

CRITICAL THEORY - I

By S.R. Ayers

Winter 2009

PAGE ONE (6 panels)

Panel 1. Angus, a man of about 30 years old, sits in the alcove of a coffee shop in Vienna. The place is called Möbel, and there is artistic furniture and furnishings about the walls and floor space. It's dark and wet outside through the tall windows along one wall, and cigarette smoke softens all lines and edges. Two wide leaf trees stand sentry to this section of the café. Across from Angus' table is a table of young men and women, about 5, dressed in early winter garb. They are playing a game of 'Who Am I', in which they write the name of a famous character or person on a scrap of paper, pass it to the person beside them without looking at the name written on the scrap they receive, and stick it to their forehead. Then they go about deducing their new identities through a series of 'yes' or 'no' questions. Beside him is a table occupied by two women, one of whom in mid-motion of sitting down. And they are beautiful.

Angus is writing in a notebook, but at this very moment his eyes are closed and his head is held up, as though expecting the first drops of a summer rain to land upon his cheeks. On the small table before him rests a pouch of tobacco, a book of rolling papers, a book of matches, an ashtray, a small carafe of water, a glass, and a demitasse cup (empty). All of these details are laid out here for reference, I understand if every line of each item cannot be set in ink in this one panel. The only things that are relatively important in Angus' possessions are the notebook in front of him, the pen in one hand and a smaller pocket sized notebook in the other.

CAP/ANGUS: I pull as much of the atmosphere as I can straight up into my nose, timed perfectly with her passing.

Panel 2. Closer on Angus. A slight smile creeping into the corners of his closed mouth. His eyes are still gently shut. The woman has successfully sat down in her seat.

CAP/ANGUS: Vanilla and cigarettes fill the air she pushes my way.

Panel 3. A small panel. Angus looks her way, to see the face belonging to this aroma. Unfortunately she is sitting with her back to him. However, her friend is facing Angus, and looking up from her drink to catch Angus' glance. There is no emotion in her expression, blank, the face you give to a stranger who has just looked in your direction for a split second.

Panel 4. Another small panel, the same size as Panel 3. Angus is looking forward again, and the woman is looking at her vanilla and cigarette scented friend. No exchange made beyond the momentary eye contact.

CAP/ANGUS: But it's enough.

Panel 5. From whichever angle you see it best- Angus is now looking at the table young men and women playing 'Who Am I'. They're having too much fun to notice Angus.

CAP/ANGUS: These are the games I play now, collecting things nobody can keep, including myself. Collecting the moment of these things.

CAP/ANGUS: And *those* are the games that I used to play. Creating the moments people wished to collect. For a short time anyway.

Panel 6. A thin panel squeezed in beside Panel 5 and the right hand corner of the page. Very close on Angus, looking up from under his eyebrows. He's lighting a cigarette with a match, and most of his face, except for his eyes, are obscured with the initial drag of smoke.

CAP/ANGUS: Funny that I still can't find any sense of...regret.

PAGE TWO (4 panels)

Panel 1. Now we are at the center of the table, looking at the youngsters play their game, laughing, all of them with a scrap of paper stuck to their foreheads with spit. One man has just asked his question, his hands up and shoulders shrugged, a look of disbelief on his face.

CAP/ANGUS: Even though I sit here now with no family, by blood or by choice, not like times past. Sequestered from the world, *much* like times past. Questions and answers, and games and decisions, all said and done.

Panel 2. Angus is still staring at the game players. He's tapping the ash off the end of his cigarette, and handing his matches to a woman with an unlit cigarette between her lips beside him. She's reaching for them with a small smile of thanks.

CAP/ANGUS: And somehow it all ended up, all led to now, to this moment which I always saw coming.

Panel 3. The tall window behind the game players is shattering with devastating force, the plaster of the wall cracking and splitting, but not crumbling or giving way to the car that just crashed into the other side of it. The players are leaping away, startled beyond belief, as is everybody present, except for Angus, who is merely squinting his eyes so as to not get any debris in them. Also, all the scraps of paper come off the player's foreheads.

CAP/ANGUS: And even though I expected it to come to this, I could not even imagine what the trip would look like before it started.

Panel 4. All the scraps of paper are on the table, scattered amongst the glass and plaster and flecks of blood.

CAP/ANGUS: What the world would look like before we played that last game, that one last round. Which, oddly enough, I cannot take credit for.

PAGE THREE (full page)

Panel 1. Placement of scraps of paper lay on a table exactly like Panel 4, Page Two, but now there are more of them, and there is no glass, plaster and blood. They all lie on a completely different table too. An old table, worn at the edges. Small glasses of schnapps, in various degrees of empty & full. The lighting is from directly overhead, by a traditional hanging lamp with a stained glass cover. This is the old family cabin. Another difference in the scraps of paper is that instead of famous characters and people's names, there are the names of the Nicht Family: Angus, Benni, Sophia, Flo, Leon, Maggie, Christy, Lukas, Kassia. Detail: on Angus' scrap is a tiny skull & crossbones.

In the margin of the page, behind the panel itself, is a collage of family & personal effects and viscera, such as: butane lighters of various colors, ribbons stained with acrylic paint, a couple of wooden toy skeletons, old strips of film with dark landscapes in each frame, a tattered book of children's fairy tales, busted stoneware mug that's been glued back together, used pen nibs, a few feathers from different kinds of birds (some of them painted with water color paints), marbles, a pinecone, coins from many different countries and many different eras, and string, wool, and yarn unspooled and tossed about.

CAP/ANGUS: That was Sophia's province.