

A fluorescence microscopy image showing a dense network of neurons. The neurons are stained with two different dyes: one in bright green and another in bright red. The green-stained neurons have long, thin processes extending across the field of view, while the red-stained neurons are more numerous and appear as smaller, more rounded cell bodies with shorter processes. The background is dark, making the glowing structures stand out.

**Versuche: 25**

**Kinski in Kanada (Playlet)  
[c. 1999]**

KLAUS AND CHRISTOPHER

*An office, noncommittal, more or less bare except for a desk and two chairs; on the desk are two or more books, one a "manual." There is a chart, or perhaps a screen, on which appear blueprints for a building. Presently the chart is covered (or the screen is blank). (This last object is optional. The actors can merely gesture toward it when the time comes.)*

*Klaus, the interviewer, is dressed in a casual, conservatively dandyish business outfit and sits behind a desk. He leans over a pair of stapled sheets of some gaudy color like lime green or salmon. Christopher, the interviewee, is on the other side of the desk, dressed similarly if with a slightly more roguish and younger look.*

*However, for the first four lines of the scene, they are nose to nose over the desk, staring each other down like rabid dogs...*

Klaus: *(threatening)* I know your type.

Christopher: *(threatening)* And I know yours.

*(pause)*

Klaus: Where then would you go with that? Could you go out the door?

Christopher: I could go up or dowager, over or outlandisher. I could muscle through like John Henry's hammer, or lumber beside like a Communist Party Animal. The point is: I'm not you.

*(they both relax into the postures described above)*

Klaus: Welcome to Spectacular Decor, Christopher.

Christopher: Glad I found your building! It's bright out there – the windows are flooding the turnpike with light. I almost missed my exit!

Klaus: Thirty-eight floors of atracite, paper and purple glass. Classic International Style – the first right here in Kelowna, BC. But you'll learn all about the building later.

Christopher: OK.

Klaus: Fine.

Christopher: Good.

*(Klaus examines resume)*

Klaus: So, you know Microsoft Word 7.0, Frontpage 6.1, Adobe Photoshop 6.0, Illustrator 5.2

Christopher: 7.2, 6.4, 6.3 and 5.4 respectively... That *(indicating sheets)*, that hasn't been updated.

Klaus: I see. Macromedia Freehand 4.3, Fireworks 3.2, Flash 5.4

Christopher: Uh, 5.4, 4.2, and MX... I also know Dreamweaver MX, and generally work on Windows XP or Mac OSX, second release. I... I just put Linux on my laptop.

Klaus: *(scribbling on pages)* Huh! Adobe Dimensions 3.0, Adobe Pagemaker 4.3, Adobe Premiere 4.3, Final Cut 3.0...

Christopher: Yes, and Aftershock 3.0, Distiller 2.3, ProTools 3.4 (free edition) and Quark 3.0. Didn't get that down yet...

Klaus: I see. Ok, let me make these fixes.

Christopher: Fine.

Klaus: Just a second.

Christopher: I'll wait.

Klaus: One moment.

Christopher: In no rush.

Klaus: (*shaking wrist*) Oh, this damn wrist!

Christopher: Carpal tunnel?

Klaus: Not in the garden swinging the hoe!

Christopher: You've been taking swings at your ho'?

Klaus: What?

Christopher: Humor.

Klaus: I'll forget I never heard that.

Christopher: (*sings*) "The walls have ears. Your ears have walls." Hee hee.

Klaus: We've got a lot of work to do. No time to challenge decorum.

(*Klaus writes*)

Christopher: (*to audience*) Let me get back to this issue of belief. I've air-guitared my misery to thousands of shoppers before you... this is just the five-item-or-less-aisle version, the radio mix where they butcher the organ solo to get it under two minutes eleven... the one from the Irish karaoke bar, the one from Fox TV, the one missing the cameo by a 19-year old Harrison Ford, fresh off his success in Star Wars, left in frames like black snowflakes on the cutting room floor. The miniature you can put on a shelf, like a kitten yet undefiled by the mature proportions of catness. What kind of job can I get, just sashaying off the turnpike like I own the palace – is it three-thirty yet? Isn't the teacher going to tell us we can go? But I'm staying after, again?

Christopher: I don't think you like me very much.

Klaus: I ask the questions here.

Christopher: That wasn't a question. That was only a reflection on your attitude. You're harboring some sort of disgust for me, aggravated by my present position of having to appeal to you for help.

Klaus: Please, we just met!

Christopher: We're like this again.

Klaus: I told you to be patient. Let me correct this.

Christopher: (*to audience*) Yes, there's more of that in my mind... more of such speaking attitude. You can put away your pens, I'm starting where I began.

