

VOLPI: 5s

The stage is set with a chalkboard on a hidden wall, or facing the stage. It's dank in there. Oil stains or puddles on the floor.

Volpi, a Brazilian artist who makes paintings with a little flag motif, is sitting on a stool with his back to the audience.

Between the scenes, the lights do not go out.

Scene I

Flags. Flags, motherfucker, flags! (Volpi turns 90 degrees CW). Oh, hello mother.

(Deadpan) Hello, baby John, you're a great painter. You're the best painter Brazil has right now. Everyone loves your paintings, everyone loves these little flags you're making.

(Facetiously) Oh thanks. I'm really into surrealist theater right now. (Volpi spins 180 CCW.)

What does that mean, sonny?

That means I can jerk off and suck my thumb and people will say ooh aahh ooh ooh ah ah.

Does it have to be good?

Not necessarily. That's what makes it beside reality. It can be laughable. If you're going to fuck it up, fuck it up huge. Look! (Volpi points around) Look! Look at the banks! (Volpi spins 90 CCW)

Volpi, how can you be so cute with your little flags and still prove to be a colossal idiot?

I thought you were on the side of truth and logic. That sounds like my mother-in-law. Or my wife.

(Simultaneous) Or your wife.

She loves the flags.

Charming lady.

Tell me about it. She's the one that makes me make flags. Really charmed me into it.

What does fire feel like, Volpi? What does fire feel like Volpi? What does fire feel like Volpi? What does fire feel like Volpi? (Volume decreasing until next line).

(Volpi lights a cigarette backward.) Inside or outside?

The crossing, the threshold, when the inside crosses the skin, or the outside burns to the bone.

(Volpi takes the cigarette and writes with it on the chalkboard)

Fire. Fire burning across skin.

(Volpi rips the burnt filter off the cigarette, lights the filterless cigarette and sits back down on the stool, Rodin-thinker style, at an angle towards the audience, looking at the chalkboard.)

Now shush for a second, I got something here.

(Volpi stares for as long as the actor feels comfortable keeping the audience holding.)

Orange. (Volpi spins away from the audience and blows a lot of smoke.) (Volpi spins 90 CCW)

Orange.... and red!

Can I interject?

(Volpi spins 90 CCW, facing audience) Nnnnnnn.....ot yet

Yes, right now, just for a second. Your mother's on the phone. Your mother-in-law, I mean. She needs to talk to you RIGHT NOW.

Tell her I love her but that I'm about to crack. And if I speak to her...

Motherfucker!

Flags. Red, red flags. (Volpi makes a W with his finger and squints through it. Volpi spins 90 CW, then 90 CW, then 135°CW then 90 CW and holds it there, wherever that is. Then Volpi loses interest.)

Volpi?

Yes, God.

Need a hand?

Sure.

Your mother's on the phone. She says your painting at the biennial was your best/worst one ever. She wants to know how you did it. She also wants milk and cats.

Oh, that makes sense.

End of scene I

Scene II

(Volpi is again sitting on the stool facing the audience)

Volpi, darling.

Yes, mother?

Your mother's on the phone. She wants to know if you've read the art papers.

Tell her I did. With the eye in my buttole. Tell her she's so mean and mean and mean that I don't even know what that means.

Tell her yourself. (Long pause) Volpi, dear.

Yes God.

You're not acting like the Greatest Brazilian Flag-Painting Modernist Zero I read so much about. Says here you're working on something different, something not flag related.

It's funny. I'm doing theater now. And it feels kind of like fire. Do you know fire, mother? Like the one you use to burn Romes with? It's like Mussolini, I want to raise the columns even higher, I want to skewer the earth with a grid of columns, a grid of doric columns, or whichever columns suit me that day. Better yet, wherever there are Roman columns in the world, I want them extended into space and through the earth, into the infinite.

There it goes again. (Like the REM song)

No, I mean, that's me acting. That was theater. I'm doing a play about Il Duce. I hope you're not offended.

Why would I be offended? I hated Mussolini. I still hate Mussolini. I've had fights with your friends about this.

