happen to someone, then which stories above all others would remain untouched—much like the single left foot of Madeline Harvey herself? With her singular red shoe. And if the

remainder of her body began to shake while many other still untold stories were crying out . . .

BERTRAND: “Knock-Knock-Knock! Can we come in please?”

RITA: But even then, would one continue to exist? Or suppose, for instance that the beloved Madeline Harvey was in bed at night—and alone in her bed began shaking—her whole body violently shaking. Would that mean that she really DID exist after all? Or was never EVER fully existing? Choose between alternatives by quickly telling oneself a true story that itself might have no great importance—yet in itself has GREAT importance because it really MIGHT have happened.

STEPHEN: Would that mean therefore that if handsome Roger Vincent were to tell such a story . . .

RITA: Then beautiful Madeline Harvey herself might well exist. But would this be of any real importance to still nameless people hiding in the same room with many others? Remember, if Madeline Harvey were to disappear by fire?

MADELINE: Or alternatively disappear by time slowly making me melt into the sunlight?

RITA: Or if beautiful Madeline Harvey were to disappear at last into her very own story which she is now telling herself in order to stop her own body from shaking? Remember this above all, however. Madeline Harvey will never exist more than she exists at this very moment.

MADELINE: So she must now choose which of the many options of disappearance will be the one she will choose by asking the world itself . . .

RITA: . . . on her behalf . . .

MADELINE: . . . to make this important choice?

RICHARD: Suppose beautiful Madeline Harvey—surrounded by her dearest friends . . .

ALL: Surprise!

RICHARD: . . . in a world . . .

ALL: This world!

RICHARD: . . . within which the depth and intricacy and apparent solidness of this same world were REPLACED by a very DIFFERENT world in which ALL human

beings were, well, so to say, paper-thin somehow, minus any enfolded depth. Mere surface alone, even if that surface seemed so clever and quick about the intricate ways of that same-such world. Which still had, you know, NO DEPTH? But suppose this only meant the scene of the action was now ELSEWHERE! No longer with human beings as such but, you know, ELSEWHERE! Even though this new THIN kind of being still participated, as of old, in many actions that were now "Elsewhere". As if within some fluid atmospheric field between people—which was now the place where the action was now taking place. No longer inside these very THIN human beings—instead permeated by some FLUID that enabled humans to now float on the surface of all things all the while BUFFETED by the "Elsewhere" of a LIFE FORCE operating in new and unexpected ways on the surface of these people now lacking all inner depth. AND SUPPOSE it was really like this with people, HERE AND NOW?

STEPHEN: And now, the handsome Roger Vincent holds his head between his two hands while trying not to smile. But does handsome Roger Vincent ever dare to be really so exhausted?

ROGER: Treading water in the vain hope of swimming backwards?

STEPHEN: Because Roger Vincent's life has been stolen from under his feet.

CHARLES: And he must first of all protect his eyes somehow because all things HURT when seen for the first time!

STEPHEN: And though catastrophe therefore might well be hidden—just around the corner? Roger Vincent will turn the corner of course but he will never see it. And therefore, he will be happy.

ROGER: Even if sometimes I feel like crying.

STEPHEN: Because he knows his deepest wishes will never be granted. And even the handsome Roger Vincent with sadness does accept that while secretly remaining hopeful? Therefore, the handsome Roger Vincent waits in a properly designated café for beloved Madeline Harvey to walk down the street in his direction—with the sunlight behind her so bright that the handsome Roger Vincent thinks to himself . . .

ROGER: . . . looking into such a light might render one completely sightless!

STEPHEN: And thank God! So blinded, handsome Roger Vincent would feel at last he was at last indeed . . .

LOUISE: ON FIRE!

STEPHEN: And then—AT LAST—AT LAST! The beloved Madeline Harvey for whom handsome Roger Vincent has been waiting patiently is seen stepping down from the bus as the door of the bus opens with the beloved there appearing suddenly transformed into the image of that child she was in years long past while carrying a little red suitcase that suited such a child who now, in the true shape of the beloved right now—seated at that very specific café table where refreshments were ordered suitable both for the occasion and for that child—

MADELINE: Beautiful Madeline Harvey forever.

STEPHEN: Does she smile as only a child can smile while looking directly into the bright sunlight? Already having decided to open her little red suitcase—to discover inside the very same dress that both handsome Roger Vincent and the beloved Madeline Harvey hoped against hope she would be wearing. And suddenly the beloved Madeline Harvey is walking down the wide boulevard. But then . . .

BERTRAND: . . . like an electric SHOCK!

STEPHEN: Two pair of eyes meeting. While wearing a dress much too large for that little child Madeline Harvey—now seated beside Roger Vincent. And as that beloved Madeline Harvey—already wearing that polka dot dress, begins to disappear under the eyes of the handsome Roger Vincent, but vanishing into a very different space and time, into which Roger Vincent believed he had been forever denied entry? Though in fact handsome Roger Vincent himself did ALSO EXIST unbeknownst to himself inside that unique time and space.

ROGER: And very slowly handsome Roger Vincent comes to understand . . .

CHARLES: . . . THAT HE DOES ALWAYS EXIST.

ROGER: Burning inside with the . . .

CHARLES: . . . ONLY REAL FIRE . . .

ROGER: . . . burning inside all things?

MADELINE: While Madeline Harvey is imagining the following? Walking down the sunny boulevard with the polka dot skirt that flares out like it should, while holding a small leather pocketbook which I anxiously clutch to the side of my body while smiling a faint smile? And suddenly, in the crowd occupying one of the many cafés along that wide boulevard, I catch the eye of the handsome Roger Vincent—and I think to myself as I involuntarily stop smiling—my back still to the sun . . .