Christopher: Muffmuncher 4.0, Sodabelcher 3.4, Bellybutton 1.2, Stumpmaster 8.3, Chilipacker 1.2, Vicepreacher 3.2, Darthvader 12.3, Kindergarten 3.5 and Betweentheears MT!

Klaus: You really know what you're talking about!

Christopher: I'm a Groucho Marxist.

Klaus: You're just like me. You don't like the new smoking laws.

Christopher: I'm full of spite. I think too much of myself. Insolence is the new revolutionary weapon. "The new white meat."

*(Klaus finishes writing)*

Klaus: Ok. So we're up to speed. Your last job was as a web designer for...

Christopher: Penthouse Magazine. Couldn't take it anymore.

Klaus: What do you mean? Looking at all those dirty pictures?

Christopher: Dirty plastic. We just collected credit card numbers from seedy insomniacs and tried to sell them... suspicious enhancers... through the internet. Not enough dirt at that office to keep a cactus stiff.

Klaus: Drive the morality police out of your head?

Christopher: Drive? On rudderless ten speeds!

Klaus: Ah, the blind biking the blind...

Christopher: Touché! But only until dinner time.

*(Klaus writes)*

Klaus: Why'd you leave your home?

Christopher: I had certain attitudes about war that I tried to explain to my parents who, even then, were totally against it: I said: "think of how the rage of dust compares to the surety of bombs." I would express this in compact sentences – baby steps – I know they were allergic to my superhuman hyperbole. Much more than they could handle. I was wrong to start it! But if, by evening, we weren't at each others throats, that somehow was confirmation that time patronized everyone equally – like healthcare for fists – until they found their own singular denouement, or spoke in their own tastelessly souped up brogue that was incessantly rich, but impenetrable to anyone not from the neighborhood. Or – still alive – that we just weren't paying attention: I wasn't a son.

*(still impassive, Klaus writes)*

Klaus: Sports?

Christopher: None.

Klaus: Shave?

Christopher: Frequently.

Klaus: New shoes?

Christopher: I'm not much for shopping. My girlfriend holds my hand.

Klaus: What makes you think you'll fit in here?

Christopher: I'm not quite sure, but once I get in, I'm pretty sure I won't be seen.

Klaus: Oh, you'll be seen. We pay attention. We'll know what you *type*.

Christopher: That's not being seen. That's seeing what I'm seeing. Not the same thing.

Klaus: To see what you see is the same as being seen.

Christopher: But seeing *what* I see is not seeing *how* I see.

Klaus: But you'll be looking at nothing, which is much the same thing. You see?

Christopher: I see what you mean. But I don't expect I'll be seen. Maybe needed. But not seen.

Klaus: And when you're needed, will you respond?

Christopher: That's between me and my dog. But to all outward appearances...

Klaus: Can you believe that there are still...

Christopher: Christians?

Klaus: No, appearances.

Christopher: Good question. You're good at begging questions!

Klaus: Things are not looking good for you halfway through this interview.

*Pause as Klaus writes. Loud hum or music that makes Klaus appear uncomfortable.*

*The Lady Quay Jessica, an ancient woman in a hodgepodge of clashing summer patterns, briefly appears onstage, scratching a Lotto card and trying to shield her eyes from the sun.*

*Christopher catches sight of her, cannot draw his eyes away, but as she disappears he snaps out of it. Klaus took no notice.*

Christopher: Do you mind if I... scratch?

Klaus: Go right ahead.

Christopher: *(scratches behind his ear like a dog)*

Klaus: What do you know about... phonology?

Christopher: "O" versus "ö" – "A" versus "ä" – "U" versus "ü" – that malarkey?

Klaus: Do you have a command of the "French style" of thinking.

Christopher: "Under the paving stones, the beach!"

Klaus: Fetishes. Tell me about your fetishes.

Christopher: *(embarrassed)* Buttermilk statuettes.

Klaus: What are your views on the country joining the European Union?

Christopher: Be the best thing for our banana firms!

Klaus: Ever had an epiphany at a track meet?

Christopher: "Grub Worm Cinema." Worse ten hurdles of my life!

Klaus: At a laundromat?

Christopher: But I didn't approach her.

Klaus: Playing bone harp in a klezmer band at the Walmart in Flint, Michigan?

Christopher: The satellite dishes were on sale... I couldn't help it! How did you find this out about me?

Klaus: Oh, Isherwood's *Prater Violet*. *(lifts book)*

Christopher: Under the paving stones, the beach. Under the elephantine hide, the bleach of mammalian ink.

Klaus: Tendentious.

