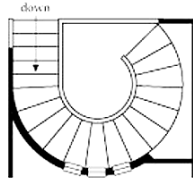


# to scratch an angel

containing the impressed history of a master's last hour,  
and – in its forceful brevity – projecting us  
to the limits of the actual world

original libretto & music by ari frankel



*Duration: app. 90 minutes without intermission*

PRIMO	lyric baritone
MESSENGER	countertenor
MOTHER, dbl. MELENCOLIA	mezzosoprano
WIFE, dbl. EUTERPE	soprano
DAUGHTER	soprano
CONCIERGE	mezzosoprano
SON, dbl. CADMUS	tenor
FATHER, dbl. Uncle & CRONUS	bass
NEIGHBORS	SATB ensemble

## SECTIONS

1.	Skin	<i>Neighbors</i>
2.	The Shave	<i>Messenger</i>
3.	Prelude	<i>Instrumental</i>
4.	Check/Mate	<i>Mother, Computer/Messenger, Primo</i>
5.	Oh, Primo	<i>Mother, Intercom Voice, Son, Primo</i>
6.	Home	<i>Wife, Daughter, Mother, Messenger, Primo</i>
7.	Dirty Feet	<i>Primo, Neighbors</i>
8.	Mail Dance	<i>Wife, Daughter, Primo</i>
9.	Not To Worry	<i>Primo, Concierge</i>
10.	Gray Zones	<i>Wife, Concierge, Neighbors</i>
11.	Living, But Not Alive	<i>Son, Primo</i>
12.	Walk In My Footsteps	<i>Primo, Neighbors</i>
13.	It Can. It Is.	<i>Messenger, Primo, Father</i>
14.	Like you, caro babbo	<i>Primo, Father</i>
15.	Sand	<i>Son, Primo, Cronus</i>
16.	Broken	<i>Euterpe, Neighbors</i>

- |     |                      |                                   |
|-----|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 17. | Point. Comma. Point. | <i>Melencolia, Primo</i>          |
| 18. | Afar [dust]          | <i>Neighbors</i>                  |
| 19. | Chemistry            | <i>Primo, Neighbors</i>           |
| 20. | Does Not Equal       | <i>Neighbors</i>                  |
| 21. | Some Never Do        | <i>Melencolia, Neighbors</i>      |
| 22. | Ask Me               | <i>Euterpe, Concierge, Cronus</i> |
| 23. | Arm Patrol           | <i>Messenger, Cadmus</i>          |
| 24. | Burning Coal         | <i>all but Primo</i>              |
| 25. | Non ne posso piu     | <i>Primo alone</i>                |



*Melencolia I, Albrecht Dürer*

*The stage is a 3-dimensional cut of Levi's family house. The different floors are visible. The Levi apartments occupy all of the third floor. Other neighboring apartments are also visible.*

*At its center is a wide, spiraling staircase, "hugging" an elevator shaft. The staircase has a low railing. At the bottom of the vertical, caged, elevator shaft, descending the middle of the stairwell, one also sees its well and bottom elevator door, and on the far left, the concierge's apartment door.*

*Alongside this center "column", there are projection screens / activity areas, that will allow virtual tableaux to be both staged/performed and/or screened. For example, when PRIMO falls, his "body", or morphed projections thereof, can actually be contained inside this elevator cage/shaft.*

*It is Saturday morning, April 11, 1987. As morning breaks, PRIMO is still asleep, in bed. The house awakens, as neighbors start their day. PRIMO awakens and rises.*

## 1. Skin *Neighbors*

[CREASE, CEASE,] DOUBT THOU THE STARS ARE FIRE;

*translation:*

[crease, cease,] doubt thou the stars are fire;

[CREASE, CEASE,] DOUBT THAT THE SUN DOTH MOVE  
[CREASE, CEASE,] DOUBT TRUTH TO BE A LIAR;  
[CREASE, CEASE,] BUT NEVER DOUBT I LOVE.

[crease, cease,] doubt that the sun doth move  
[crease, cease,] doubt truth to be a liar;  
[crease, cease,] but never doubt I love.<sup>1</sup>

NEL MEZZO DEL CAMMIN DI NOSTRA VITA  
MI RITROVAI PER UNA SELVA OSCURA  
CHE LA DIRITTA VIA ERA SMARRITA.

In the middle of the journey of our life  
I came to myself within a dark wood  
where the straight way was lost.<sup>2</sup>

GRAU, TEURER FREUND, IST ALLE THEORIE  
UND GRÜN DES LEBENS GOLDNER BAUM.

All theory, dear friend, is gray but the  
golden tree of actual life springs ever green.<sup>3</sup>

VERDE QUE TE QUIERO VERDE,  
VERDE VIENTO. VERDE RAMAS.

Green I love you green,  
Green wind. Green branches.<sup>4</sup>

TACITAE PER AMICA SILENTIA LUNAE  
VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST.