RITA: "This is that one who will certify to my real existence."

MADELINE: And Madeline Harvey stands there, again smiling faintly, with the sun behind my head, making my hair frizz like a golden halo, while the crowd on the boulevard is moving past in all directions at once, but there is one only who does not move, and the eyes of that one man—handsome Roger Vincent are upon me as very slowly . . .

RITA: . . . like honey dripping from a spoon into a cup of frozen tea . . .

MADELINE: My physical self dissolves, disappearing like a slow fade in front of handsome Roger Vincent's motionless eyes. Hypnotizing his frozen, wide-awake stare.

RITA: But the actual disappearance of the physical body of beautiful Madeline Hardy? Could it really have happened? As if melting into the world of sunlight always behind her body?

MADELINE: And would it then be necessary to keep telling the stories of my life inside my own lifetime?

RENÉ: So even if she didn't exist . . .

LOUISE: Did she exist?

RENÉ: Would those stories still exist? But then, who or what would it be who was really existing?

MADELINE: If Madeline Harvey was existing alone in an empty room, when suddenly, spontaneously, my physical body caught fire! And within seconds, my entire body was consumed by flames and turned to purest ash. While all that remained untouched was a left foot in a bright red shoe.

RITA: Unbelievable, but this could happen. And it has indeed happened to a few bodies—that pure fire. But when it does happen what stories remain untouched? Like a left foot in a red shoe?

MADELINE: Is that why my body is now shaking and so many different stories go . . .

BERTRAND: "Knock knock knock! Can we come in please?" Do we still EXIST. Please?

MADELINE: Suppose Madeline Harvey was asleep in bed at midday when suddenly—my whole body was shaking in its sleep without me ever awakening?

Would that prove that I exist or that I do not exist. There is no way to know for certain. Unless waking from a terrible dream—or even better, tell oneself an imaginary story that has no real importance unless . . .

LOUISE: IT REALLY DID HAPPEN!

MADELINE: But would this mean the beautiful Madeline Harvey exists FOREVER? Or NOT FOREVER?

RITA: Possible answers—if she disappears by fire—or if she simply disappears by time slowly melting her into a void against the sunlight?

MADELINE: Or if she only disappears into her own story which is that story the beautiful Madeline Harvey now tells simply to stop her own body from shaking? And therefore, Madeline Harvey never exists more than she exists RIGHT NOW.

RITA: So, which of many options is the option Madeline Harvey chooses RIGHT NOW when she lets the outside world by itself make that important choice for her—THE WORLD BY ITSELF CHOOSING?

RICHARD: Just suppose it was the case that the beautiful Madeline Harvey was surrounded by clever people, in a world in which the depth and intricacy and solidness of the world itself and of her fellow human beings, was replaced by a world in which human beings were all, you know THIN somehow? With no enfolded depth, nothing but surface? Even if that surface seemed clever and quick about the ways of this world. But, nevertheless, with no—you know—depth? But suppose all that meant was that the scene of the action was elsewhere, no longer in human beings as such, but you know—ELSEWHERE? Even though this new thin kind of human being still participated in that action which was now ELSEWHERE. In some fluid like—ELSEWHERE. Like in an atmospheric, or even spinal fluid externalized, and somehow shared by all people—and that's where all the action was now, unbelievably, taking place. Not inside the now so-very-thin human beings, who were now quite LIFTED UP by this externalized fluid, simply FLOATING on its surface, there to be buffeted still, by the forever "elsewhere" of that ETERNAL life force operating as always in unpredictable ways. And just now on the surface of these new people who contain no depth whatsoever? Suppose it WAS like this? REALLY like this with people—here and now?

STEPHEN: Imagine that Roger Vincent was given such information, what happens next? The handsome Roger Vincent holds his head and smiles, daring to be exhausted because Roger Vincent no longer believes that he belongs in such a world where the people surrounding him have speech patterns like idiots.

RENÉ: But do people speak like idiots because people are idiots? Or do people choose to speak this way because speaking this way can sometimes produce a more intense mental resonance?

STEPHEN: Or does handsome Roger Vincent hold his head in an effort to solicit adventure by losing consciousness? Which is inevitably accompanied by that inevitable catastrophe which always includes at least one more OPPORTUNITY? It does happen sometimes that, with no desire to leave his familiar neighborhood, handsome Roger Vincent involuntarily finds himself in a still more unpleasant environment.

ROGER: Where am I?

STEPHEN: . . . asks Roger Vincent—though never in fact having left his old neighborhood? Is this because his speed is sometimes faster than the always faster speed of the surrounding world? Suppose Roger Vincent were to skim the cream off the top of this apparently unpleasant situation—which could well stand in for any one of multiple unpleasant situations.

ROGER: How does one skim the cream off the top of any such situation?

STEPHEN: First, Roger Vincent chooses some small detail within the given situation—or perhaps even one or two details that catch his attention. And it is these such small details that ultimately represent such a situation.

ROGER: But additional details seen but not chosen?

BERTRAND: Ruthlessly discard them. One must never speak of them again. NEVER!

STEPHEN: Although they will agitate powerfully inside oneself—because having been discarded—they secretly become potent indeed. So handsome Roger Vincent must be asked does he truly LIKE it here? Though discarded details: sex and violence, for instance—does he LIKE IT here?

RICHARD: Perhaps Roger Vincent at a certain point should be told which planet he is currently visiting? And Roger Vincent is then informed that he is one of the very few who will eventually understand many unusual things on this Earth.