Christopher: Patent leather purple.

Klaus: *(reading)* No sports, no buns. Ho hum.

Christopher: Ah nerts, this guy's no fun.

Christopher: *(to audience)* They didn't have jobs that snapped them back to attention like a bunji chord – or hangman's noose. What kind of job can I get – in Canada! – all Marloned up like this? Is it three-thirty? Isn't the teacher going to tell us we can go? But I'm staying after, again? I kid you not: the rage of dust to the surety of... bombs? Or the jerking of privates on naval charts? But love is not dignified – it's only the best who can make it's walnut breads more than absurd. I loved that son. That son

was beautiful. That son that my mother saw crawling up the crib – who shaved all of his teeth down at the age of sixteen to get a complete set of porcelain crowns, picket-fence smile like a Polish Julio Iglesias – destined to break free of Berlin and be a star. I know... I don't sleep... don't make much sense... there's big trouble in my Little China... there's halaciousness in my hips. But I have a memory of things having been much better: Violet shafts of light cutting across yellow walls. A single vaginal bee fluttering tirelessly in this luminescent, lumpen spa. And me, spending hours there, watching it, waiting for, waiting for... my mother? Oh, someone with that obviously fashionable sense... to arrive... too... late. A moist, sour taste in the mouth. Satisfaction of three square, and evenly devoured, and easily evacuated, meals. A train station in topical, Frankfurt light. A costume of impeccable, class-hatred beige. I could lose myself in that color, that sound, that taste of pretzels and beer. I hadn't allowed kitch into my stable of effects. Minhoi, are you listening? And my little prosciutto, Nastassja? Are you done rising through the mainlining mists of Vietnam? Will I see you when I close my eyes tonight?

Klaus: Ok.

Christopher: What?

Klaus: You got the job.

Christopher: Great!

Klaus: Congratulations.

Christopher: Thanks.

Klaus: Time to come out of space-time.

Christopher: You're speaking my religion!

Klaus: Now for your training. You might need a pen for this.

Christopher: This one's on me. *(produces pen)* You take the coaster for a ride.

*Christopher stands up, lifts the cover from the board that was near the desk, exposing a top-down perspective blueprint for one of the floors of the building. It is squarish, has red squares near each of the corners, a series of black squares in the middle that are the elevator shafts. There are also, scattered around, things that look like staircases. If no such prop is available, then miming its presence is just as good.*

*Christopher takes sporadic notes throughout this monologue.*

Klaus: Ok, before we start, take a deep breath – yes, that's right – and throw away all of your preconceptions. Don't remember a thing you've ever heard about Spectacular Decor Limited, any of the commercials, products, furniture, celebrity divorces, news of the bailout – nada, nichts. Forget about the Kwanzaa parades, the President's ovarian cancer, the class action suit in Ulan Bator, just pretend you don't know. Clean the slate, reformat the hard drive – like Hal singing "Daisy" at the end of "2001," get it? Cause there's a lot you've got to learn, a lot to download, and I don't have all day. It's almost three already.

*(a loud hum like earlier)*

Argh... *(recoils slightly)* the Blim Blim Splitter must be malfunctioning... Uh, nothing.

*(hum recedes)*

Ok, about the headquarters, your “field of employment” as we like to call it. The building looks like your run-of-the-mill International Style glass box on the outside, but it’s got a functional... a *recombinatory* element that you can’t see. The design – Samuel T. Gorkweller, a protégé of Corbusier’s and peer of Constant’s, created it in 1959 – is based on a rare geometric shape called the “hypercube.” H-Y-P... you don’t have to know what that is – “applied utopianism” – like black and white strawberry sorbets for the colorblind, or his and her blow-up urinals – that was a non-starter in every part of the world except here. They got a ton of them in Prague.

It looks like a building, but it’s not a single building at all, rather a series of identical cube-shaped offices that are fitted into each other, like Lego blocks – I mean, they’re all screwed together, just that each one’s self-sufficient, it’s own... biosphere, if you will. Their own plumbing, heating, electricity, etc. But like geese in a “V” – when you shoot a rifle at them, they all fly away like they never heard of a “V” or met the guy flying next to them – where’s the “V,” I didn’t see no “V” – they can separate, become their own self-sustaining worlds. But we don’t want to talk about that, that’s sci-fi.

Well, we’re stuck with the design. It was cheap, nobody wanted it.

Just keep this mind. If you can, the job will be a lot easier for you.

