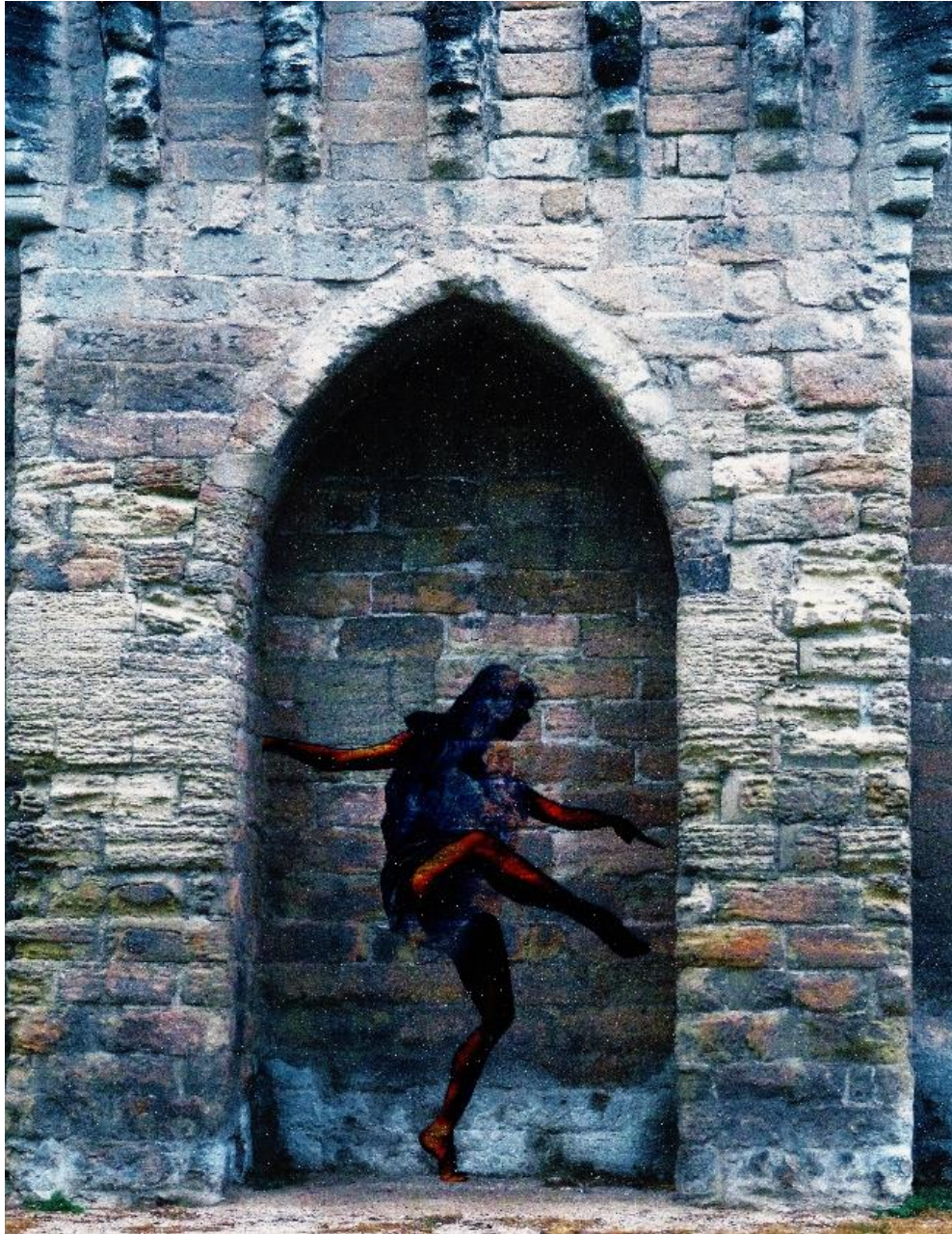


The Real Demoiselles d'Avignon 2018

Performance Text, 28 June 2018

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First Recording: *When I was eighteen, the doctor told me that I was standing before the dark doors of Tuberculosis. So I went to St. Martin's Island where I*

lay naked in the sand with my arms spread out to receive the healing powers of sun and nature.

And I was able to elude death, but I soon noticed that life was not worth that great effort. I had escaped from the danger of death, but it was only with great difficulty that I was able to escape that far greater danger - life!

I took... You know, whenever I see these ghost photos, I'm reminded of the film "Darby O'Gill and the Little People," which I saw with my father in 1959 when I was ten-years-old. I'll never forget this Walt Disney version of Irish mythology. It was my first experience of the supernatural as well as my first experience of the power of film. It's perhaps the reason why I rarely go to the cinema - I watch a lot of DVD's... When the Banshee, as you see here, appeared in the film,



I found myself on the floor, hiding behind the seat in front of me. Since that time, almost sixty years ago, I've never ever been as terrified of anything as I was of that fifties-Walt-Disney spirit. In comparison, these Avignon ghosts, from the beginning, have only fascinated me.

Anyway, I took this photograph two summers ago here in Avignon. It's one of several I'm going to show you this

afternoon. It's an image of one of the ghosts that live in the towers, called Échauguettes, along the wall that surrounds the old city here.



And the recording you just heard is the voice of that ghost responding to my request to tell me something about her life. It was my intention to use these ghosts last summer to create the greatest show that Avignon - or anywhere else, for that matter - had ever seen. I wanted it to be a site-specific piece, whereby I'd take the audience out to these towers, make these ghosts appear and dispel any doubts the audience members may have had about life after death. But alas - and I do think that "alas" is the right word here - that didn't happen because I lost my ability to make the ghosts appear. And it was all because I'd lost my melancholy soul. Let me explain...