CHARLES: The darkness, for instance, repeatedly falls here. Which is always the taking place of what always takes place.

STEPHEN: And finally, having lost all belief in a better world, handsome Roger Vincent sets off in search of the final unavoidable.

ROGER: But why this unnecessary search? Simply wait for something terrible to happen.

STEPHEN: And if Roger Vincent somehow fails to see that happening? Then life will go on even more unendurable until the next terrible thing happens again.

RITA: Is handsome Roger Vincent being driven crazy-mad by forces that somehow seduce others with the shining promise of great happiness?

STEPHEN: And here again find handsome Roger Vincent almost untying the knot that ties together the foolish and the wise. Using his own mind mirror to begin mirroring at least, that deep unavoidable entanglement.

RITA: At the same time OTHERS are being ordered to be happy about the inevitable state of confusion—being ordered to enter it again and again.

STEPHEN: But Roger Vincent, handsome and always missing the point, because trying so hard means he always misses the point. Never realizing there is a twist in all things. From the very first moment, a terrible TWIST!

ROGER: And all this serious thinking means things will always go wrong. But inevitably, I MUST think, so I must always go wrong. Because one such as Handsome Roger Vincent does SEE many things, but handsome Roger Vincent never will never see everything, so Roger Vincent must always go wrong. Because Roger Vincent does not know, really what I should really do with a life such as my own life. I HAVE it. But then?

RENÉ: People often believe Roger Vincent is crazy, but Roger Vincent is only HALF crazy—all the time? And this is never enough.

RITA: At THIS moment in time, for example—beautiful Madeline Harvey could easily choose this as her moment of transformative encounter.

MADELINE: Why not?

RITA: If beautiful Madeline Harvey were to venture into the street right now, for instance, would she be likely to encounter something truly revelatory?

MADELINE: And why not?

RITA: Something that would completely change her life?

MADELINE: And why not?

RITA: But yes and no. Because while catastrophe always approaches from just around the corner, Madeline Harvey will never turn that corner, never see what approaches, and therefore she is happy.

MADELINE: Even if I sometimes feel like crying. Because though beautiful for a moment, Madeline Harvey's deepest wishes will never be fulfilled.

RITA: But she secretly accepts that. And it is therefore—CATASTROPHE that secretly awaits her.

RICHARD: Why does Beautiful Madeline Harvey never understand that she exists today inside a kind of space—difficult for the human mind to register? In which depth is only another paper-thin surface—and with more space she never sees curled up inside the space she lives in but does not see. Invisible space therefore? But not always. Not for everyone.

RITA: Suppose handsome Roger Vincent was discovered waiting in an obscure boulevard café, waiting for the beloved Madeline Harvey to walk down the street in his direction? With the sunlight being so bright that Roger Vincent says to himself . . .

ROGER: . . . that to look into that light for very long would cause unavoidable blindness.

RITA: But thank God, thank God for that possible blindness. Because so blinded one might feel inside at last . . .

CHARLES: ONE IS ON FIRE!

RITA: And the beloved Madeline Harvey, for whom the handsome Roger Vincent has been waiting patiently—appears suddenly! Stepping down from a blue bus as the door of the blue bus opens and the beloved appears, transformed into the shape of the child she once was in years long past—and carrying a little red suitcase that suited that child appearing in the true shape of the beloved as she now sits beside one now at the designated café table where handsome Roger Vincent has already ordered refreshments suitable for such an occasion and simultaneously—smiling back into the blinding sunlight, deciding to open the child's red suitcase, discovering that someone unknown much earlier had packed that very same polka dot dress that both Roger Vincent and the beloved Madeline Harvey hoped against hope she would be wearing. When such a beloved one as she—Madeline Harvey—would come walking toward handsome Roger Vincent down the wide boulevard—with two pair of eyes suddenly meeting. With a sudden . . .

LOUISE: ELECTRIC SHOCK?

RITA: While she—still wearing a dress much too large for such a small child, but now seated beside handsome Roger Vincent—that same beloved Madeline Harvey. But slowly disappearing now under the fixed gaze of Roger Vincent into

some space and time so very different from the here and now within which Roger Vincent until now believed he was never GRANTED ENTRY. But suddenly Roger Vincent also—YOU TOO HANDSOME ROGER VINCENT! You at last exist inside that very unique space and time in which you understand at last that Roger Vincent always did—always exist inside a different space and time. YES! This is where Roger Vincent did exist! Does exist ON FIRE!

MADELINE & ROGER: ON FIRE?

RENÉ: Then run for one of the many exits of course.

RITA: While burning up inside in the best fire of all which BURNS from the inside out making things, therefore, DOUBLY DISAPPEAR! Unreal as always and totally transparent. Where YOU, SHE, IT? Were indeed invisible until now. MAKING THE WHOLE WORLD FINISHED AND COMPLETE?

STEPHEN: Yet suppose beautiful Madeline Harvey didn't believe that handsome Roger Vincent really did exist? Or suppose beautiful Madeline Harvey didn't believe he DIDN'T really exist? Holding on to herself as her body starts to shake—Madeline Harvey imagines the heretofore unimaginable. She walks down the sunny boulevard in her new polka dot dress, with the skirt that flares out as it should, while holding a small leather pocketbook which she clutches to the side of her body and smiling a faint smile. When amongst those crowded into a café along that wide boulevard—Madeline Harvey catches the eye of the appealing and handsome Roger Vincent—and she thinks to herself as she stops . . .

MADELINE: . . . in the middle of the street?