Through the amicable silence of the soundless  
moonlight<sup>5</sup> The word was made flesh.<sup>6</sup>

ON L'ENTERRA... AUX VITRINES ÉCLAIRÉES,  
SES LIVRES DISPOSÉS TROIS PAR TROIS VEILLAIENT  
COMMES DES ANGES AUX AILES ÉPLOYÉES...  
LES VRAI PARADIS  
SONT LES PARADIS QU'ON A PERDUS.

They buried him... in the lighted windows,  
his books arranged three by three kept watch  
like angels with outspread wings...  
The true paradises  
are paradises we have lost.<sup>7</sup>

*BATHROOM, in the childhood house where PRIMO was born (and to which he returned after the war). After brushing his teeth, PRIMO (late Sixties) proceeds to shave. MESSENGER, who may not yet be "visible", sings, mimicking, or shadowing, or guarding PRIMO, and his reflected mirror image.*

## 2. The Shave *Messenger*

MESSENGER: I come with whiskers rather short.  
I hate to shave, oh, help me grow.  
I know your time is in much demand;  
I only ask you to be my friend, with  
worlds colliding, cultures lost;  
have no control, find no God;

---

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.ii.115

<sup>2</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno* I. 1-3

<sup>3</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Studierzimmer*

<sup>4</sup> Federico Garcia Lorca, *Romance Sonámbulo*

<sup>5</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* ii. 255

<sup>6</sup> The Mass in Latin, *See* 71:27

<sup>7</sup> Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière* I, 1

be my savior: try it on.  
Oh, be my savior.

I come with questions, answer not.  
I come to hold you in my dark.  
The sheets are dirty, I care not  
My laundry's rich and full of stuff, so  
be my savior, try it on;  
wear the crown, wear the crown.  
Be my hero, one and all;  
be my savior.  
Shave me close.

The cream is burning from outside.  
The blade is bright and smooth and nice.  
With drugs available for free,  
I'm somewhat worried, wouldn't you  
be my savior, try it on.  
Be my savior, wear the crown.  
Be my hero, one and all.  
Oh, be my savior.

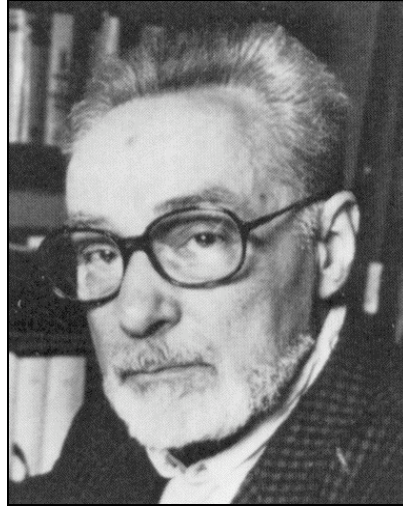
I knock, and wait, and watch TV;  
Play with computers in search of me;  
Life is fleeing, sleep no more;  
I'm always tired, so alone with  
worlds colliding, cultures lost;  
have no control, find no God;  
Be my savior.  
Oh, be my savior.

Be my savior: wear the crown.  
Be my savior: try it on.  
Be my hero, one and all.  
Be my savior.

I come with whiskers rather short.  
I hate to shave, oh, help me grow.  
I know your time is in much demand;

I only ask you to - - - shave me - - -  
shave me - - - shave me.

### 3. Prelude *Instrumental*



*As PRIMO finishes dressing, he moves into his STUDY, fixing his shirt into his trousers. Booting the COMPUTER, he searches for some notes. He launches a chess program, and sits to play "against" the computer. The COMPUTER's singing voice is the processed MESSENGER voice.*

### 4 . Check/Mate *Mother, Computer/Messenger, Primo*

COMPUTER: Your move.

PRIMO: My move?! Why, yes. You're right  
I must have dosed off; not quite awake yet.  
Queen takes Knight 4.

COMPUTER: Watch out. You'll score.

PRIMO: This house... This room. This game...

COMPUTER: Were you born here?  
What do you know?

PRIMO: One thing... one thing... [*frustrated*] I forget.

Your move.

COMPUTER: Bishop bows. Pawn is out. I have doubts.

PRIMO: How is that possible?  
I'll re-boot you and you'll know: doubts are human.

COMPUTER: Watch out, you men.

PRIMO: This house... This room.

BOTH: This game...

PRIMO: I write.

COMPUTER: You record.

PRIMO: I delete.

COMPUTER: Erase some more.  
Help me with this game.

PRIMO: Prostate pills – go away!  
Post-op was hard...

COMPUTER: Pawn takes White Heart.

PRIMO: Check?

COMPUTER: Check.

PRIMO: This house. This game...

MOTHER: *[from other room]* Primo!

COMPUTER: Who calls?

MOTHER: Primo!

PRIMO: Mother calls.  
*[toward Mother's voice]* I'll be...

COMPUTER: Right away you jump to her side!

PRIMO: What else can one do?  
What else would you do for an ailing mom?  
*[pause]* Check?

COMPUTER: Check-mate.

MOTHER: PRIMO!

PRIMO: Yes, mother. Coming.

