

· mother mortar, father pestle (or the nocturnal panic of 2008)

Due to an unknown aberration, the sun becomes temporarily obscured. Is it a result of an astronomical disturbance or is it an act of god? The two sides face off, but the spokes-people had numerous other problems before this.

The sun isn't just the source of warmth, the street lamp of the day. As we, the civilized, assume that someone somewhere will always be growing, preparing and/or serving our meals, we also assume that the sun will emerge and provide us with something we don't often realize we need: stable psychology. Although it is true that people look better in blurry shadow after 2am, for those of us slaves to prioritize our vision, we do need the thorough, even illumination the sun provides upon the subjects of our lives. But it is beyond this, to an analogy with batteries and their recharge, that living and working in even a diffuse sun has direct effect on health and life's quality. Sadly, we can't ask Ingmar Bergman about this any longer, but I digress. No, I'm not talking about a documentary about the sun.

We learn about the state of things from the subjectivity of our sensory organs. Some now again talk of *hard-wiring* and *collective consciousness*, but all I really want to talk about is the fallibility of any system. When we are young, most of us have the imperfect guides of some sort of parents, who have problems of their own. We all at least glance at the idea that those who have come before have done some of the prep-work, and that we have some obligation to pick up on the long history of blunders, trials and errors. But it is very tempting to *lemme see what happens when...* and researching things thoroughly is such a hassle. And there are the problems of the interpretation of history, the translation of languages and the fog of wishful thinking. And then there are the white men behind the curtains, and the silver spoons have therein left a thick residue of entitlement and confidence, as recipe for Roman empirical sequel.

In our scenario however, we have no guides, only a few days to walk the streets of the city, to meet a few disoriented people who now don't trust their watches. They do still walk and breathe, still want the best for themselves. And must still hold confession, assure the public, dive dumpsters, proclaim the possibility of human transcendence, provide a service by evicting people, come up with the next RNC funding scam or at least get the boot removed from a pimped ride – it's just that this round is in a *noir*.

• And into this dingy moonlight.

The population was already tired and irritated. Those who sleep in beds or in doorways aren't sure when to get up, as don't the flowers.

This is not a good time for the government to have another problem, as oil prices are high, irrational walking bombs lurk behind every door, no one in the country makes anything anymore and there are general fears that the duped population might wake up to hold someone responsible. An OFFICIAL from the NSA is having difficulty getting a decent night sleep, as a result of irritable bowl syndrome and a lot of unsatisfying phone calls. And the god at his side is either as tired as he is, busy drinking with Dionysus, or doesn't really exist.

It isn't clear to me why people ever join the clergy, but our THEOLOGIAN has been reading Bertrand Russell. He dreams of Russell's analogy between the relationship of god to man and that of man to ants, and of the compliment of attention such an almighty bestows by looking down into the cage to monitor the behavior therein. He goes through the motions of his work, as does everyone in this world, but is distracted by a SECULARIST intruder, endless trouble with his sedan, a HOMELESS hitchhiker and the futility of his calling. If he was horny (in a hetro kind of way) he might have an awkward outlet in RELIGIOUSE, a woman whose faith, a bit too blind (and in the dark even more so), launches nearly pagan ritual and hallucinations so vivid as too finally self-provide the reassurance she seeks. SECULARIST suggests that THEOLOGIAN *secularize* his community work, as cult and fairytales are not necessary in the quest to help people - as if that were really the aim of a church. After consuming the tortilla embossed with the image of Jesus, HOMELESS is more frank about the religious motivation of old white men, as practiced by polygamists or Jim Jones. *"Just drop me at a diner"* really just leaves him in THEOLOGIAN's nightmares (or daymares), in which he is loosely crucified while HOMELESS proclaims: *"I just wanted you to meet your god the old-fashioned way"* and *"I'll let you down in a while."*