Which ones?

Marinetti. You know, ever since his shrink prescribed him Ritalin, he's been making collages of his internal organs. They're quite dull.

Duller than flags? Duller than flags? Really? Can they really be duller than flags?

Your wife is here, she wants a word with you.

Yes, dear.

I'm going to sleep. I ate a Granny Smith apple and it made my eyes cry and then once my eyes teared up, and I started sweating, well, I just got tired. If it hadn't been for the day I went to the market and decided to start eating apples as a habit.

By that logic, if Nixon hadn't insisted on prolonging the Alger Hiss hearings, he would never have been governor of California and would never have been president.

(Tit for tat) If he hadn't married Pat.

Or if his brothers hadn't died of tuberculosis.

His mother was a saint.

No Watergate.

Boo-hoo. We would love the bastard.

White people. (singing) White people!!! White people!!! What's the matter with these white people?!!

Good night!

(Carried away) White people, white people.... Now shush for a second, honey... White people makes a lot sense.

End of scene II

Scene III

(Volpi is clearly on the toilet, constipated. He rocks back and forward and groans.)

Beautiful black vaginas. Burnt-down bars of Beirut. Very beautiful black backdrops. (Squirm)

Jesus Volpi!

Come to me, put some pressure on me, my dear.

Touch you?

Touch me here, touch me here, touch me here and touch me here.

I'd rather not. I have a message for you. It's from—

Don't say. It's from my wife's mother-in-law. It says she's at the grocery store. It says she's eating bananas.

No, it's from Volpi, the Brazilian painter. The other Volpi, the one you replaced.

Oh, brother!

You know, one night, when I was married, I stayed up late while watching TV. I was eating bananas. You were born a few days later.

I'm a little banana. (Volpi picks up pants, sits back down.)

OK.... Are you feeling the fire, my boy? Feeling the fire in your...

Don't ask. I don't know where.

I've got someone to see you.

It's the...

Black man you know.

Black man I know, hey, black brazilian artist! How goes it on your side, so full of melancholy and laughter. Ha ha ha ha.

Black people, you know, black people in this country.

I know, I know. It's the blood of this nation. But I'm on an different kick these days. Black comedy. Black comedy, man.

That's theater brother. And isn't all that for snakes?

It's for flimiser people than you, slither, slither.

You know that mother of yours makes the best chocolate cakes.

Get out of here!

Serious.

Seriously, though, what kind of work are you making? Who are you working for?

Your mother.

Puh! Portrait? (Pause.)

For what, sonny?

Rats!

Even though you like making paintings?

Under my dead body?

Dead! Who said anything about dead? Ok, chill out, young man.

Young man, I'm playing Volpi at 62!

I'm older than you.

Oh, brother.

What does that make you, then?

My sister-in-law.

The mighty oak.

The mighty oak, the mighty acorn. The mighty cocoa bush. The mighty palm. The mighty palm nut.

One heart of palm.

Back... and forth, but not too far. These new ideas I've been having, everything feeds right back into them. You're part of them.

Oh, bye. (Volpi does a spin around the stool, stopping at every right angle.)

Hello dear.

Oh, hello, dear. Why did you come to my studio?

To issue you with this ultimatum. Biennial or die.

By any, all, Lord, I. You know what kind of pressures that going to put on me. I won't be able to live them out in the next act.

It's the threat of your life.

It's not. But those walls, in that space... I don't know how my flags will look there like that.

Your...?

Theater! Surrealist theater! Freudian slip. Those walls... (Vopi drifts off for a bit)

Hello, Volpi's subconscious, I'm going to tell you all the secrets that I can't tell you in person. Volpi is not doing well, he's really always been a washout. You can't listen to him. He thinks he does a great job, he thinks these flag paintings are modernist when they're like, so kischy! Ha Ha Ha ha. He doesn't even understand kitsch. So don't count on him to tell you what's up. He couldn't explain his paintings to his brush. Ha ha ha ha. Ok. Where was I?

(Volpi falls off his stool) Shit!

