

memo

Monday, March 22, 2004

To: A memory, myself, and Libby mostly

From: A guy who hasn't stepped foot on a stage since the autumn of 1995

Re: "If there is something comforting—religious, if you want—about paranoia, there is still also antiparanoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long." —Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

On January 10, 2004, Spalding Gray disappeared. His body was found 57 days later—March 7, 2004—in the East river, closer to Brooklyn than Manhattan. It is believed that he committed suicide by jumping from the Staten Island Ferry. Mr. Gray was 62.

In the spring of 1995, Doane College presented *Orchards*, a series of student-directed, one-act plays based on works by Anton Chekhov. I performed the monologue "Rivkala's Ring" by Spalding Gray. It is based on the short story "The Witch."

"The Witch" begins with the sentence, "It was approaching nightfall." "Rivkala's Ring" opens with the lines, "The day the Chekhov story arrived I saw my first missing child. On a milk carton. And found a drowned rat in our pool."

I wanted to write this memo two weeks ago, but I couldn't do it without first rereading "Rivkala's Ring." I don't know what happened to my dog-eared, highlighted, marginalia-ridden copy or I didn't want to dig through boxes to find it. And I didn't have time to go downtown to the library before Heather and I went to Kansas City. And then we got drunk. And then I forgot all about it. Almost.

On Saturday, I found myself standing in front of the Evanston Public Library—well, blown there really by Santa Ana-esque winds, and the wind must have jogged my memory just as it was attempting to jog my feet from underneath me. I went in, took *Orchards* off the shelf, found myself a copy machine, and spent a dollar copying "Rivkala's Ring."

It's funny reading something again for the first time nearly nine years after you spoke it aloud from memory. And it's funny reading something nearly nine years later and thinking that—at the time I was vaguely aware of the piece's significance to me, and I knew there was a reason—the show's director; Anton Chekhov; Mr. Gray himself; or even perhaps my own paranoid nature (which was not the least bit augmented by the amount of marijuana I smoked in college)—why my performance of "Rivkala's Ring" was the best performance I have ever given, but . . . It's funny reading something nearly nine years later and being able to look back and say I did this, that, and the other because of some words once memorized and spoken aloud.

And this memo was supposed to be about Spalding Gray, but somehow it's become a memo about me.

I had all these plans. I still have all these plans, and . . .

"The Witch" ends with the sentence, "The pain in his nose was soon over, but the torture in his heart remained." And "Rivkala's Ring" ends with the lines, "And beyond that, black black, dark black. Oh dark dark dark, forever dark. We all go into the dark."