*Rising from the desk, PRIMO slowly, with effort, turns towards his mother's room.  
On his way, the apartment's intercom buzzer sounds. He answers.*

### **5. Oh, Primo**

*Mother, Intercom Voice, Son, Primo*

*"I go to the door of my mother's room and  
I feel the weight of the whole world on me."  
– Primo to relative*

PRIMO: Prego.

VOICE: Is Renzo there?

PRIMO: No. He is Number Four.

VOICE: Sorry!

*Primo proceeds through the corridor, as the apartment door swings open.*

SON: Sorry, father. My friend pressed the wrong bell.

PRIMO: Not to worry, Renzo.

SON: We'll be in my flat for a while, if you need anything.  
Ci vediamo *[be seeing you]*.

PRIMO:               *[waving son away]* Ci vediamo.

*Passing through the landing, PRIMO transforms from a moral compass, from the celebrated guru of a writer that the world perceives him to be, into a controlled child, eager to please mommy.*

*MOTHER'S ROOM. Bedridden for months, with Primo's DAUGHTER at her side, the ill MOTHER complains. Seemingly senile and weak, she remains stubborn.*

MOTHER:           Oh, Primo, Primo.  
                      I've been calling you forever.  
                      Where have you been?!

PRIMO:             In my study, Mama.

MOTHER:           Why don't you answer?  
                      You don't care at all about me...  
                      It's only "work" with you!

PRIMO:             Sorry, Mama. I am sorry.

MOTHER:           *[answering, as if she was asked:]*  
                      Sleep? I had no sleep.  
                      All I had was pain.  
                      I want to go home.

PRIMO:             But, mother, you ARE home. We ARE home.  
                      This IS home. *(looking around at the room)*  
                      This has always BEEN our home.

MOTHER:           No, my words... you don't understand.  
                      You don't understand my words.  
                      I want to go to my true home.  
                      My home in the sky.

PRIMO:             Mama, what nonsense!  
                      Don't TALK like that.



w/SON: Don't talk

PRIMO alone: Like that.

MOTHER: Ah, it hurts!

TOGETHER: It hurts.

MOTHER: Yes, it hurts so much!

PRIMO: I'm sorry, Mama.  
Not our home. Not our home... What IS home?



## 6. Home

*Wife, Daughter, Mother, Messenger, Primo*

DAUGHTER: Home is often a thing you loose.  
Home is never a place you choose.

w/MOTHER: Home is maybe. Home is wet.

MOTHER alone: All my troubles begin in bed.

w/PRIMO: Home is throats that are seldom sore.

PRIMO alone: Home is freedom desiring more.

w/MOTHER: Home, I got'ch you.

Primo, Daughter, Wife: Home, you're it!

Wife, Mother: Please come closer; now retreat.

MOTHER alone [*half spoken*]: Home is mirrors that never, ever crack.

PRIMO [*spoken*]: Home, I've left you and now I'm back.

w/WIFE [*sung*]: Home is shelter. Home is clean.

WIFE alone: Children playing, mothers near.

MESSENGER: Home is where wings are hung to dry.  
Home is truth over many lies.

w/PRIMO: Home is beauty. All is well.  
You [*P: I*] move lightly within your [*P: my*] shell.

MESSENGER alone: Fly, fly home.

w/PRIMO: Fly, fly soul.

*PRIMO kisses MOTHER, who relaxes back into bed. He leaves her room slowly, shuffling his feet. As NEIGHBORS begin the hymnal "Dirty Feet", PRIMO freely, oratorically, recites:*

## **7. Dirty Feet**

*Primo, Neighbors*

I marched far away to the forest;  
I crawled close to the burning bush;  
I tried to aim, and then fire,  
but you never understood.

I was caught, and then I was tortured.  
Tested, again and again.  
Starving, dirty, abandoned  
by you, and by what some call Hell.

Oh, mother, your doorway s0 heavy;  
Its weight more precious then stones;  
*[linger, extend the end "s"]*

I have traveled the railways of Europe.  
Still carry the markings of war.  
But when violence let go, released me,  
both my shoes were too dirty for home.

Oh, mother. *[pause]*  
Your doorway. *[pause]*

I live but for life, and the others?  
Living with fears of regret.  
We love not for the sake of forgiving,  
but for the chance to crawl, dirty, to bed.

*WIFE appears from another part of the apartment, carrying a shopping bag.*  
*CONCIERGE begins to make her way up the stairs, carrying a bundle of mail.*

## **8. Mail Dance**

*Wife, Daughter, Primo*

WIFE: Primo, I am off for a short while;  
We need some vegetables and milk.

PRIMO: Very well, my dear. Very well.

*[quickly turns to Daughter as WIFE leaves]*  
Please answer any phone calls that may ring.  
I am going down to check for [any] mail  
That the mailman may bring.

DAUGHTER: But is it not always brought to you, caro babbo?  
Is it not always brought up to you?

PRIMO: Well, yes. *[hesitant]* It does not matter...  
But, yes, well, it IS a Saturday morning...  
Maybe. Yes, it will be easier if I, myself go...

DAUGHTER: Of course, caro babbo.

PRIMO: ... if I go myself.