RELIGIOUSE, not a completely unlikable person, merely runs without two of six cylinders alight. It's not that she is *dim* per se, she just can't quite see reality to which most could attest. And in the dark it's harder to find a loose aspirin in your purse. As with this type, there is also an issue with imagination, of the kind that can stretch out - to extend one's mind to that location behind the eyes of another. RELIGIOUSE doesn't seem to be able to negotiate not just the motivation of others, but a bird's eye view, a signal flow chart or an organizational structure. She could be the kindest, the most self-sacrificing sweetheart, but her consciousness is located some distance behind her senses, connected to her body only through a tube at least the length of a paper towel core. She asks THEOLOGIAN for advise, but he tires of her easily and as we have heard, is disoriented himself. In fact this phenomenon is at the heart of this world - the slight shift in the heavens has only slightly amplified the inability of man to divorce himself from his own perspective. It is true that SECULARIST is brazen and intimidating when he corners her at the bus stop, but he doesn't mean to be cruel, he merely falls prey to the righteousness he abhors. Can he claim the high ground because he knows when to stop flogging the unreachable? Nonetheless, SECULARIST has raped RELIGIOUSE, at least with ideas, and she runs to THEOLOGIAN who obligingly drives her to the doctor (or is it the DMV?). RELIGIOUSE of course is healed (at least for the moment) by her own will. And although she might think JESUS came over to have some tea and do some lower back exercises, she has sustained herself, conjuring enough mind-bending to reach around and pat herself on the back.

SECULARIST is an odd one. I mean if you're an arty-type who is inclined to prioritize logic over practicality, making statements about consumerism by looking like a troll - you assume that people will think about out-sourcing, labor rights and the environment instead of holding their noses, holding their purses and giving you excessive berth. Not to mention the authorities. But I think you're no threat until half a million dollars goes through your account in a given year, not an issue for SECULARIST. But the passion of SECULARIST lies in the poison of gospel, but not *his* gospel. He thinks that his humility, a matter of style, and a *science* - separates his diatribe from preaching, from being just a *matter of opinion*. As he confronts RELIGIOUSE, he wants only to lay the facts on the ground before her (all) and thereby the world will be transformed. He pronounces that there should be *no tragedy in an end to consciousness* but is also aware of the notion of *an hour (or so) of need* and the *pain of death*. And by so combining the sciences of geology and chemistry, animal and human animal behavioral science, empathy and hospice, and a precise courage to face infinity, SECULARIST stands to destroy the foundation stone of religion, the FAIRYTALE OF THE AFTERLIFE. This is a tremendous accomplishment and SECULARIST may not even know of its enormity. Of course, it wouldn't be the first valuable information to fall on deaf ears. He may be in his Einstein moment, his greatest hour, his crowning achievement behind him while still possessing some of his youth. But what naiveté, he is just practicing his delivery, telling THEOLOGIAN after breaking in to his apartment "*This is a grass-roots kinda thing; we're just finding our bearings.*" He is allowed to step back from the precipice when he finally goes home to find PALER dying of pulmonary edema in the stairwell. He calls his ex-girlfriend, asking her to recount the night her life was saved by exploratory surgery. A "humanizing" reflection on the fragility of (all) life may *mellow* SECULARIST, or is it something sort of tragic called growing up?