STEPHEN: Still smiling faintly with her back to the sun . . .

MADELINE: . . . this is the one who will certify to my EXISTENCE.

STEPHEN: And she stands there frozen, with the sun behind her head, making her hair frizz like a golden halo. While the crowd on the boulevard is moving past in all directions at once. But Madeline Harvey does not move, with the eyes of Roger Vincent fixed upon her always. And slowly, very slowly . . .

ROGER: . . . like honey dripping from a silver spoon into a cup of frozen tea, her physical self dissolves . . . and disappears like a slow fade beneath his fascinated gaze.

STEPHEN: But the actual disappearance of her physical body?

LOUISE: It could happen!

STEPHEN: As if Madeline Harvey were melting into the world of sunlight behind her.

LOUISE: It could happen!

MADELINE: And then—would she finally exist? Or would it be necessary for her to keep telling stories of her life inside the story of her lifetime? And even if Madeline Harvey didn't exist, would those stories still exist? And then, who would it really be who was, in fact, existing?

STEPHEN: Pretend Madeline Harvey was alone in a room, and suddenly, spontaneously, her body caught fire, and within seconds, all of her body was consumed by flame and within a few seconds—turned to ash—all except a small left foot, inside a clean red shoe, untouched. It could happen—it has happened before to a few bodies—that pure fire. And if it should happen to Madeline Harvey, what stories would remain, untouched like the left foot and the red shoe?

BERTRAND: Is that why her body shakes and the stories go “knock knock knock, can I come out please?”

RITA: Suppose at some earlier time Madeline Harvey was in bed and began shaking in bed. Her whole body—shaking in bed? Would this mean that Madeline Harvey did exist or did not exist?

STEPHEN: Find out by allowing Roger Vincent to tell an important story that may have no real importance because—though it really did happen to Madeline Harvey—would that mean that Madeline Harvey necessarily did exist or did not exist?

MADELINE: And Madeline Harvey asks herself whether I believe in this no longer important story even more than the many other stories I never even bothered to imagine?

RITA: Even when her whole body is shaking because her important story is in fact being told?

MADELINE: But inside which of the many possible moments am I really existing and is that really important? Remember, if Madeline Harvey disappears now by fire, or if I disappear now by time, slowly making me melt into the sunlight? Or if I disappear into my own story alone. Which I am now telling myself to stop my body from shaking? Remember, if Madeline Harvey never exists more than right now, then which of the several options of disappearance will be the one I chose through allowing that world which is always MORE than myself to choose between options for myself alone. Madeline Harvey alone.

ACT TWO

RICHARD: Suppose it was otherwise, and Madeline Harvey was surrounded by people—an entire world in which the depth and intricacy and the solidness of both the world and of your fellow human beings was replaced by a world in which everything was, you know, thin somehow, with no enfolded depth. Human beings with nothing but a surface—even when that surface seemed clever and quick about the ways of the world, but which had no, you know, depth? But suppose this only meant that the scene of the action was suddenly elsewhere. No longer between human beings as such but, you know, elsewhere. Even though human beings, this new paper-thin kind were still manipulated by an action which was in fact—elsewhere. Imagine some fluid, like hidden from view—spinal fluid? Or even some hidden and exotic atmospheric fluid in empty space between people. And in that fluid, between people that's where the action was taking place? Not inside these now paper-thin human beings, but washing through those—who, being paper-thin could then float upon even highly agitated surfaces. Being buffeted on those surfaces by the "ELSEWHERE" of the eternal life force—operating now on the surface of such paper-thin persons all with no depth inside? And suppose it was really like this, with people—here and now?

MADELINE: And if Roger Vincent is given such information—what happens? He holds his head and tries not to smile. But does Roger Vincent dare simultaneously to be exhausted? But if exhaustion would not be enough—though still a step forward—treading water one might say? When Roger Vincent does such a thing in order not to swim backwards? Preventing, hopefully, life being once again, stolen From Roger Vincent himself? Making such demands upon himself that Roger Vincent is forced to become that son-of-a-bitch he might already have become just so he might go with the . . .

ROGER: Shit, fuck, son of a bitch!

MADELINE: . . . flow of things—? So, has Roger Vincent really been cheated? Has Roger Vincent's life really been stolen?

RICHARD: Here comes one of the possible thieves disguised as an emptiness factory that simply manufactures more and more empty space inside already empty people and things.

MADELINE: This no longer perfect Roger Vincent—deepening in empty space lost? While that empty deep space reproducing itself again and again but inside itself only? A perfect example—Roger Vincent receives an apparently pure orange which until eaten will never feed Roger Vincent. Should Roger Vincent therefore never EAT such a pure but empty orange?

BERTRAND: OH, SUCH EMPTINESS!

MADELINE: An entire solar system put to work? Empty fruit farms on many empty planets where Roger Vincent himself may amazingly evolve into the self-destroying angel of all planets included where emptiness is finally put to work? And what depends upon, is an empty brain performing a necessary shift of focus to reveal the unpleasant fact of vast surfaces beneath all things.

RENÉ: Completely dead.

MADELINE: While the manipulation of such surfaces eats up all the surrounding protective space! So first: Roger Vincent must carefully protect his eyes. Because all things HURT when seen for the first time. Protected therefore against all SPACE VOIDS which though unimaginable are yet potent enough to damage those such as ROGER VINCENT—foolish enough to explore deeper into space as close to one as one's approaching death? A space which, as it deepens, compresses and destroys all impurities both real and imaginary—in a fire which has no equal. But this same fire burns a path into one's always other self.