From as far back as I can remember, I've struggled to make a living in the arts. I started out trying to be a writer, then became a visual artist, and in recent years I've been working in performance, mostly at summer festivals like Avignon and Edinburgh. Because I've never

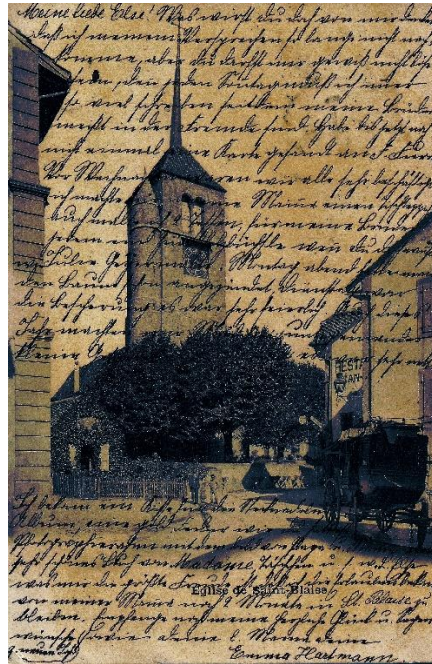
had much financial success, I've always had to have a day job to pay the bills. And the job that I've enjoyed the most over the years has been working for companies that clean out old houses. Now this may sound like boring, backbreaking work to you, but to me it has always been a labor of love. And that's because, for most of my life, I had a severe case of melancholia. Everything I did was covered with a layer of black bile. Every piece of art I ever created, whether written, painted, photographed, or performed, was seasoned with the solemn sadnesses of memory, ruin, and decay, and it's precisely those precious spices that were often in abundant supply in the houses we'd clean out. Typically an elderly person would die or be sent off to a care home. The relatives would come in and take what they wanted, and we'd be called in to remove the rest before the house was either sold, or more often than not, torn down to make way for expensive apartments. And the things those people left often made my melancholy soul rejoice!

Boxes of old photographs like this one,

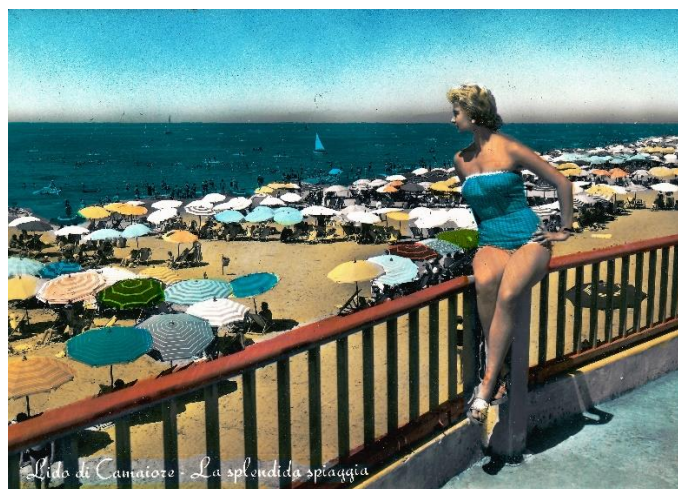


depicting long-ago Christmases celebrated by beaming children God knows what has happened to since.

Or stacks of yellowed letters written in a tiny, archaic script that we can hardly read anymore.



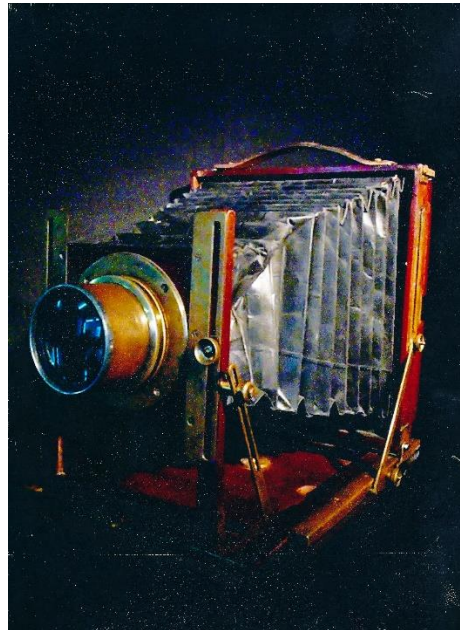
Or boxes of picture postcards of numberless beaches with hastily scribbled messages on the back like "wish you were here."



All of these things never ceased to bring a tear to my eye, and I would always take them home to be constant

reminders of that cornerstone of melancholy: the futility of trying to bring back the past.

Sometimes, though, we actually would find things of real value in the houses we'd clean out, like this old camera



I found many years ago that has the power to capture lost passions and emotions. I've brought along a few photos I took with it to show you: this is the castle of Mesocco in southern Switzerland.



Notice how the castle is surrounded by violent passions from its turbulent history. Or this photo of a tree,



broken by the storm Lothar that raged across western Europe on the day after Christmas in 1999. Notice how the agony of the tree's dying is clearly visible on this photo.

But the find that actually led to the discovery of the ghosts in the towers came much later, less than three years ago. We'd been called in to clean out this house,



which I found really spooky. It had the dust of a thousand years and the smells of ten-thousand. Anyway,

it was here that I found a small reel of Super 8 film. It was in the corner of a shelf, and, judging from the layer of fluffy dust on top of it, it hadn't been touched for a very long time. Needless to say, I put it in my pocket and took it home. The following weekend I watched the film. I'd like to show you a digitalized version of it now. (Film Clip 1) (Below are two still photos from the film.)