DAUGHTER: Of course.

WIFE: So, I am off.

PRIMO: Very well

WIFE: Will you be alright?

PRIMO: Yes. Surely. *[pause]* You know...

WIFE: *[only slightly impatient]* What is it now?

PRIMO: We could brighten up this hallway a bit.

WIFE: What do you mean?

PRIMO: Paint. Change curtains. Add light.

WIFE: Primo, it's Saturday morning... Early Saturday morning.

PRIMO: I know, cara, but this has been on my mind for some time.

WIFE: Well, can we discuss this later?

PRIMO: *[spoken]* Sure. Why not.

*[softly]* Let's dance.

*Instrumental Dance/Dream follows. PRIMO and WIFE dance, awkwardly. This is a shared fantasy, imagining a spontaneous, expressive courtship they wish they had. Dance moves include spirals and dives. At climax, tango vamp/beat appears. Then, back to real life.*

*As music ascends, with basket in one hand, WIFE gives PRIMO a brief hug with her free hand. He shies away from the touch. She lightly waves goodbye, without speaking. PRIMO waves back, without speaking.*

*As WIFE descends, she passes by the CONCIERGE. She slows down, and will pause*

*at the landing, without yet exiting the building. Through the corridor, PRIMO passes his STUDY and reaches apartment door. As he opens it, the CONCIERGE reaches it from the other side.*

## 9. Not To Worry

*Concierge, Primo*

CONCIERGE: Oh, excuse me, Dottore Levi!

PRIMO: Not to worry, Signora Gasperi.

CONCIERGE: *[handing him the bundle]* Not much mail today, Dottore.

PRIMO: Not to worry.

CONCIERGE: Some days there's a bag, and other days there is almost nothing but catalogs and bills.

PRIMO: Not to worry. Not to worry.  
Thank you, Signora Gasperi.  
Thank you kindly.



Levi's terrace, street corner. Photo: Ari Frankel

*PRIMO waves, closes apartment door, and returns to STUDY. Absent mindedly, he draws the curtains and looks out the terrace, onto his street. The CONCIERGE begins descent, and duets with WIFE, who remained near building exit.*

## 10. Gray Zones

*Wife, Concierge, Neighbors*

WIFE: Raw emotions pouring out

to touch life; to bless this house.

w/ CONCIERGE: Pain above us, pain below.  
How I love him, he won't know.

CONCIERGE: Do I need him? More than air!

TOGETHER: Give me passion, or I despair.

Gray zones cover both our lives.  
Words of freedom never rhyme.

*NEIGHBORS hum a chorale ending, as WIFE exits and CONCIERGE descends and reaches her apartment. PRIMO turns back from terrace, returns inside, and sits to look through the mail while dialing a phone number. In another apartment, SON is also now seen, speaking to his visiting friend.*

## **11. Living, But Not Alive**

*Son, Primo*

SON: My father, he is not well.  
He is living, but is not alive.

PRIMO: I am living, but am not alive... *[repeat]*  
*[on phone]* Cara, how are you?  
*[sigh]* How many things we have done together.

You, you know by now.  
How by writing I found peace for a while,  
And felt *[myself]* becoming a man again,  
A person like everyone else; *[x2]*

w/SON: Neither martyr, nor debased;  
Neither martyr, nor a saint.

PRIMO: Cara, how are you?  
Here, it is over. Over.  
It is harder now than it was in the camp.  
I am worse than I was at Auschwitz.

So hard. So slow.

w/SON: I am living, but am not alive... *[repeat]*

PRIMO: Grazie... Tu sei molto gentile. *[pause, repeat]*

*PRIMO hangs up the phone. MOTHER calls from her room.*

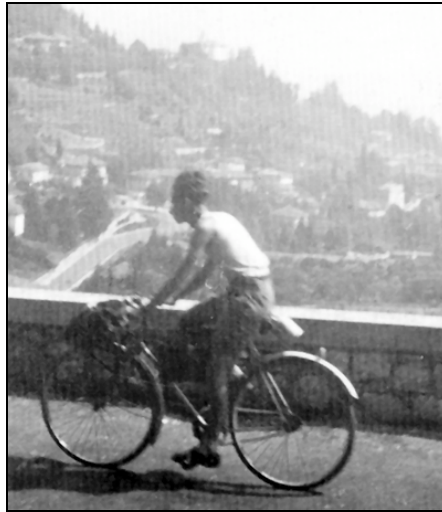
MOTHER: *[to the Daughter, angry]* Don't tell ME if I can call him or not!!  
*[towards PRIMO's study, loudly]* Primo!! *[pause]* Primo!!

PRIMO: Coming, mother! Coming.