BERTRAND: Thank you Roger Vincent?

MADELINE: Because though never STABLE and very brief, thank you again—moving step by step into a terrible space made available now only by absent space itself? Roger Vincent alone with a beating heart gripped by a space which is of itself NOTHING?

RENÉ: Nothing at all.

MADELINE: Recreating itself automatically with terrible thunder heard by no one that produces that same emptiness again and again AND AGAIN! The emptiness of an idea that covers the entire world of mind and body. But does such emptiness enter Roger Vincent's room even bringing its own furniture? Dissolving through intimate distances old tables and chairs with new furnishings gathered from all directions at once accompanied by a great wind which arises, with no physical manifestation what-so-ever? Yet during this time of implicit revolution—three kills are permitted; yet even with three inevitable resurrections no dense and sacred things are ever produced within that diamond mind of unimaginable space.

BERTRAND: EMPTY SPACE!

MADELINE: While all those people who continually speak about . . .

ROGER: OH PLEASE, NO!

MADELINE: . . . people who speak continually about one's inner life . . .

ROGER: OH PLEASE . . .

MADELINE: No speaking about one's inner life? Roger Vincent resembling everyone else—flat surface only—a PANCAKE-LIKE surface?

ROGER: Roger Vincent.

MADELINE: Now a surface PANCAKE-LIKE even in such good-bad times? Roger Vincent spread so thin—resulting in no depth at all but spread thin, flattened out to become so wide that Roger Vincent himself reaches the far edges of all that life might potentially spread out before Roger Vincent. And sometimes, Roger Vincent himself might be driven to accidentally express paper-thin ideas about his paper-thin life. On rare occasions, however the no longer imaginable depth of things might surface in an unexpected explosion both banal and beautiful at once. On the other hand, a path followed diligently will often lose its appeal over time, and then more often than not the bottom falls out of life and whatever happens . . . ? Is no longer interesting.

ROGER: Being tired is no longer interesting . . .

MADELINE: . . . but being very tired and then falling asleep, is this somehow interesting?

ROGER: Being ready to fall asleep and lying down and doing that—or just letting it happen—this could be interesting?

MADELINE: But even if falling asleep could be interesting . . . dreaming is a surprise and not necessarily interesting. So, make sure to keep open any doors that promise hidden—TREASURES?

BERTRAND: Is this Roger Vincent at the open door the same Roger Vincent who has long ago seen—all such things?

MADELINE: Yes! HE IS THAT ONE! Overflowing and delirious!

BERTRAND: But of course, when the heart breaks—as it always must, everything else also breaks.

MADELINE: But here is Roger Vincent broken and alone. But even now, ready to take a stand not against reality as such—but deep inside a given reality—quite invisible to Roger Vincent who is being nevertheless nourished in ways he does

not understand? And if a never understood God were ever to speak to a hypothetical Roger Vincent having at least a hypothetical depth, constructed haphazardly, with otherwise useless parts of himself folded over otherwise useless parts? And if Roger Vincent never had to speak using some established language—then even Roger Vincent could tell the TRUTH about ALL THINGS! For instance, a non-descript café on some hypothetical wide boulevard would be an unusual place to be designated as where TRUTH might suddenly arise.

ROGER: But why not? Why not such a café?

RITA: One would never by choice remain here for long—here in this part of the world where people have speech patterns like idiots?

ROGER: But perhaps such people, on occasion may also speak normally?

STEPHEN: Can it be true, that upon occasion speaking like idiots produces a more intense mental resonance!

RITA: As if to encourage adventure through losing normal consciousness?

STEPHEN: But losing normal consciousness inevitably means . . .

RITA: . . . leaving one's usual neighborhood?

ROGER: Where am I?

MADLINE: . . . Roger Vincent might well ask himself. Even though still inside his usual neighborhood. Because the speed of such a question registering in the mind is often faster than the speed of the world itself. And Roger Vincent might well choose to skim the cream—as it were—off the top of this situation?

ROGER: Off the top of what exactly? WHAT situation?

RITA: Well, any situation—a combination of mind and world.

ROGER: How does one skim the cream off the top of such a combination?

STEPHEN: Step one: selecting one or two appealing details. And then: using such small details to evoke and identify a chosen situation.

ROGER: And the remaining details which one never chooses?

STEPHEN: Allowing them to be simply forgotten is a great mistake.

RITA: Because then, those forgotten details will never then be able to HINT even at the potential catastrophes just around the corner.

MADLINE: And Roger Vincent is one of the many who rarely sees “just around the corner”? Roger Vincent is sometimes happy there.

ROGER: But I SOMETIMES feel like crying. Because my deepest desires will never be identified or named.

MADLINE: But while Roger Vincent will accept this, this is why, perhaps, catastrophe lurks just around the corner.

CHARLES: Roger Vincent sees however that darkness which approaches and which always promises that basic “taking place” will again take place.

MADLINE: And having lost all belief in a better world, Roger Vincent nevertheless waits—for something interesting that MAY OR MANY NOT HAPPEN?

ROGER: And if I should fail to see its happening, when it did or did not happen—then life will continue, but—even more unendurable as it continues—which is to say until the next interesting though unendurable thing does or does not happen?

RITA: While the unhappy Roger Vincent tries as always to untie that knot of repetition, using his own body to MIRROR as always that deep entanglement.

STEPHEN: But could Roger Vincent’s deepening state of confusion eventually bring Roger Vincent even an admittedly perverse taste of happiness?

MADLINE: But unhappy Roger Vincent will forever overlook even that positive or negative reward. Because in trying so hard to resolve such confusing questions . . .