HOMELESS on the other hand may not need to grow up nor does he find need for other things, like the phrase *god-damn-it* - for which he tells THEOLOGIAN: *"I got no need for the phrase. There ain't no god and he can't damn nothin'".* HOMELESS is a durable man. Durable enough to survive drug addiction and retain the idea that hallucinations, including those of the sober religious, are a product of the mind. Cunning too - It's just that the thrill of the chase has become a preoccupation; that \$20 somebody musta left in that discarded pair of pants or chasing the dragon, for example. Some just can't really *get* the system. It's not that they can't understand rules or even the reason behind rules. But some emerge from childhood with a deep disrespect for authority, fight life's malaise by making a game of pushing one's luck and/or feel so cheated by circumstances that *I ain't got shit so fuck it and fuck you* becomes the mantra, M.O., and basis of humor. HOMELESS is not so far gone as to be incapable of higher brain functions like compassion. He's just is too self-centered to know how to express such an emotion. As his downward-spiraling EX-GIRL yells, after he confiscates a business card thinking that it's from a strip club recruiter, *"You don't know how to help people, you fucker!"* He does provide a demented fatherly service when he confronts ROBERTSMOFF, a scheming business type somehow involved in the diversion of sex-industry profit into the RNC, *"I kinda look out for her"* and *"It's just that I love her former self."* It's the quest for the free lunch that *must be right here somewhere* that brings HOMELESS to trouble with homeland security, but he continues his defiance: *"How much do they pay you to be an asshole?"* Or *"...my country? There ain't nothin' about it that's mine. You cogs are stupid enough to buy that flag-waving bullshit, but not me man; I'm just a rat."* It's hard to say if there are enough trumped-up charges to go around these days, and HOMELESS is probably not brown enough to be an "insurgent."

ROBERTSMOFF, just skimming a little off the top, has made a lucrative career finding creative ways to circumvent level playing fields. An articulate, persuasive gentleman, he is smart, charming, the kind of guy you open up to without realizing your doing it. Before you know it you're nodding and smiling when he says *I suppose you're aware that money tends to fix problems?* Whether it's offshore red, white and blue elephant t-shirt screening or repackaged blackmail in the tote-bag of *entertainment surcharge*, he's your go-to guy. Well maybe it wasn't directly his miscalculation, but something's gone wrong. The opposition has made enough noise to get the special prosecutor interested in MOVEMENT SERVICES, a discreet LLC that seems to strangely close to both the RNC and happy-ending massage parlors, run by, hmmn that's right, an H. ROBERTSMOFF. The day/night started out OK but *follow the money* has led to some money overseas and this sort of thing and now there's a note on the desk, *"Did you see that black car outside when you came in? Then the decision becomes who's the most powerful man ROBERTSMOFF can bring down with him by babbling in a courtroom, the kind of OFFICIAL that he could call to say: "...having cooperated fully, and uh, sacrificed myself for the sake of us... ..pro-business types, I was hoping this might inject a certain leniency into the penal system... ..if you follow me."* Not containing moral compass himself, the *"useful religious, the moral crusaders or the buzzing Christians"* as he refers to them, are merely a demographic to be manipulated as any other. But although SECULARIST slays the dragon of the *you'll find god in a foxhole* mantra, ROBERTSMOFF gets to thinking about *"Do you believe god will pass judgment on the acts of men?"* But as he asks this of his prison guard, maybe ROBERTSMOFF is just trying out a creative solution, somehow phishing for the man's SSN.

· In a shot at re-birth

So before the unhealthy slumlord PALER drops dead on the stairs, he at least has remembered enough fire and brimstone childhood brainwash to ensure his place in hell. Of course, it actually looks more like traffic court. Before the gatekeeper gods, with a few satisfactory remorseful answers and the mildly humble and sort of insightful comment: "*We are naked monkeys...with dangerous ideas*", PALER is on his way, not to infinite torture but to wander a number of semi-pleasant, boring fields. PALER, like everyone else, hasn't made much of an impression that the GEOLOGIST can note in his study of an indifferent universe. By the time the dust settles and the sun reappears, no one is more exhausted than they were before, some have gone, some have gone to white-collar jail, and we all go on perhaps to have learned that perspectives are fallible, relative and of minimal importance in geologic time.

· MOTHER MORTAR, FATHER PESTLE  
(& the nocturnal panic of 2008)  
S16/35mm, B&W, 72min, work in progress

a sweaty, claustrophobic noir and a weekend seminar on the irrelevance of human achievement in geologic time. And a 4-night-step program seeking to correct the behavioral dysfunction known as "religi-ambition."

Copywrong, G. Chapman 2007