Well, I was enthralled! I watched that little film again and again, and within days I'd decided what my next performance would be: I'd play the silent violin. And I was convinced that the limitless depths of black bile in my soul would provide ample material for my repertoire of silent music.

Of course it's impossible to create a truly silent violin. Whatever you do to the bow - in my case I covered it with a layer of very slick tape - when it's drawn across the strings, the tiniest of vibrations will occur which in turn will create the tiniest of hums. But through experimentation I found out that, if the bow is drawn just above the strings, without touching them, and the black bile of melancholy is flowing from every corner of your soul (This is very important!), then a sort of anti-vibration occurs that in turn creates a melancholy silence. That's right - silence. Silence is not the absence of sound; it is a thing in its own right. Otherwise how could there be different kinds of silence: anxious silence, awkward silence, angry silence, library silence - to name just a few. My silent violin created a very melancholy silence. And I found out by further experimentation that the closer the bow came to the strings without touching them, the more profound was the silence that was created. And this silence drenched in melancholy had great power: it could cause ghosts to appear - as I found out two summers ago here in Avignon.

I'd come to the festival here in 2016 to play my melancholy silent violin as a street musician, and I did have some success. I think most people thought I was some sort of comedian, but I didn't care as long as they put a few coins in the hat. One evening - towards the beginning of the festival - I was playing my violin outside the wall, in front of one of the towers, when the only person who was watching me at the time, a rather sad-looking, young man, began gesturing excitedly in my direction. When I stopped playing, he came up to me and asked how I'd created the light show in the niche in the

tower behind me. What light show? I asked. He then explained that while I'd been playing, he'd seen the transparent figure of a woman in the niche in the tower, and she'd been "sort of dancing." I still had no idea what he was talking about, but, wanting to take credit for anything that made my audiences happy, I explained to him that I'd created it using techniques I'd learned working at the Lyon Light Festival the year before. He seemed satisfied with that, nodded, and left.

I then turned around and started playing my violin again, but this time facing the niche in the tower. And sure enough, the guy was right! As soon as I started playing, the transparent figure of a woman appeared in the niche, and when I stopped playing, it faded away fairly quickly. I went to other niches, and the same thing happened, only with different figures: I'd start playing, the figure would appear, and, when I stopped playing, it would fade away. I began to get the crazy idea that my silent-violin playing had the ability to summon ghosts. But why did the young man see the ghosts, but people walking off in the distance never seemed to see anything?

My first explanation was that you had to be affected by the silent-violin music in order to see the ghosts, and this theory seems to be confirmed by this photo.



Notice that the woman on the left is certainly close enough to have been affected by the silent music, but she doesn't seem to notice the ghosts in the tower. Why not? Well, if you look closely, you'll see that she has earphones in both ears and therefore couldn't possibly be affected by the silence, and therefore couldn't see the ghosts. But, as I'll explain later, that's not the whole story.

It all reminded me a bit of the silence described in Sarah Maitland's "Book of Silence" that seems to pour forth from certain works of art into the space around them. She was referring to works like Mark Rothko's Seagram paintings in the Tate Modern Gallery.

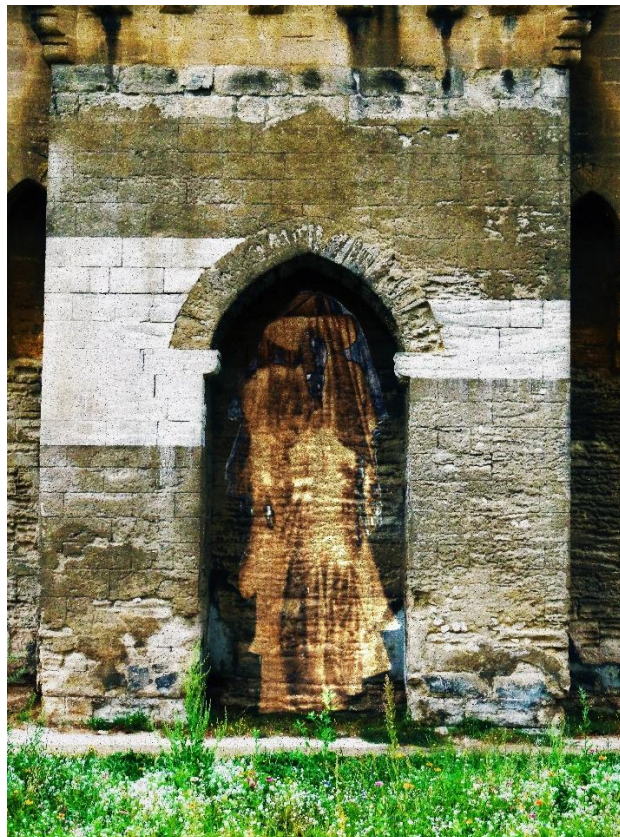


I began to think that my silent, melancholy music was working in the same way.

But who were or are these ghosts in the towers? And why only women - I never once saw a man! The first real clue I got to their identity was the fact that I actually recognized one of them: it was the ghost of the notorious Countess Maria Tarnowska, who, according to legend, was so beautiful that, during her trial in Venice in 1910 for inciting one of her lovers to murder her fiancé, the carabinieri or policemen who took her to and from the court had to be changed every day because they would invariably fall in love with her. I recognized her spirit because of this photograph.



I'd like to show you the ghost of the Countess now and
play for you the little story she told me.