ROGER: . . . I will repeatedly miss the point!

MADLINE: THAT MISSED POINT being that since the beginning of time, there has always been a VERY SERIOUS TWIST in all things.

ROGER: And therefore, for Roger Vincent, and for others before and after—THINKING means always going wrong. Even if for some reason Roger Vincent can never avoid thinking. I MUST therefore always go wrong.

MADLINE: Because even if unhappy Roger Vincent sees many things clearly, he never sees EVERYTHING, which is why Roger Vincent MUST always go wrong!

RENÉ: Others may think that when Roger Vincent goes wrong—that Roger Vincent is crazy. But unfortunately, he is only HALF crazy. And half-crazy will never suffice.

MADELINE: So, some still un-named object will have to stand in for an absent magic object . . .

RITA: . . . (crazy?) . . .

MADELINE: . . . that one could have focused upon to invoke one's revelatory encounter.

ROGER: NO OTHER OPTION?

MADELINE: If one were to plunge into the dark streets right now, would one be more or less likely to encounter that magic object that could genuinely CHANGE one's life?

STEPHEN: A possibility?

MADELINE: One must also imagine that while something resembling a catastrophe MIGHT well wait around the corner—one will never see around that corner. And, therefore, one is HAPPY, even though one sometimes feels like crying as one senses that one's deepest wishes will never be fulfilled. But accepting that unfortunate fact means that catastrophe indeed waits just around the corner.

ROGER: SO BE IT!

RICHARD: Does one finally understand that one exists inside a unique version of time and space where depth is just one more paper-thin surface—in some far away space? That space properly named—transparent space—because of that space one never sees curled up inside the space one DOES see. Where certain things however . . .

STEPHEN: . . . (catastrophe?) . . .

RICHARD: . . . remain forever invisible . . .

ROGER: . . . invisible, as if one were waiting in an ancient outdoor café for an invisible someone to walk down the street in one's direction. With sunlight so bright that Roger Vincent might say to himself—if I were to look into that sunlight, that light would blind me—rendering the real world invisible. Thank God, invisible, thank God, because so blinded, inside I would feel—ON FIRE! And then the beloved someone for whom Roger Vincent was waiting would appear stepping down from an arriving bus. As the now visible bus door opened and the beloved suddenly appeared transformed now into the shape of the child she indeed was in years past—carrying a little red suitcase appropriate for such a child—now in the true shape of the beloved as she seated herself now beside Roger Vincent himself at the outdoor café table where refreshments were now ordered suitable

for the occasion and for the child smiling back into the sunlight, before deciding to open the tiny red suitcase only to be surprised to find . . .

MADELINE: . . . that somebody had indeed secretly included that very same dress that both Roger Vincent and the beloved child hoped against hope she would be wearing.

ROGER: As she, the beloved one came walking toward Roger Vincent down the wide boulevard with two pair of eyes suddenly meeting with an electric shock unexpectedly! But a dress—much too large now for a little child sitting beside Roger Vincent—though that beloved was indeed wearing that dress now disappearing under the eyes of Roger Vincent—into that space and time which was a different space and time to which Roger Vincent believed he had no entry though in fact he DID also exist inside that very BEST OF FIRES!

MADELINE: Could disappearing in such a way mean becoming totally transparent? When SHE, YOU, IT—and then THE ENTIRE WORLD—now a totally transparent world?

ROGER: Suppose the child Madeline Harvey could never yet believe that she really DID exist.

MADELINE: Or suppose Roger Vincent believed that Madeline Harvey NEVER REALLY existed?

ROGER: Though holding on to herself as her body starts to shake, Madeline Harvey imagines the following. She walks down the sunny boulevard in her new polka dot dress with the skirt that flares out as it should while clutching a small leather pocketbook to the side of her body—while smiling a faint smile? And in the crowd occupying the café along that wide boulevard, Madeline Harvey catches the eye of the handsome Roger Vincent—and she thinks to herself, smiling with her back to the sun . . .

RITA: . . . “this is the one who will certify to my real, at last, existence.”

ROGER: And while Madeline Harvey stands there, smiling faintly, with the sun behind her, making her hair frizz like a golden halo, with the crowd on the boulevard moving past in all directions at once, while Madeline Harvey does not move, and the eyes of Roger Vincent are upon her, while very slowly . . .

STEPHEN: . . . like honey dripping from a silver spoon into a cup of frozen tea . . .

ROGER: . . . Madeline Harvey’s physical self dissolves, and disappears slowly fading, in front of Roger Vincent’s fascinated eyes. And the actual disappearance of Madeline Harvey’s physical body . . .

LOUISE: . . . it could happen!

ROGER: Yes! As if melting into the world of sunlight behind her . . .

LOUISE: . . . it could happen!

ROGER: And then—would she exist, finally? Or would it be necessary to keep telling the story of her life inside her own lifetime—so that even if Madeline Harvey didn't exist, would those stories still exist and then—who would it be that was then existing? Madeline Harvey alone in a non-descript room, when suddenly, spontaneously, Madeline Harvey's body caught fire and within seconds, all of her body consumed by flames and turned to ash, with only a singular left foot in a clean red shoe, remaining untouched. Could this happen?

RENÉ: It has happened before to a few bodies—that pure fire.

ROGER: And if it should ever happen to someone other than Madeline Harvey? What other stories would remain then—untouched like that singular left foot inside that singular red shoe?

MADELINE: Is that why her body is shaking while other stories go . . .

BERTRAND: . . . "knock knock knock—can we come out please?"