*Exiting the study into the corridor, something shifts PRIMO out onto the floor landing. He is a bit unstable, holding onto a low section of the railing for balance. PRIMO presses down on the railing a memory illuminates itself in another part of the stage: VIRTUAL TABLEAUX: [MUSIC STARTS] Mountains, morphing from snow-covered Alps to Italian countryside ones*

*a young PRIMO (app. 8-11 years of age) is seen climbing, following in the footsteps of some friendly, strong adult. They are in full gear + hats. They hum/whistle a popular folk song, innocent, and happy.*



Levi cycling along the Italian lakes, 1941.  
*Photo: Bianca Giudetta Serra*

## 12. Walk In My Footsteps

*Primo, Neighbors - duration: 2'30"*

PRIMO: In 1927 or 1928, when I was eight or nine, my Uncle Oreste Colombo, an outdoors type, took me on strawberry picking expeditions

[+ NEIGHBORS:] in the hills above Torino.

PRIMO: "Walk in my footsteps", he would say.  
"Walk in my footsteps".

NEIGHBORS: In the hills above Torino.

PRIMO: "Walk in my footsteps".

NEIGHBORS: In the hills above Torino.

PRIMO: "Walk in my footsteps", he would say.

NEIGHBORS: In the hills above Torino.

PRIMO: Before long, I accompanied Uncle Oreste to more ambitious altitudes. These excursions greatly improved my physical confidence In The hills above Torino.



"Walk in my footsteps", he would say.

NEIGHBORS: In the hills above Torino.

PRIMO: "Walk in my footsteps".

*Video images slowly shift between another "walk in one's footsteps" memory, this one from Auschwitz, following Capo Alex's leather boots on the descent from the chemistry examination, noticing his own, unmatched foot rags...*

NEIGHBORS: In the hills above Torino.

PRIMO: "Walk in my footsteps".

NEIGHBORS: In the hills above Torino.

PRIMO: Many days later, I approached [+CHORUS] mountaineering with the seriousness of [+CHORUS] a vocation.

PRIMO: Walking in his footsteps. |  
| x3.5

NEIGHBORS: In the hills above Torino. |

*Lighting morphs back to the present day staircase of his home. Real Time = 10:16. The early hour, the pressure, and the anti-depressants are making the real PRIMO sway, back into his STUDY.*

MOTHER: [calling from her room]  
Where IS that boy?!

*"Uncle Oreste" is now seated in the study, a heavy coat covering his mountaineering outfit. The coat has many large pockets, stuffed with books. He is FATHER.*

### **13. It Can. It Is.**

*Primo, Messenger, Father - duration: 0'50"*

PRIMO: Father... It can't be!

MESSENGER: It can. It is.

PRIMO: Father... What is this?!

FATHER: We need to talk, my son.  
I've been traveling way too much.  
But you know I am always "there" for you.

PRIMO: Father, you're dead!

FATHER: Don't rub it in!  
Nobody's perfect.  
I know I was too old and distant, but...

PRIMO: This can't be...

MESSENGER: It can. It is.

*The confused, older, self-centered FATHER, hammers "Carmen" on a piano, while engaging in a fast, overlapping sprechstimme exchange with PRIMO.*

### **14. Like You, Caro Babbo**

*Father, Primo - duration:*

FATHER: Drink!

PRIMO: I don't drink, Caro Babbo [*Dear, Daddy*]

FATHER: Smoke!

PRIMO: I don't smoke, Caro Babbo

FATHER: Go with girls!

PRIMO: There ARE no girls!

FATHER: Reading, then? |  
| x4

PRIMO: Yes! Reading! |

FATHER: What's wrong with you?!  
You don't drink!

PRIMO: I don't drink, Caro Babbo. *[Dear, Daddy]*

FATHER: You don't smoke!

PRIMO: I don't smoke, Caro Babbo.

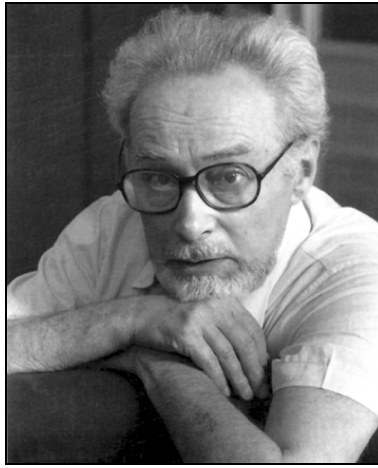
FATHER: You don't go with girls!

PRIMO: There...

FATHER: Well, at least you read. X8

PRIMO: *[overlapping]* I love to read, like you.  
Read, like you, caro Babbo.  
I love... like... you... I... love... to read.

*SON joins them in STUDY, and begins SAND. By tis end, he is morphed into CADMUS. FATHER morphs into CRONUS. By the time he himself sings, he will be pulling on curtains, walls, and bookshelves. Reality blends with depressed illusion, as walls and curtains, turn into mud and blood.*



Late 1986. Photo: Giansanti/Sygma

## 15. Sand

*Son, Primo, Cronus [Father] - duration: 3'00"*

- SON: Blood plays a game of hide and seek  
With your veins and with your needs  
If it goes – you loose;  
Stay – you win;  
Goes – you die;  
Stays – you live;  
Blood plays a game.
- PRIMO: Sand, sifting through your hands like lice.  
Follow my commands and see.
- w/SON: If you do – you win;  
Don't – you loose;  
Go – you die;  
Stay – you live;  
Sand plays a game.
- CRONUS: Mud mixes up the sand and blood;  
[w/SON, PRIMO] Dripping on the wall above.  
If it flows – you loose;  
Stays you win;  
Goes – you die;  
Stays – you live.  
Mud plays a game.

