

TONY
MATELLI

ECHO
HUMAN

A





VERY, VERY LAST FIRST MAN: MODEL VIEWS

By artist and writer Erik Frydenborg

'Play that part back again?'

CONDENSED FLESH... BUBBLING WITH HEAT
CONDENSED FLESH... KILLED IN GLEE
CONDENSED FLESH... WAS THEIR SPECIALTY¹

Right. Tapes and tapes, filled with just this kind of stuff.

Warehouses full. Should you find yourself so inclined. Cut them up just so and they will fit perfectly together like Mediterranean tile, end-to-end, wall-to-wall... See, for instance, Quote: *One hundred thousand people living comfortably in one building.*² End quote. Different ideas, then, at that time, about what could be said, what could be accomplished. Leading men were not so hairless. Here, that goes here...

Anyway, if we take off the ceiling, we get a better view of the unhappy couple in their underpants. These two are quite a pair, how long do you suppose they've been at it? Sick fucks. And no doubt with the piano playing *Die Walküre* all the way down from the fortieth floor to the street, or whatever... Oof, the shovel in this case being the particularly brutal implement. Yes, swords too, but I'm thinking they actually can't feel a thing through their calluses, all those years tilling the same mealy little plot of soil to increasingly poisoned yields. Hence your rotting veggies over there, I don't have to make the connection vis-à-vis '*upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat,*'³ and so on and so forth, I see that you 'get it' without my spelling it all out for you, come on around to this side and you'll get a sense of what they look like when they first appear out of the ether. Listen to that tone cluster ringing out into the room, chromatic dissonance of the crash, super loud at first and then softer and softer and softer and softer...

'I think that might just be a coincidence... the vegetables.'

Let me make the point again that there is absolutely no way you can properly understand this without *walking* around it, walking around inside it. We're working on a total-dimensional inspection model, and note that I emphasize the word *walking*, as opposed to just lolling splayed and defenseless like our corpulent friend here, hardly a surprise to see some Jack Sprat-shaped domestic violence playing out on these shit-encrusted lower rungs, but let's try to look through the *ha-ha* funny at the *eghck* of primitive atrocity, and tell me that ancient worm buried behind your face isn't stirring just ever so slightly now... What? Okay, well this is just one sad simian misadventure among many, and we've got other work to do down the hall, other suits to play; I'm told even Moonwatcher stopped smashing skulls now and again while the 722 Local drove past, or they queued up extra reels of Pleistocene veldt.⁴ I'm sure, I'm sure it makes you *extremely* uncomfortable... Never mind, we'll come back around to the Scouts too, let's think for a second about placement and permanence over in this area...

... here, as you see, this is what we were talking about before, plus the sausages and beef, sort of what I think of as the 'Seasons of Man' corridor. Another drink for you? Well, I don't think so much in terms of Before and After, though that would be the obvious conclusion here wouldn't it, but more on the order of During, so much propping and kneading and balancing and preening to get it just right, the slightest shudder sending the whole affair toppling, and verisimilitude in any form is quite a challenge to maintain, I'm sure you can agree with that much, at least. So transience, tension. 4:44, the corpse flower unfurled, massive soap bubble floating toward the chipped edge of a bloody butcher's knife. Or, if you prefer, Quote: *Each thing seen is the parody of another, or is the same thing in a deceptive form.*⁵ End quote. And not to put too fine a point on it, but let's consider the exact equivalence, the identical expenditures of care in rendering assembled features versus rendering their collapse, killing joke of the creator, the sheer forensic investment in pairs of fugitive parentheses,

calibrated exactly to fit your fat pink meaty head square in the middle. I did think about moving the entire group to the third hall but I was outvoted, unfortunately or fortunately, I will again allow you to judge for yourself...

(further explication)

... is, rather, a chimp, and you obviously understand the implications of that distinction vis-à-vis '*near misses*' and '*unfinished business*' and the like, and don't let's get too distracted by the shirt or what's on the shirt because in my view, though relevant, those details bear less importance as to the overall cosmic-scale picture here than the puke, the Actionist's impulse writ large, and what it reveals about the unchanging state of rudimentary consciousness, at its most nakedly relived moment, across endless yawning millennia, shame and bile and burst capillaries and all-self-awareness via, you know, self-abnegation. Of course it's him, of course it's you, it's me, whatever, whoever, but the white wall itself becomes a sort of canvas on which to behold the inscribed image of Interiority, the double-image of form and formlessness, Rorschach of rejected content, that same shape that eventually leaps out from inside every living face. Stop for a minute and lean—well, project yourself into the room and 'lean' against the wall behind him, do all you can to take the whole enterprise in good faith. Feel the immeasurable sincerity of that splattered visceral mark—not the pathos, exactly, but the pure *conclusiveness* of this gesture that exceeds even my own powers of description...

'I can think of other universal truths besides vomit.'