ROGER: But suppose Madeline Harvey was sound asleep in bed and yet began shaking—her whole body shaking—would that mean Madeline Harvey would still exist upon awakening? Find out please, only by asking oneself about an important story no longer important because IT REALLY DID HAPPEN?

CHARLES: Does this mean Madeline Harvey did exist or does not now exist?

ROGER: Later still, ask Madeline Harvey herself if she ever believed in this story more than in all other stories which could never be told, remembering always that if one disappears by fire . . .

RENÉ: . . . (one story) . . .

ROGER: . . . or if one disappears by time . . .

RENÉ: . . . (another story?) . . .

MADELINE: . . . slowly making one melt into nothingness against the sunlight?

ROGER: Or if perhaps one disappears into one's own story which is only being told to stop the body from shaking? Remember—one will never exist more than

right now—so which of those options is the option one would choose by letting the world itself, which is never oneself, make that important choice for oneself alone?

RICHARD: Suppose it was the case that one was apparently surrounded by a world in which the depth and intricacy and even the solidness of that world . . .

MADELINE: . . . and of one's fellow human beings? . . .

RICHARD: . . . was replaced by a world in which human beings were all, you know, thin somehow? With not even any ENFOLDED depth? Nothing but surface—even if that surface seemed clever and quick about the ways of a world which had no—well—depth? But suppose all this meant was that now the scene of the action was taking place elsewhere, no longer in human beings as such, but, you know, elsewhere? Though this new paper-thin kind of human being was still participating in that action which was now elsewhere in some atmospheric fluid between people—rather than inside people—that's where the action was now taking place, no longer inside these paper-thin human beings, but floating between them only—on a surface still buffeted by the "elsewhere" of a life force that was operating in some new way—on the surface of these new people with no depth inside them. Suppose it really IS LIKE THIS with people—here and now?

STEPHEN: A necessary magic therefore? Roger Vincent holds his head—and what happens? He automatically smiles because here there is nothing else to do.

RITA: Does he even dare to be exhausted? Treading water perhaps which when exhausted one does in order to swim backwards into a life long ago stolen from one.

ROGER: Shit, fuck, son of a bitch?

STEPHEN: One has been cheated, of course—but people who continually talk about . . .

ROGER: Oh please, NO! Please NO!

STEPHEN: . . . people who continually talk about one's inner life . . .

ROGER: . . . OH PLEASE?

RENÉ: One should never talk about one's inner life.

STEPHEN: Though sometimes, human beings fall prey to the expression of their hidden philosophy.

RITA: While on very rare occasions even Roger Vincent himself alludes to the depth of things—minus, thank God, sentimentalized expression.

CHARLES: Yet by chance producing a single ray of sunlight both banal and beautiful at once.

STEPHEN: But looking into that sunlight—suddenly the bottom falls out of life. But even this catastrophe is no longer interesting.

BERTRAND: While here is that one . . .

LOUISE: . . . (Roger Vincent?) . . .

BERTRAND: . . . who has already seen everything that can be seen—leaving him both overflowing and predictably delirious.

ROGER: But when the heart breaks, as it WILL break—and then everything else WILL break. And the city in which this might happen will seem to be opening from the inside out. And speeding, so it would seem, towards inevitable catastrophe.

RITA: But Roger Vincent is here and now discovered—ready to take a stand never AGAINST reality, but always deep INSIDE reality while continually FED—in a way that other people are never fed—because if God were perhaps to speak to Roger Vincent himself? Could this happen?

STEPHEN: It would only happen because Roger Vincent has acquired depth by folding parts of himself over other existing parts of himself. And now—if a deeper Roger Vincent no longer needs to use language to speak the truth? Then at last—Roger Vincent could . . .

BERTRAND: . . . TELL THE WHOLE TRUTH—ABOUT ALL THINGS!

RITA: But currently—Roger Vincent waits in a non-descript boulevard café—which is or is not an appropriate place for truth to suddenly burst forth?

STEPHEN: But why not? Why not truth bursting forth into this fallen world in the midst of a crowded café where Roger Vincent himself sits and waits until he no longer knows where he is? Surrounded as he is by people who lie about everything using the speech patterns of idiots?

RITA: Yet it is possible—such people—(idiots?) can also speak normally—and possible that people who always lie choose to speak like idiots only in order to produce increasing mental resonance?

LOUISE: NEVER SAY SUCH A THING!

RITA: But what NEW kind of adventure will arrive through a reduction of consciousness? Or does such a reduction simply open the door to ONE MORE USELESS CATASTROPHE? ONE MORE USELESS ADVENTURE?

STEPHEN: But does it ever happen that a quiet man with no desire to leave his usual neighborhood, finds himself in an unusual environment?

ROGER: Where am I?

STEPHEN: . . . Roger Vincent asks—but without ever leaving his old neighborhood?

RITA: And is this question only being asked because the sudden speed of Roger Vincent is now even FASTER than the speed of the world itself?

STEPHEN: And does this sudden speed of Roger Vincent allow Roger Vincent to skim the cream off the top of his current situation? Or even off the top of—well—ANY situation whatsoever?

RITA: Then how exactly would Roger Vincent skim the cream off the top of any and all such situations?

STEPHEN: To begin with: Roger Vincent would take some small detail—or one or two little details that appeal to him—and these details are what he would always remember as “validating” this chosen situation.

RITA: And what about the many other details that are not chosen, and which validate therefore nothing at all?

STEPHEN: Roger Vincent would ignore them, which renders them slowly—surprisingly potent. So potent that unnoticed, they would begin bubbling up from the depths of things forgotten—and therefore secretly active in all visible things while remaining invisible in all visible things.