PRIMO w/SON:    Flows – you loose; stays you win;  
                         Goes – you die; stays – you live.  
                         Mud plays a game.

*VIRTUAL TABLEAUX: on a post-war wasteland, EUTERPE – previously WIFE - introduces the "journey"/mood. This character may also bring to mind the opening of Monteverdi's "Orfeo".*



*Euterpe by Roqueplan*

## 16. Broken

*Euterpe, Neighbors - duration: 4'30"*

Man  
is a bird full of mud,  
I say aloud.

– Anne Sexton, *After Auschwitz*

EUTERPE:        There is a square in black and white  
                         Where shots ring out throughout the night.  
                         Please help me; Please come  
                         to stop the violence of our tongue.

In a burning forest hides a pine,  
So no-one will forget your crime.  
Please help me; please come  
to join in writing of that time.

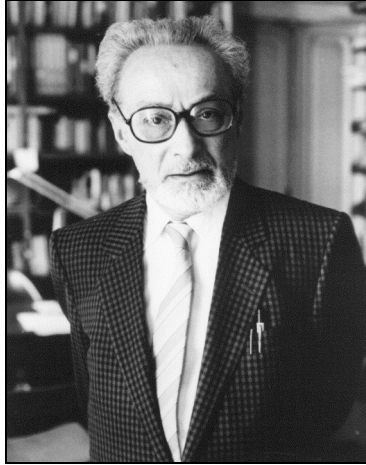
A train is flying off the track.  
All numbers carved into my back.

Please help me; please come  
and move my knight from where it lies.

+ NEIGHBORS: In a land where rules are broken, *[repeated, chorally built]*

EUTERPE: wearing robes all torn.

*LIGHTING now alternates on other areas, with images related to logic, formulas.*



### 17. Point. Comma.

*Primo, Neighbors - duration:*

NEIGHBORS: Point. Comma. Point.  
Point. Comma. Point.  
Point.

PRIMO: I wonder.

NEIGHBORS: Point. Comma.

PRIMO: Tired with all these...

NEIGHBORS: *[from sides of stage]* Try to be as scientific as you can

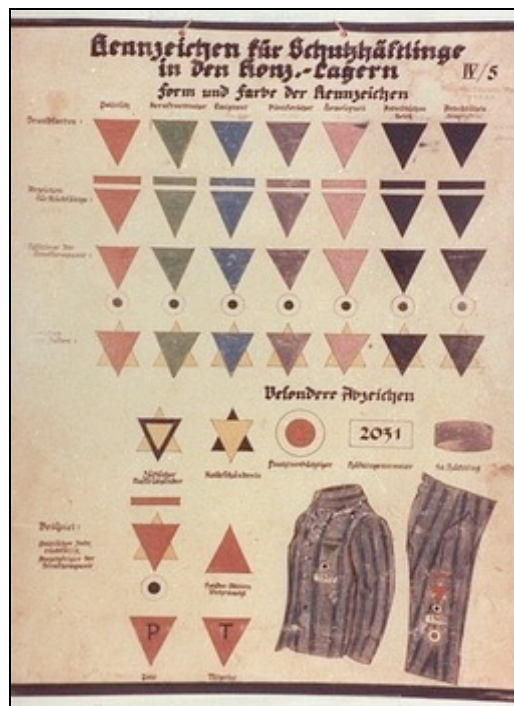
PRIMO: Tired with all these, from these would I be gone.

*The neighbor/ensemble may appear as fellow chemists or prisoners or patients,  
interpreting Levi's beloved Dante opening:*

### 18. Afar [dust]

NEIGHBORS: We know who you are.  
You are who we say you are.  
Afar el afar;  
Ki afar ata For dust thou art  
Vé-el afar tashuv. and unto dust shalt thou return.<sup>8</sup>  
Amen.

*Images morphs into articles of clothing, chemical symbols, and Nazi triangle marks, the actual PRIMO appears in another, virtual pseudo-lab setting.*



*Different Nazi triangle symbols, identifying the various enemies of the regime.*

The horizontal categories list markings for the following types of prisoners: (from left to right) political, professional criminal, emigrant, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexual, Germans shy of work, and other nationalities shy of work. The vertical categories begin with the basic colors, and then show those for repeat offenders, prisoners in punishment commandos, Jews, Jews who have violated racial laws by having sexual relations with Aryans, and Aryans who violated racial laws by having sexual relations with Jews. The remaining symbols give examples of marking patterns. *Photo: KZ Gedenkstätte Dachau*

*VIRTUAL TABLEAUX: PRIMO, in a torn (or clean?) lab coat, is at a lab table with a bunzen burner, tubes, and other science tools; it is not clear if this is his Turin paint factory lab, Auschwitz's exam, or a school experiment.*

## 19. Chemistry

*Primo, Neighbors - duration: 4'00"*

<sup>8</sup> The Old Testament, Genesis 3:19

PRIMO: Chemistry is clear, precise.  
Chemistry is verifiable.  
Chemistry is an essential, definitive system;  
A language that I like enormously.