... and again I'm going to ask that for now we skip the macrocephalic troubadour (love the sweats, though) and let's direct our attention over here and, more specifically (brief rustling noises) *here*, where we're confronted with what I'm going to go ahead and just define as the Defining Moment of this particular period, albeit a difficult period to circumscribe within particular parameters. What is that face? Anyway... How to countenance this display? I know, you're going to say it's an affront to decency by

way of the capital V Victim, unrepentant mockery untempered by mercy, and I don't think you'd be averting your eyes like that if it didn't hit its mark—a Bunker Buster, right? Armor-piercing, scorched earth savageness. Not for the faint of heart. But all things being equal, I am going to challenge you to deny the most unlikely and (arguably) the *most* striking attribute among the many nuanced traits conveyed by this besieged, metastasized odalisque, which I would argue against all odds is its—his—quietly composed *dignity*. Think about that for a thick second or two. Dignity. True, it's not of the uncompromised or conventional variety, but how else to read those penetrating, heavy-lidded eyes, alert and shining over rippling waves of horrifically erupting skin, the casual Etruscan bearing of the somber repose, the clear, unshaken resolve, presiding over a scuzzy bath mat littered with emptied radioactive vessels? I don't particularly like looking at it either, but then it does conjure certain apposite considerations, e.g., Quote: *I am no longer concerned with my body, nor with time, nor with the world, as I experience them in antepredicative knowledge, in the inner communion that I have with them.*⁶ End quote. So you see, this is exactly the kind of thing that

It is at approximately this moment that I have stopped listening, having fallen completely and irretrievably asleep, though he continues talking loudly at me at least until I am out of earshot and have fully exited the wide fluorescent room. I wander unfeelingly past remnants of disused plumbing jutting out through refinished drywall, and on through the dim and poorly organized storage area filled with columns of empty beer cans, half-filled five-gallon buckets, neglected dirty panes of unwrapped mirrors, stenciled crates, various cobwebbed piles of undifferentiated industrial waste.

In the middle of the day, the corrugated metal walls and ceiling are warm from hours of sun, and a wave of heat hits my face as I meander toward a crack of light peeking through a battered sliding door, blocked at its opening with scraps of lumber and randomly sized bits of pocked, grimy cardboard. I sense nothing, I am nowhere, my

body is a crumpled marionette tugged across soupy oceans by loose lazy hands. Reanimated in sleep's absolute annihilation. Oblivious to the cooing sounds of sparrows, pigeons, the odd seagull roosting in nests of razor wire and white plastic shopping bags high on the tar roof, perched above the fishmonger's leftover offerings for mangy neighborhood cats.

Daylight floods orange through my closed eyelids, affecting nothing as I shuffle out onto the little veranda that is in fact a fenced-off alley, enclosed and converted long ago by some optimistic tenants into a grubby small container garden. Networks of delivery trucks, choppers, leaf-blowers and forklifts merge somewhere in the frenzied neighborhood beyond, a steady rumbling sonata of white engine noises and reverse indicator chimes. The warm air lifts slightly. Wafts of rank brine and dissipated smoke curl in smoggy whorls in my nose, drifting past my inert shoulders and hips, stirring bits of discarded cigarette filters and drinking straw wrappers from piled debris accumulated in the garden's far corners. I move in time with these tiny specks of trash.

The slight grade in the asphalt lists downward from the sooty blue brick wall opposite the building, whose own aluminum sides are here and there adorned with halfheartedly executed arabesques, smeared insults and incoherent warnings, these obscured by brittle dangling skeins of weather-beaten laundry twine. Rows of black painted windows peer down from huge derelict lofts, punctuated occasionally by the glint of small geometric fractures and delicately suspended shards of broken glass. My interior is pure void. I am starless black space, before the birth of time. There is no matter, no gravity, nothing to populate or disturb my abandoned or unbuilt universe.

A crackling tenor voice from the adjacent street shrieks "MOTHERFUCKER!" several times in quick staccato bursts. At my right, a 23-story house of cards sits impassively on a cardboard box, undisturbed on the low deck of the rickety lean-to that provides the lone source of overhead shelter on the terrace.

My own footsteps are barely audible, but leave faint traces of my movements in the powdery ash that dusts the cracked surface of the yard. Slowly, distantly, I brush past an inverted bouquet, rhododendrons and daffodils, incomprehensibly poised in approximation of a headstand, porcelain vase upended and balanced effortlessly on the butts of cut stems, fragile tips of its topmost petals now curling balletic toes. Among the abundance of potted ficuses, jades, and succulents, myriad unchecked weeds flourish in the insubstantial shade of these cultivated and contained plants. Several of these are elaborately articulated and improbably large. It is possible that one or more of the weeds or plants are laughing maniacally human laughter as I move near and past them. All probabilities are erased. Beyond blankness, with zero relationship to substance even in its absence

“Josh?”

NOTES

1. Chorus of the song ‘Condensed Flesh’ by John Weiffenbach/Void, 1981.
2. Possibility envisioned by conservative economist Thomas Sowell, known for his hyperbolic 1984 assertion that the entire world population at that time could be housed in the state of Texas in one-story, single-family homes.
3. From Genesis 3:14, King James Version.
4. Refers to an anecdote in Arthur C. Clarke’s forward to Dan Richter’s *Moonwatcher’s Memoir—A Dairy of 2001: A Space Odyssey* Richter, Dan. Carroll & Graf, New York, NY, 2002
 In recounting the experience of creating the *Dawn of Man* sequence of Stanley Kubrick’s film, Arthur C. Clarke explains that the famous scene of a prehistoric hominid discovering the use of blunt tools was filmed in a field near a busy highway, consistently interrupted by noise from passing traffic and overhead airplanes.
5. Excerpted from Bataille, George: ‘Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939’, IN *The Solar Anus*, 1931, Stoekl, Allan. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 1985
6. Excerpted from Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: ‘Experience and Objective Thought: The Problem of the Body’, 1945, IN *Phenomenology of Perception*, New York, NY, 2005