Second Recording: I was at play, in a school somewhere, happy and alone, and I heard my name. Raising my eyes, I saw the small, eager face of my playmate Tatiana, peering out of an oval window in an old tower. "Mura, Mura, come quickly! The tower is full of swallows!" Full of swallows, I can still remember the joy I felt when I heard those three words. I ran to the tower and up the dark, narrow staircase into the gloomy loft. And Tatiana was right - It was full of swallows, flying everywhere, brushing our faces, making us shriek with delight. And we caught any number of them, filling our aprons. We ran downstairs into the dining hall and shouted, "Look, look, at the swallows we've caught!" And the girls crowded around us, but the mistress shrank back, horrified and pale with a cry of disgust: "Mercy upon us! They are all bats!" And with screams of horror Tatiana and I flung the bats from us.

For the rest of my life, the memory of the bats' slippery smoothness near my cheeks made my flesh creep. And that is what always happened when I entered the tower of my mind, looking for noble thoughts and soaring fancies: I always only found the monstrous, black bats of madness.

So what if the other ghosts in the towers were similarly notorious? It's possible, you know - especially here in Avignon. Let me explain. When I was in art school, I read a book about Picasso's famous painting "Les Femmes d'Al" (O, Women), which, as you see here,



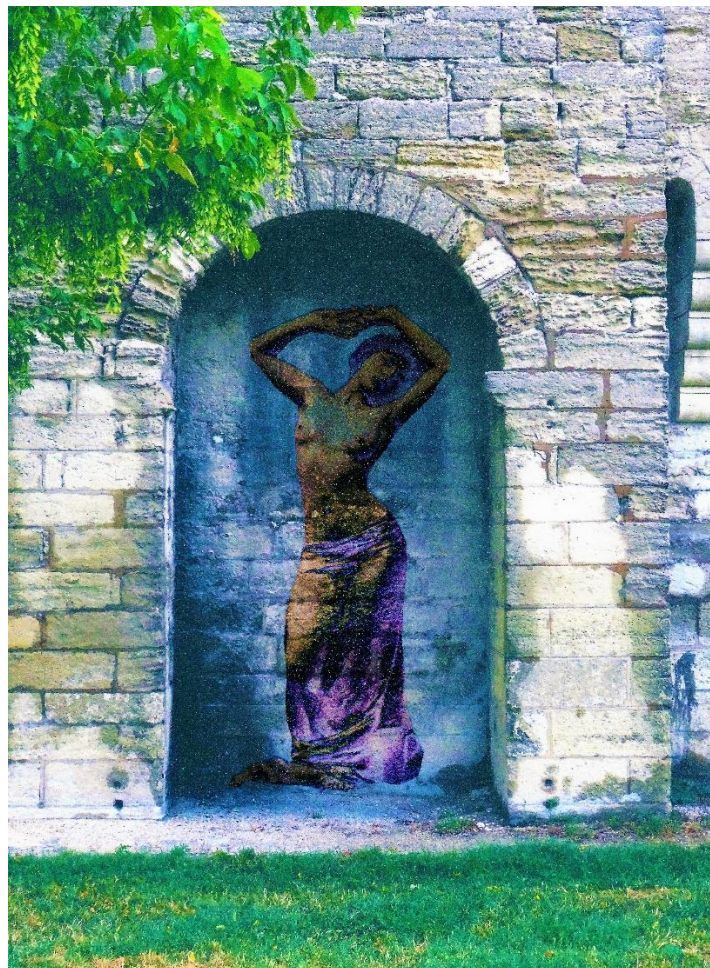
mainly consists of five naked prostitutes and a little bit of fruit. Now in the section of the book that discusses the origins of the painting's title, it's pointed out that, going all the way back to the days when the Popes were here, Avignon has been famous for all sorts of scandalous behavior. The Marquis de Sade's family even comes from this area! The Abbé de Sade, himself a famous libertine, would always quote Petrarch as having described Avignon as the "sewer where all the impurities of the world come together," and would point to the poetical tradition of Avignon as a "cesspool of infamy and iniquity." What if the ghosts in the towers are the women from this cesspool? If it's true, it would make them the real Demoiselles d'Avignon. More about this later.

Needless to say, soon after I discovered the ghosts, I got the idea of trying to photograph them, and, just as importantly, of trying to speak with them, to find out who they really are, and why they're living in those niches, which nowadays seem to serve no purpose other than to give men a place to pee and homeless people a place to go to get out of the rain and the snow.

So how did I get the ghosts in the towers to communicate with me? In the midst of the silence that made them appear, it seemed ridiculous to ask them questions out loud. I then remembered that I'd read an article which claimed that the thoughts of the dead are the same as their voices. This gave me the following idea: I'd think my questions for them, and they'd think their answers which I'd hopefully then be able to record. And it worked! The answers to my questions suddenly came into my mind. There was nothing to hear at the time, but the answers were clearly audible when my recording was played back. The answers all sound like some version of my voice, but I guess that's logical since they in some sense all come from my mind.

I was of course very interested in finding out whether my "cesspool of infamy and iniquity" theory was true, but, out of politeness, I couldn't just come right out and ask the ghosts about it. So I decided I'd make the same request of all of them. I'd ask them to tell me something about their lives. And as you've already heard, their answers are very ambiguous.

So two summers ago during the Festival, I'd get up early in the morning, go to my chosen tower for the day, turn on my tape recorder, set up my camera to take a picture every thirty seconds or so, start playing my silent violin, and then the ghosts would appear. They seemed well aware of my presence and didn't seem to mind being photographed and recorded. I do have one last recording that I'd like to play for you - a little story told by this ghost...