Y'all right honey?

Sugar, I'm good. Hold on a sec. (Volpi thinks a bit)

Been reading much?

A little here a little there. Some, uh, Polish—

Polish!

—vodka labels. Not much. I've been too busy trying to figure out the next step of this thing.

The next step of the banana thing?

Right, banana, old, brown, black. Wait, get out of here!!

End of Scene III

Scene IV

Sometimes I wonder why I keep doing this. This isn't going anywhere. I have to be the first person to see that. Me, first.

No, me first, then you.

What do you think of this one? (Volpi points around)

The theater or the painting?

Theater? Oh, right, no, the theater I'll have to show you later. For now, you'll only get snippets.

The painting...

It locates the issue precisely where I want it: a dialogue of culture, form, history, present, color, intent.

...it bores me.

Same old, same old, huh?

Well... actually, it's kind of growing on me. It's like a little folk painting, but with stuff like blocked out so all we see are these little darling flags of yours.

Yeah, yeah, wait, no. The flags are incidental, they stand in for form of any kind. They are essential, they are the square missing a quarter, it's a form that reverberates through our land and experience. It foretells the future!

The future bores me.

(Resigned) The future bores me too.

And this piece?

Bores me to pieces.

Too...

Surfacey. (Rubs his chin, tsks, sighs)

("Working on a Groovy Thing" comes on, cuts abruptly)

(Volpi works feverishly on the chalkboard)

End of Scene IV

Scene V

(Applause)

(Volpi walks to the stool) Volpi comes back!

Hahaha, very well, my boy. Too bad there was little jab in the critic's review.

What do you mean, little jab? It was all, *I love it, I love it!*

Volpi. Be sensible. No review can be that good. Open your eyes, dear.

Open my eyes? Brother! Today is a bad day, you say?

Just sit back in your studio. Look at what you ended up leaving out of your show. You thought you were taking a risk with those and people ate them up. You could've pushed them so much further. What about that one and the other one? Oh, and remember that one?

(Volpi looks around himself, trying to ke

Well, maybe in my next show at the gallery, I'll knock 'em dead.

Biennial, sonny, this was the biennial. This is where you're supposed to carry the banner of this country—

—flag—

—and show the world where the future of this country is.

The future of this country is...

In the future,...

The future of this country is...

In the future,...

Yes, in the future, the future of this country is...—

—it's in the future, I'm telling you. You can trust me on this one.

I see what you mean. The older I get, the further I move from something.

It's receding into the distance, I know. You can depend on me. I'm right here.

In my ear. I know, you don't have to remind me. You, of all things, are the one thing that gets closer. Like Mount Fuji.

I am the Inner Hack of every artist. I have to pay the college bills of my degenerate children.

You are not! I trust you, you're my friend. You work with me. You store all my memories, of my conquests and good moments.

Predictably, your father wants a word with you.

Yes, Dad-o?

Son, you did good. Come see me nex- nex- some time.

That's it?

(Silence)

That's it. Anything from my mother?

(Silence)

Any word from my wife?

Of course, darling, I'm the one you can count on. I can see you've been struggling.

You look different, sweetheart, what's it been, like, a few weeks?

I went to Hungary. It's like no place you can imagine.

Really?

The language there is like no other language in the world.

Except for Finnish!

End of Scene V

Act VI

Oh hello Volpi.

Hi, mother.

Your children are here to see you.

What does that mean? What kind of time has passed here?

Hi dad.

Hi Junior. How's the...

Golf Pro business? It's good. Going to be in a match play tournament in a few weeks. Making quite a bit of money at the club teaching the members' sons and daughters. Sis is here. Hi dad.

Hi honey, how's your painting career going?

I'm really into dance right now.

Performance?

No, dance, dancing. Dancing in my room, and, little by little, dancing around the world.

Hm.

I don't document it, I just dance around.

Hm.

(Pause) You know what missing from all this, dad?

Hm?

You know, a sense of connection, a sense of direction.

A nude erection?

(Both) Oh papa!