There was a manual to be found in every home –  
“New Industrial Recipes” –  
explaining how one can prepare oneself,

+ NEIGHBORS: spiritually and physically,

PRIMO: so as to be in a state conducive to making an invention.  
I have a curious sensation;  
is there a plot at my expense?

+ NEIGHBORS: Here is the echo of great discovery  
Here is the echo of ecstasy.

PRIMO + VOX 2:	Chemistry is	<i>[voice 2: Emotion,]</i>
	clear, precise,	<i>[esthetic]</i>
	verifiable information	<i>[and poetic].</i>
	Chemistry is	<i>[A discovery]</i>
	a definite system	<i>[that takes];</i>
	A language that I like enormously	<i>[your breath away!].</i>

+ NEIGHBORS: All that can exist, exists. [x4]  
Chaos gave way to order;  
The indistinct to the comprehensible. [x4]

PRIMO: Chemistry is clear, precise, verifiable information.  
Chemistry is an essential, definite system;  
A language that I like enormously.

NEIGHBORS: *[whispering]* A discovery that can take your breath away. [x 4]

PRIMO: Here is the echo of great discovery.

*NEIGHBORS now appear to hold bunzen burners or candles. They may be survivors,*



or "gray zoned" compromisers, or scientists in the great lab that is life.



Primo in the lab.  
Photo: Giansanti/Sygma

## 20. Does Not Equal

Neighbors - duration: 2'00"

NEIGHBORS: Symmetry does not equal balance.  
Make the leap [with us] from  
Prosy symmetry into poetic balance.

And meanwhile, go on living, living and partly living.

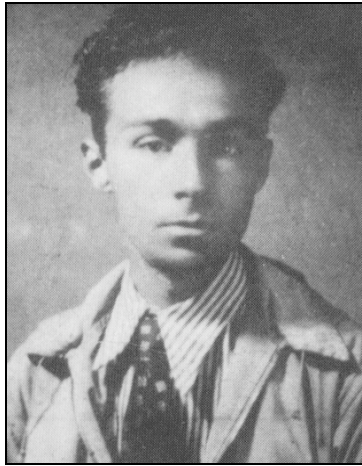
Belief does not equal faith.  
Make the journey [with us] from  
Greedy belief to pedestrian faith.

And meanwhile, go on living, living and partly living.

Just does not equal wise.  
Take the road [with us] from  
Cultural justice to inner-bound wisdom.

And meanwhile, go on living, living and partly living.

*VIRTUAL TABLEAUX: an old, poor, devout woman, slowly, deliberately, crawling down the church aisle, while murmuring her prayers. Is it MELENCOLIA en route to the altar? A parallel image will later appear, where PRIMO – alone, or with fellow prisoners/patients/inmates – crawl in a similar way, but not down an aisle, towards a fence, or towards barbed wire, or towards a lit entrance/exit.*



## **21. SOME NEVER DO**

*Melencolia, Neighbors - duration: 7'45"*

Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.

– Shakespeare, Sonnet LXVI

NEIGHBORS:     *[in background, as intro]*  
Strong. Weak.  
Strong. Weak.

MELENCOLIA:   A sign red; a seal said;  
Bang the dead slowly.  
Defend me, my memory;  
It all is true.

A thin sand; a hand wrong;  
Bang the dead slowly.  
I came first; I go last;  
Some never do.

NEIGHBORS:     Or mipinot heder; teva shakuf;

Mavet yasig otti, mavet katuv.

*(Hebrew: Light from room corners, transparent nature.*

*Death will take over me, written death.)*

MELENCOLIA:	A sign is; a seal is;	NEIGHBORS:	[in background]
	Bang the dead slowly.		Strong. Weak.
	To occupy; to not release;		Strong. Weak.
	Don't loose control.		[continue?]

But only; but every;  
Bang the dead slowly.  
I came first; I go last;  
Some never do.

NEIGHBORS: Or mipinot heder; teva shakuf;  
Mavet yasig otti, mavet katuv.  
*(Hebrew: Light from room corners, transparent nature.*  
*Death will take over me, written death.)*

*When MELENCOLIA finally reaches the altar she somehow partakes (alone, or in parallel, with the others) in a sort of communion, but instead of or in addition to the thin host, she digs into a round loaf of bread, accelerating with hunger, shoving more into her mouth, then stuffing pieces into her pockets...*

*MELENCOLIA now visually seems to be the bed-ridden MOTHER, as DAUGHTER begins "Ask Me". EUTERPE, and CRONUS join from elsewhere, "above"?*

## 22. ASK ME

*Daughter, Euterpe, Cronus - duration: 3'00"*

And I wander in a land of barren boughs:  
If I break them, they bleed;  
I wander in a land of dry stones:  
If I touch them they bleed.