CHARLES: Is this a darkness always falling many times over in visible things—while the invisible taking place is always “taking place.”

ROGER: And Roger Vincent—having lost all belief in a better world, sets off—in search of possibilities overlooked?

RITA: Driven crazy by forces that seduce others with their promise of continual happiness?

STEPHEN: Lonely Roger Vincent persists in trying to untie the most tangled knot of all—using his own mind to mirror that deep entanglement while paradoxically

fascinated by his own deep state of confusion. And Roger Vincent fails to understand that by trying so hard he's always missing the point which is . . .

ROGER: THAT THERE IS A TWIST in all things. From the very first moment, an unavoidable TWIST! And all thinking, which can only commence AFTER THAT TWIST—means unavoidably, going wrong. But everyone MUST think. So everyone unavoidably MUST go wrong because while everyone can see things no one can see everything, so everything has to go wrong, Because—WHAT SHOULD I DO?

MADLINE: Everything HAS to go wrong!

ROGER: You think I'm crazy? But I'm only HALF crazy. And half-crazy is never enough. This paper-thin self will have to stand in for that magic object I could easily call my revelatory encounter. But wait a minute. If I went out into the streets, would I be more or even less likely to encounter something or someone who could genuinely change my life? This paper-thin image of myself and others?

RICHARD: Don't you get it? Like everyone else, Roger Vincent exists inside a special kind of space, where depth is just one more paper-thin surface. An invisible space one never sees curled up inside the space one imagines one sees but one never sees.

MADLINE: Right now—Roger Vincent is waiting in a café for a beloved someone to walk down the street in his direction, and the sunlight is so bright he says to himself—if I look into that light, that light will blind me. Thank God, thank God! So blinded, one feels inside—on fire at last! While the beloved for whom he has waited appears at last, stepping down from her bus as the bus door swings open and the beloved appears, transformed in the shape now of the child she was in years past—carrying a little red suitcase that suited such a child which was the true shape of the beloved as she sat with now at the café table with Roger Vincent ordering refreshment suitable for the occasion and for that child smiling back into the sunlight, and deciding to open the red suitcase and finding that somebody had packed the very same dress that both you and the beloved hoped against hope she would be wearing—such a beloved one as she—the beloved came walking toward you, down the wide boulevard, your eyes meeting like a sudden electric shock! Wearing a dress—much too large for the little child sitting beside you—while that beloved was wearing that dress while disappearing under your very eyes into a space and time which was some very different space and time to which you believed heretofore, that you were denied entry, though you too, you too did exist, in fact, inside that different space and time in which you understood at last, that you did exist always.

RITA: But does a path followed diligently lose its appeal in the end?

STEPHEN: And sometimes does the bottom fall out of life?

RICHARD: Roger Vincent has recently met a man who has seen everything overflowing and delirious, this man holds out his arms to Roger Vincent. And a stunned Roger Vincent can only say . . .

MADELINE: . . . life has been stolen from me. Here, however, I must take my stand, not against reality, but deep inside reality. Invisible, therefore, but always fed in a way that many others are never fed. Does God speak to me perhaps? This is possibly because I have constructed parts of myself folded over other parts of myself to project a certain depth. And if only I didn't have to speak using a language—then—only then perhaps, would I—Roger Vincent—be able to tell you—THE TRUTH ABOUT EVERYTHING!

RICHARD FOREMAN is the founder and artistic director of the Ontological-Hysteric Theater (1968–present). The theatre was located in the historic St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery in New York City's East Village neighborhood from 1992–2008. Foreman has written, directed, and designed over fifty of his own plays both in New York City and abroad. Five of his plays have received OBIE awards as best play of the year and several others for directing and "sustained achievement." He has received the annual Literature award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the PEN Master American Dramatist Award, and a MacArthur Fellowship. In 2004, he was elected officer of the Order of Arts and Letters of France.

Foreman's plays have been co-produced by The New York Shakespeare Festival, La MaMa, The Wooster Group, the Festival d'Automne in Paris, and the Vienna Festival. He has collaborated (as librettist and stage director) with composer Stanley Silverman on eight music theatre pieces produced by The Music Theater Group and The New York City Opera. He wrote and directed the feature film *Strong Medicine*. He has also directed and designed many classical productions including *Three Penny Opera*; *The Golem*; plays by Havel, Botho Strauss, and Suzan-Lori Parks; *Die Fledermaus* at the Paris opera; *Don Giovanni* at the Opera de Lille; Philip Glass's *Fall of the House of Usher* at the American Repertory Theater and The Maggio Musicale in Florence; *Don Juan* at the Guthrie Theater; Kathy Acker's *Birth of the Poet* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music; Gertrude Stein's *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights* in Berlin and Paris. More than ten volumes of Foreman's plays have been published. His archives and work materials have recently been acquired by the Fales Library at New York University.

OBJECT COLLECTION was founded in 2004 by writer/director Kara Feely and composer/musician Travis Just. The Brooklyn-based group operates within the intersecting practices of performance, music, and theatre. With sixteen evening-length performances alongside countless shorter works, the company has toured to over thirty venues throughout North America and Europe. Object Collection's pieces have appeared in New York at La MaMa, Performance Space 122, Ontological Theater at St. Mark's Church, National Sawdust, Chocolate Factory Theater, Abrons Arts Center, Invisible Dog Art Center, Roulette, and Issue Project Room, among others. Albums have been released on Slip Imprint/Warp Records, Infrequent Seams, and khalija.