There is only one direction, towards the end.

(Both) Oh papa!

Hm.

We can always start now!

Start now!!? Start now!!? Oh darling, I wish you were here more often. (Volpi turns away from her and goes to work.)

Thanks dad. I'm out.

Mr President!

The president of the Federative Republic of Brazil, flourish, Volpi, an honor!

The honor, Mr President, I assure you,—

Is yours, agreed. Volpi I'm here because your mother and father sent me.

I know, they warned me in advance. It's a comission, you want the colors of the flag.

Agreed.

They said it was a rumour, but what they told me was that you were going to stage a coup d'etat and you want to wrap your head around this painting for the public to see.

Agree! That's a great idea. You don't mind, do you?

Oh no! That would be—

Your honor.

Oh God!

Yes, Volpi?

Did you hear what the president said? It's...

A sucker's serve.

When I have settled on a color, when I have figured out the color that I'm going for, that I'm going to try to investigate, then everything afterwards is a whole lot easier. It just kind of comes out. But it comes out the same way. Smarter and older, funner and older.

Oooh, that's harsh.

More of the same. More of the same. 4 more years of more of the same.

4 more acts.

4 more gestures.

Pink?

Pink.

Black?

Black.

Red?

Got it. And yellow.

Skin, I like it!

Sure, I will go with it. But before, let me question it intensely for a while. I feel like I haven't showered, maybe I should take a shower first.

Skin... I like it!

Skin.

Skin.

Skin.

End of Scene VI

Scene VII

I need some credit. I don't know who else to turn to.

I'll give you all you need. How much credit do you want?

I want it all. Oh, thank God, you're around. I mean, thank you, Satan.

What's in it for me?

I'll give you some flag paintings.

(Silence)

Someday, I will be famous, you can bet on it.

Sweetheart?

Yes, dear.

Your mother is here, she wants to scorn you.

Send her in.

Hi mom, check out this new painting I've made: I've incorporated suprematism into the national fabric of—

—it's crap!

Yeah, I have to find another way of talking about these delightful little shapes, so positive and negative, masculine and feminine—

—zis is crap, Fredo.

But mama!

Fredo.

Get my real mother in here!

Hi son.

Hey mom, this is getting kind of painful, for everyone involved. I think it's time we end it.

Not yet: Purple.

Oh, FUCK YOU!

End of Scene VII

Scene VIII: The Final Scene

(Volpi is scribbling away mercilessly at the chalkboard)

In the end, the character of Volpi picks up a gun and points it at his head. He has written no note, no nothing. He picks up the gun and, boom it goes off. The audience is baffled: actual brains are on the stage. Volpi had seemed perturbed, but not that much. He always seemed to be someone with not enough emotional depth to suicide. His wife says it must've been an accident. Someone replaced a stage gun. Someone planted a real gun and Volpi, the actor, not Volpi the writer, pulled the trigger.

That would only generate confusion.

Precisely. A murder mystery.

But why? Why do you... wait... what is this? (vomits out:) Fredo, mio figlio.

Si mama?

What will you-a be someday, you think?

Why, mama, sarò uno playwright. A cheesy one. Fromaggio.

Perché cheesy? Perché fromaggio?

Cheese, mama, is the glue, mama. Yellow, light yellow, white, cheese. Fromaggio, mama. Fromaggio.

Fredo, you make me very proud. What is this you're working on?

Mother, it's a painting. It's nothing.

Nothing? It's beautiful!

Thank you, mama.

Wrap it up!

Shh! I'm having a tender moment. So you like this painting, mother?

It's marvelous. It's amazing. It's the best thing I've ever seen, my son. Since when have you been painting?

This is my first one. I envision a whole series. I envision many many like this to come.

Marvelous! An artist in the family!

Hmm? Yes. But the play is where it's at. My focus is 100% on the play. The painting is a side project.

What is the play about?

A man gets married, struggles to make paintings, sells his soul to the devil, MAYBE.

This is your first play?

Yes. It's not very good. Would you like to read it? No, right? Good. Good.