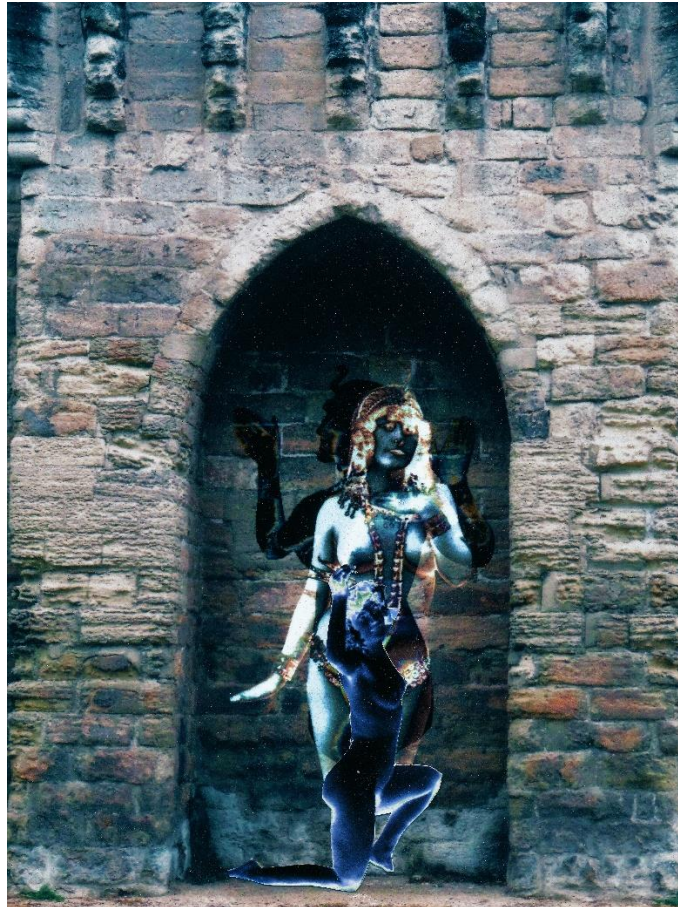
Third Recording: After Gaetano had returned from America and killed his wife and her lovers, he came to me, grabbed me by the wrist and said: You see, you were meant for me! You, only you! Because you refused me, I had to marry another, a woman not meant for me, who was therefore forced to deceive me! Had to! Do you understand? Because of you, I had to shoot her, an innocent woman, and all those innocent men! Because of you! And he pressed his revolver into my neck and pulled the trigger.

Everything worked out well two summers ago, and, like I said at the beginning, it was my intention last summer to create the greatest show that Avignon had ever seen. I'd even figured out what I was going to do with all the money I'd make. But, like I also said, that didn't happen because I had lost my power to make the ghosts appear. At the time, I thought it was all because of the knee operation I had had the previous February that took away my melancholy soul - so necessary for the production of the anti-vibration that creates the melancholy silence of the silent violin. Just as my bony knee had been replaced by shiny metal, so also had my melancholy soul been replaced by... By what? Dare I say it? By the realization that my miserable body is all there is. There is no "me," no spiritual entity of the sort indispensable to a belief in life after death. And I realized this as I lay in bed in the days after my operation - that there was no soul for me to retreat to, to escape the pains in my body. Before the operation, my body had been a thing, an "other" to be contemplated by my melancholy soul. After the operation, that soul had vanished. Anyway, that's how I first explained it.

And so when I returned to Avignon a few weeks before the Festival started last summer and went out to the towers and started playing my silent violin, nothing happened. No ghost appeared in any tower. So there I was, forced to be satisfied with showing my audience photographs and playing recordings, all of which they no doubt assumed to have been faked. But I had to do it! I'd committed

myself to doing a new show last year, and that was it!
(THE NARRATOR PAUSES TO THINK.)

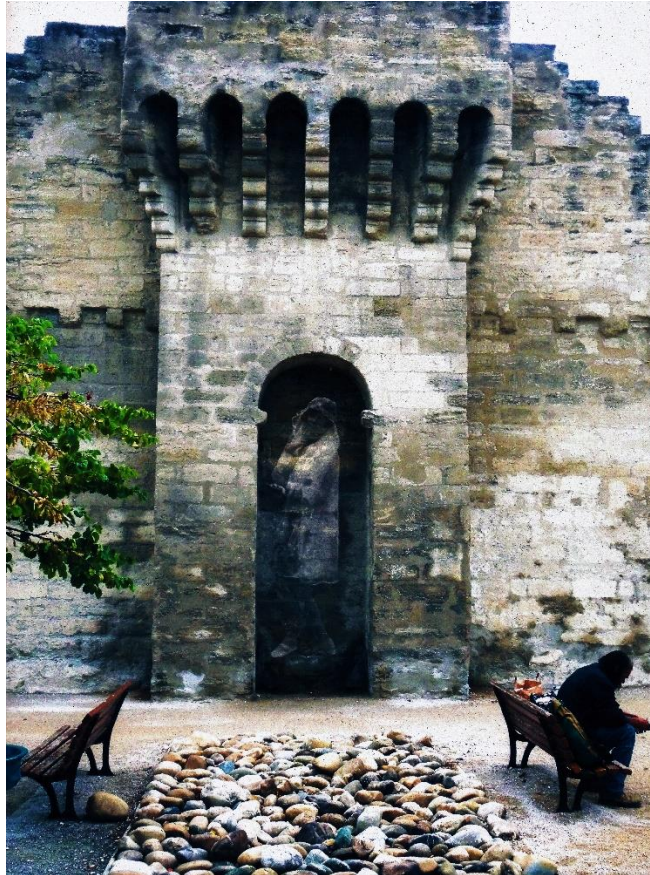
Before the Festival started last summer - just after I'd found out I could no longer get the ghosts to appear, I was drinking a lot of wine one evening and going through my photographs when I came across this one.