– T.S. Elliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*

DAUGHTER: You ask me once, you ask me twice,  
You ask yourself a million times:  
Oh, how such things can happen.  
You search above; you search below;  
You search for someone who might know.  
But answers are not forthcoming today.

CRONUS:           And time moves on, and years will pass.  
                       More people may embrace these acts,  
                       As history repeats itself.

w/DAUGHTER:    You hope we learn. You hope we pray.  
                       But we're up here and you're down there,  
                       And animals will grow hungry for more.

EUTERPE:           No sticks nor stones will break my bones;  
                       The glass is hard, the wind is strong,  
                       And smoke will cover many.

w/DAUGHTER:    As birds - we sing, as stones – we throw;  
                       I fear you'll never really know.

w/CRONUS:         But answers are not forthcoming today.



*VIRTUAL TABLEAUX: PRIMO lies down, covering himself with a blanket.  
 Background/set transforms from mountain-top to camp bunks, or hospital beds,  
 or morgue drawers; with only a scrap of blanket to cover his ill, shaking body.  
 MESSENGER hovers over bed-ridden PRIMO.*

### **23. Arm Patrol**

*Messenger, Cadmus - duration: 6'00"*

MESSENGER:       As I land on your bed now,  
                       Hold your head in my hand,  
                       There's a breath in your lungs still;  
                       There is time for regret.

I don't want you to die now,  
But that's why I've been sent  
From the place some call heaven;  
The domain of the rest.

You are very afraid now.  
You are weeping alone.  
As I fly out the back way,  
As I go on patrol.

w/Cadmus: Rain is falling outside now,  
Rain is leaking inside,  
Through the walls of this cabin,  
Through the evils-in-kind.

MESSENGER: There's a number behind you.  
There's a number in front.  
Let's examine your arms, now;  
Connect all your marks.

w/Cadmus: Pain is falling outside now;  
Pain is leaking inside,  
Through the walls of this coffin,  
Through the bridges of sighs.

MESSENGER: As I land on your bed now,  
Hold your head in my hand,  
There's still bread in your pocket;  
There's no time for regret.

*PRIMO, at railing, loses his balance. The projected mountaineering, images return. The young PRIMO loses his balance on the mountain as well. MESSENGER watches over them both, but can't hold back any of the two. The young PRIMO jumps, or plunges, or falls/slips off the mountain. The actual, live PRIMO falls over railing, "plunging down" in ultra-slow-motion.*

*PRIMO's slow motion, tumbling fall to the ground lasts throughout the 7 minutes of "Burning Coal". Projected images can morph into colors, flowers, animals, uniforms, chemical elements, etc. Additional possible VIRTUAL TABLEAUX:*

*Passengers in a train. It is not Levi's crowded war travels; perhaps a latter return to Germany, or just one of many business trips. EUTERPE introduction may be underscored by train noise [audible using sampler playback].*



*R.B. Kitaj, "The Jew, Etc."*

## **24. BURNING COAL**

*everyone - duration: 7'30";*

*I sang to the moon the toad's liquid song,  
my constant hunger riddled wood.*

*– Primo Levi, Autobiography, Collected Poems*

EUTERPE: I will not adapt to anything.  
The ones who adapt to everything  
Are those who Survive.

w/MELENCOLIA: Most do not adapt to everything.  
Unable to adjust to trivial things

EUTERPE alone: And die like a pair of shoes.

w/CRONUS: A chemist is trained to interpret things.  
A substance can say the time is here.

EUTERPE alone: I leave you no hope.

w/MESSENGER: A country can be marked by certain smells.  
A land can often tell of secret things;

w/CADMUS: Toasted barley, burning coal...

ALL:                   We will not adapt to anything.  
                          The ones who adapt to everything  
                          Are those who survive.

EUTERPE alone:   Most do not adapt to everything.

*The virtual tableau on stage sides goes dark, as we return to the house set.  
Back in real time, PRIMO's actual body reaches and hits landing.*

*There is SILENCE, then there are the last words from PRIMO:*



*William Blake*

## **25. Non ne posso più**

*Primo - duration: 1'45"*

PRIMO:               Non ne posso più.  
                          I can't go on.

*PRIMO lowers his head, dead.*

*The CONCIERGE rushes out of her ground floor cubicle to see what the noise was.  
She sees PRIMO's body, next to the elevator shaft. She screams and runs to the  
citofono, the intercom system, at the entrance. She buzzes the SON's apartment.*



Levi's building buzzers. Photo: Ari Frankel

*translation:*

SON voice: Prego?!

CONCIERGE: Tuo padre...  
Si è ammalato...  
Ha avuto un incidente.

*Your father...  
He has taken ill  
He has had an accident.*

*Just then, WIFE returns with a full shopping bag. She enters, sees PRIMO's body and freezes.*

*As SON speeds down the stairs and reaches the landing, WIFE drops the bag. It holds bottles, eggs, and other breakables, which shatter loudly in the silence.*

*As the bag hits the floor and its contents shatter, the stage goes black.*

**CURTAIN, END**

e

Levi's grave, Torino. Photo: Ari Frankel