I remembered that these ghosts had not responded to my request to tell me something about their lives. And in my grumpy drunkenness, it seemed to me that these women were leering at me, making fun of me. So then and there, under the cover of darkness, I took my violin out to one of the towers and burned it in the niche, in the hope that the flames would at least singe some of their pretty little toes!

Then - as the Festival went on last summer, and I became more and more frustrated - I decided that once my show

was over, I'd try to find out more about these ghosts - specifically why they live in those smelly, old niches. And then I remembered this photo - with a ghost and a homeless man on the same image.



I went back to this tower, looking for this man. He wasn't there, but another homeless man was. I showed him the photo and asked whether he'd ever seen the ghost. He said, "Of course, every time I go into the niche to get out of the rain, she snuggles up to keep me warm!" He then burst out laughing in a "no-you-idiot" sort of way. He did tell me though, later, that at times, sleeping in the niches during winter, he found them much warmer than the air outside. This of course flies in the face of the well-known belief that it is noticeably cooler in the area around ghosts. It was then that he mentioned in passing the legend of the ghosts in the towers, the details of which I found - after much research - in a

book called "Stories of Old Provence" by Lionel Philippe, published in 1936. The ghosts in the towers are mentioned in a chapter describing the Great Flood of 1433. The translation is mine:

"The flood was so extensive that even the red-light district in Avignon on the other side of the city from the Rhone River was under water, as well as the nearby Chapelle des Pénitents Gris, where a miracle is supposed to have occurred: the flood waters in the chapel parted so that the host on the altar could be saved. It was reported that several of the prostitutes from the Bourg Neuf brothels were so impressed by this that they gave up their profession and vowed to enter the convent for repentant prostitutes.

By the way, it is said that the spirits of unreformed prostitutes live in the niches of the towers along the wall. It has been suggested that they live there because once one of them was chained in one of the niches as punishment for sneaking out of the convent one night to meet a gentleman. She died of exposure after several days, and ever since, the ghosts of prostitutes have sought out these niches in sympathy."

So I seem to have been on the right track about the ghosts all along. They actually are the real "Demoiselles d'Avignon..." It soon occurred to me though that the one ghost I'd recognized - Countess Tarnowska - didn't seem to fit into this legend, so to speak. I know there were those, in her day, often women, who thought she really was nothing but a high-class prostitute, but she certainly never was a "repentie" in Avignon. More research was clearly necessary...

I'm happy to say that I quickly found two articles on the internet that were very helpful:

*From Prostitutes to Brides of
Christ: The Avignonese
Repenties in the Late Middle
Ages*

By Joëlle Rollo-Koster

And

*La prostitution et sa prise en
charge à Avignon au XVIIIe
siècle*

By Cécile Doumas

These articles helped me find a possible answer to a question that had been troubling me for a long time: namely, why is it that the ghosts are attracted by melancholy silence? And the answer to this question helped me find a connection between the ghosts and Countess Tarnowska. Let me explain.

It should come as a surprise to no one that the highpoint of prostitution in Avignon was during the 14th Century when the Popes were here, along with their entourages of other men. It was said that you couldn't cross the bridge of Avignon without meeting two monks, two donkeys, and two whores. Mary Magdalene is of course the patron saint of Provence. Prostitutes were allowed to roam throughout the city in search of clients as long as they returned to one of two red-light districts for drinks, dinner, and sex. They weren't permitted to wear certain items, such as silk veils and gold rings, in order to distinguish them from "honest" women and, like Jews, were required

to buy any bread, fruit, or vegetables they happened to touch in the markets.

Another important aspect of prostitution in the city were the "Repenties," or convents for repentant prostitutes - mentioned earlier, which were remarkably successful. It has even been suggested that poor, virgin girls would tell fanciful stories of lurid pasts in order to gain admission to them. Whereas normal convents often admitted women who were ill or unwanted for some reason, the Repenties accepted only (and I quote) "those under twenty-five years of age, who in their youth had been lewd and lustful and who, because of their beauty and shape and because of human frailty, were still inclined to worldly pleasure and could still induce and attract men to such."

Upon initiation the repentant prostitutes were given a white robe, cape, and a veil and told that their dress couldn't be too tight. Because it was believed that women had a lot more to repent than men, life in these convents could be very strict. The days of the women consisted of prayer and work, mostly sewing, and they were encouraged to wear hairshirts and the like so that their bodies would be objects of suffering rather than objects of pleasure. The mouth was considered to be a real source of feminine weakness so the women fasted often, and their food and drink were simple and consumed as a necessity and not as a source of carnal pleasure. Frivolous speech was also associated with women's mouths, and for this reason, the women lived in silence most of the time... (THE NARRATOR PAUSES AGAIN TO THINK.)

Now what might that silence have been like? For the truly repentant prostitutes, it must have been intensely spiritual - holy even. But for those unable to repent, it must have been melancholy in the extreme and a constant reminder of the futility of trying to bring back their earlier, somehow happier lives.

And Countess Tarnowska? This discovery made the connection clear. After she had been convicted in Venice, she was sent to a women's prison in the city of Trani for eight years. Yet this prison was in fact a convent - a convent run expressly to reform female criminals. And the inmates lived mostly in silence...

My conclusion is that my melancholy, silent-violin music must have - for whatever reason - summoned the ghosts of unrepentant prostitutes from all over the world that live in the towers along the wall in Avignon. Countess Tarnowska died in Argentina in 1949...

I really longed for another way to make the ghosts appear! Trying my luck with another violin - given my lack of black bile - seemed pointless. I had to find some way to create an appropriate silence that didn't require my being melancholy.

And then - as the Festival ended last summer, and I was preparing to go home - something curious happened. An envelope was delivered to Shakti, our venue manager. Luckily she was able to catch me just before I left for the TGV station. The envelope contained this photograph,



a DVD, and this letter signed "Alfred Schöenberg." The note is in English and reads as follows:

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I saw the very first performance of your show and was impressed by the story of your melancholy and the discovery of the ghosts. For this reason, and after much thought, I've decided to send you this photo and the film. I hope they may help or at least encourage you in your work. I bought the photo at an antiquarian bookstore in a covered alleyway near the University of Amsterdam. I was told it was from Albania and had been taken during the first part of the 20th Century. As I'm sure you can well imagine, I was struck by the astounding image of the poor, little, dead girl, with her eyes and mouth wide open, staring right at you!

I soon became convinced that this photo was alive, so to speak. It seemed to not only portray but also embody this girl. How do I know this? Because it communicated with me - just as the ghosts in the towers communicated with you. Ideas, comments, little stories - things impossible for me to have come up with on my own - would suddenly creep into my mind whenever I was in the presence of this photo. This is to say, she used her thoughts to speak to me. And, again just like you, I began to "think" questions for her, and she would answer! One day I asked her how she had died. Within seconds the words "from whispers on my left arm" floated into my mind. She is in some sense alive in this image! And I have proof:

I projected Super 8 films onto this extraordinary photo and digitally filmed the results. I'd like to show you the most dramatic example. It's on the DVD I sent you. Pay close attention to how the little girl's face changes as the man swims toward her. I must tell you that this little film was a great relief to me - I had been worried that the voice I was hearing was a sign that I was going crazy!

I'm an old man now, and this photograph has become too much of a burden for me. I've decided to entrust this priceless thing to you, Mr. Johnson. I know it will be in good hands.

Needless to say I watched the DVD the minute I got home. The guy was right! Please look at his astonishing film! **(Film Clip 2)** I've printed out a few stills from it so you can see the facial changes more clearly.



Then a few days after I'd received the photo, the words "Remember Francis, Bernard, and Claude" passed lazily through my mind, out of nowhere. There was no way I

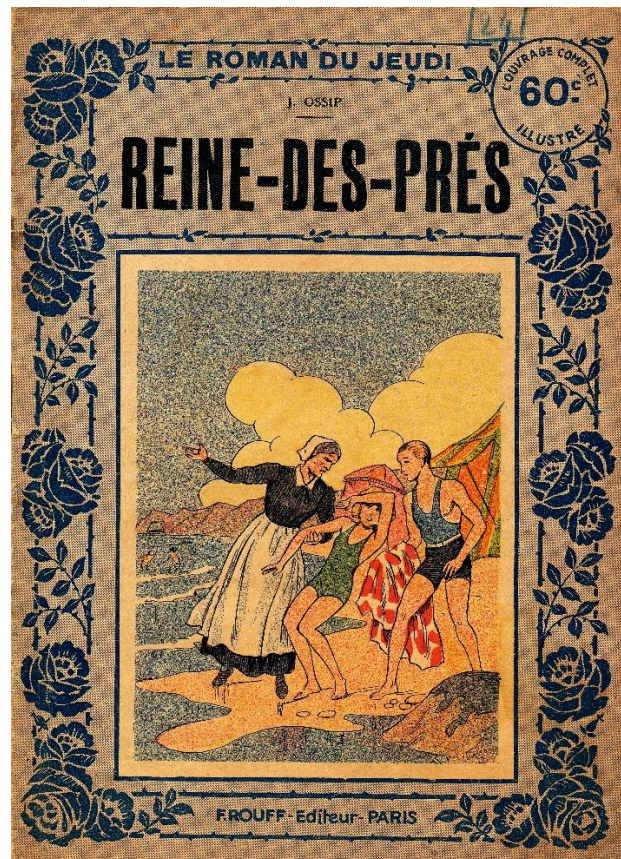
could have thought of these names myself so I had to assume that they'd come from the photo of the little, dead girl. She was communicating with me just like she had with Mr. Schöenberg. What else could it be? By the way, I didn't bring the actual photo of the little girl here to Avignon because, to be honest, it's hard for me to focus on anything else in its presence.

And that very night I started dreaming of 3 boys - and their collections, of all things. If I remember right, one collected stamps, the other butterflies, and the third seashells. Then one morning shortly thereafter, I opened up a box of old glass negatives that I'd bought at the Place Pie fleamarket here in Avignon but hadn't had a chance to look at yet. The box contained multiple images of - you guessed it! - 3 boys! The first negative in the box though was this photo of a hotel called "Reine des Prés" or "Queen of the Meadows."



So I Googled the name of this hotel to see if it still exists - I don't think it does. On the same Google page,

however, was an ebay listing for this booklet from 1937 titled "Reine-des-Prés."



I bought the book and found that it's the story of 2 girls AND Yes! 3 boys - three boys named Francis, Bernard, and Claude!

Why did the girl in the photo want me to know about these 3 boys??? I knew that there was a name for such unlikely, meaningful coincidences - "synchronicities" they're called - and I did some research. Carl Jung is credited with coining the term and wrote extensively about it. He defined a synchronicity as "...a coincidence in time of two or more causally unrelated events which have the same or a similar meaning." He gives many examples of synchronicities in his book on the subject. Perhaps the most striking is the story of the woman who took a

photograph of her son in the Black Forest in 1914 and gave the film to a shop in Strassbourg to be developed. Then World War I broke out, and she was unable to pick up her print, which she soon gave up for lost. Then in 1916, she bought a film in Frankfurt and took a picture of her daughter, who had been born in the meantime. To her great surprise, this picture turned out to be a double exposure. Behind the photo of her daughter was the photo of her son that she had taken in 1914! Clearly the film she had turned in before the war had never been developed and had found its way back into the supply of unexposed film. Some current literature points to synchronicities as glimpses into other realities, as examples of the interconnectedness of all things, like life and death.

So I printed the photos of the 3 boys (Below are a few of them.),



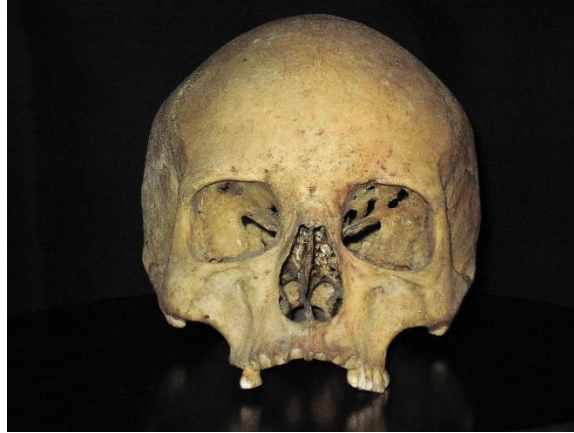


and I projected Super 8 films onto them - just like Mr Schöenberg had done - to see whether they were alive like the photo of the little dead girl. This is one of the results. (Film Clip 3)

I've got to stop here a moment to explain to you how I got the film of the little girl splashing around in the sea... It's actually part of a longer story about all of the amazing, abandoned stuff that I've accumulated over the years. At the beginning of this lecture, if you remember, I explained how I saved things I found in old houses I was helping to clean out. Well, it wasn't only in old houses that I found wonderful things worth keeping - It was also in fleamarkets, and more recently on ebay. Fleamarkets have been an almost inexhaustible source of old photographs, most specifically of abandoned family photo albums from the early 20th Century.



I've always asked myself what sad set of circumstances has led to these truly lost souls being left behind by families and ending up on fleamarket tables, surrounded by yellowing lace and broken toys? But more disturbing than that even is the human skull I once bought at a fleamarket.



How on earth could it have been abandoned by - anyone? By the way, I quickly came to my senses and realized there was no way I could live with this skull for the rest of my life so I decided to turn it over to the police. What else could I do? Can you imagine the explaining I'd have to do if someone saw me burying it somewhere? Anyway, the police told me it was the skull of an old woman - like many of the women portrayed in the abandoned photo albums...

To return to the film of the little girl: That came from ebay. During my last, melancholy years, I amassed a significant collection of Super-8 home movies that I watched for their deep melancholy, their naïve, almost desperate, attempt to capture passing time. The scene of the little girl comes from an astonishing collection of 30 small reels from the late 70's and early 80's that depict the mostly beach vacations taken by this little girl and her family. My guess is that the girl is two or three in the first film and six or seven in the last. The girl was a natural performer from the beginning. In the very first reel, she can be seen dancing on the beach as her father lovingly films her. But then, at a certain point, several years later, the films stop. That in itself is perhaps not so surprising. After a certain point, I imagine, filming your children doesn't seem so necessary anymore. What is surprising though is the

question I always ask: how could it possibly happen that these lovingly-made films could be offered for sale to strangers on ebay? Were the films forgotten at the bottom of a box mistakenly left behind during a move? Or, more dramatically, was the entire family killed in a horrific car accident? Anyway, the little film I just showed you seems to create - at least for me - the same kind of melancholy silence that my silent violin created. Please look at this still from the film.



I feel that this photo beautifully captures and projects the film's silent melancholy. Notice how the three boys and the girl can obviously see each other "through time" but can't "go through time" to meet one another - the perfect expression of that cornerstone of melancholy: the futility of trying to bring back the past.

And as I considered this, something else became clear: I hadn't lost my melancholy because of the operation at all. Rather it was because, when I discovered the ghosts in the towers, I lost my belief in the futility of trying to bring back the past! After all, if seeing and communicating with ghosts isn't bringing back the past, then I don't know what is!

So I've tried to use the melancholy silence created by this photo to make the ghosts appear again. Luckily I was able to find a remarkably small, battery-powered projector that I take out to the towers. There I alternately project the film and this photo in the hope that melancholy silence will pour forth from one or the other. I'm sure that happens, but no ghosts appear.

Doing this, though, has given me a final epiphany. It's not enough for the melancholy silence to be present. You have to be melancholy yourself in order to perceive and be affected by it. (This explains why so few other people saw the ghosts two summers ago - only the sad-looking, young man, as far as I know!) I find myself in a sort of "Catch-22" situation: I can't see the ghosts because I believe it's possible to see them. If I believed in the "futility" of trying to see them, then I'd be melancholy and able to be affected by the silence that makes them appear.

To be honest, I've only seen ghosts once since July 2016, and that happened a few weeks ago. They weren't even in a niche. They were in one of the large frames built onto the outside of the wall south of the ferris wheel here in Avignon. I happened to be walking by one morning when this group slowly formed in the frame just long enough for me to take this photo.



It was a very silent, gray Sunday morning, with the bells of the Chapelle des Pénitents Noirs - who in the past cared for condemned prisoners - faintly ringing in the background. It then struck me that sometimes the kind of silence necessary to summon the ghosts can simply be present, requiring no work of art to create it. And that just maybe for an instant I'd recovered a bit of my old melancholy. Regardless of all of that, though, I think the ghosts were telling me that they actually are the real Demoiselles d'Avignon.