In each corner of every floor of the building there are way stations – we call them “Charlies” – that have corridors that transcend the floors they are on, so that this one (*points to one red black, then lifts sheet*) and this one (*points to another red square*) connects with (*returns sheet, points*) this one, this one with (*lifts two sheets, points*) this one, and this one (*returns sheet, points*) are connected – you use them to get around, from floor to floor, kind of like shortcuts except that you’re actually moving *out of space*. It’s not just a quick way to get from one floor to another, but a way to get *above time itself*. No time, no space – no long, no short – your brain does the leg work! It helps when you’re working in a thirty-eight floor building with no elevators!

This is all made possible by electromagnetic fluxions in the energy fields around the building that Gorkweller channeled into the building itself – kind of like a tributary of the Oregon Vortex, but much stronger – so you get more than pet tricks like eggs rolling uphill but – at least here – a way for employees like you to get around without getting a coronary. Don’t worry about the details, it’s all in the manual. Think of it like a train system, but three dimensional, with transfers on certain floors – like an algorithm that guarantees maximum efficiency in your work and increases your chances of finishing your duties by the end of the day. Only in this case, *you’re* the algorithm. You’re *in the program*. Get it? It’s very smart.

Now, there’re some twists though. You got things you got to look out for.

You see the blueprint. There are a few things I have to tell you about the life inside of it.

This corridor (*points to blueprint*), corridor 7, on the 8th floor, that's where the Ramsey Helions are – that's the sun-worshipping cult that was exiled from Georgia in the “post-‘me’” eighties – you've probably seen them on 60 Minutes. Yeah, they got a chapter in here – shaving dogs to look like Cubist hedges, swinging their bamboo bats and playing whisper music on scratch glass. They drink a glass of snake urine everyday in a bid to outrace modernity to Paradise Alley – don't ask me, I'm not one of them. Just remember, they don't like to have any noise outside their doors between four and five in the afternoon – that's when they do their pee ceremony, and play their scratch instruments, which I guess are hard to hear if there's anyone around. If you're outside their door, vacuuming, sweeping, whatever, they throw a hissy fit. You don't want to see that cause it doesn't smell like chicken. Anyway, just keep away from there, whatever you do, from four to five – that's *every day!* Capiche?

Over here (*gestures*), nothing so extreme – just a problem with the magnetic fluxions. Remember to wear the rubber boots all the time. This corridor and this one (*lifts three sheets*) exchange places at any odd hour – it's unpredictable – if you're in there when one of these matter transfers are happening, you're going to find yourself standing in two or more feet of viscous wax – kind of like what you get in the inner ear if you've been the ocean too much. A toxic ragout – sludge juice, we call it. This is caused by a gravitational pull on all the liquid solids in the building, making them converge on the insecure matter plain. Anything that is not quite liquid, and not quite solid – not quite convinced, not quite unconvinced, not quite adamant, not even skeptical, but wavering in spiritual doubt – is affected. Your nose will probably start to run, too. It's quite a cocktail.

On this floor, there is a lock, the one lock you don't have a key for. It's called the “Mal,” which is French for “mean.” Break the “mal” or “mean” lock everyday to get to the esoteric pulp on the other side. You must remember this – break the lock, don't fiddle with your keys. Try to do it earlier, before you deal with the Ramseys.

There is a dispute on floor fifteen. None of us have been able to resolve this. I could never call this a principled battle. One tribe, the Dead Hares, claims it had a ancient, intricately designed spatula that it uses to create elements of their traditional prose styles – they claim metaphors, amplification, chiasmus and mellifluous refrains have been unavailable to their language since losing this spatula. While the other tribe – the Havana Aquafeeders, who live under water – not only deny having the spatula but deny having *anything at all* – which all of our spies and satellite photographs have shown so far shown to be true. Their contention is that the Dead Hares are just an involuntary psychic byproduct of the Lady Quay Jessica's – she's here, on the first floor, near the Lotto Machine standing in the entrance to the subway, just out of the sunlight, with a bit of cold cream on her upper lip. (She's had a case of melanoma when she was sixteen that's turned her into a prisoner of the shade. You'll probably never see her unless you use the subway.) The Havana Aquafeeders claim the Dead Hares are Lady Jessica's and are demanding she come in herself and retrieve them from the bottom of the shower because – or so they claim – they resemble a disembodied pubis (a revered form of evil in their religion) and that it is, in any case, unsanitary. The Lady Jessica has no opinion herself – she's

deep in luxurious, Maine-lobster-town dotage – she only plays Lotto, if not in the subway entrance, online. When you go around there, just make sure to use a little détente, a little Madeleine Allbright magic. I don't want to see you get stuck cleaning Dead Hares from the bottom of a shower because a senile Quay can't satisfy the obsessive Aquafeeders.

Most of floors 12 through 15 are relatively trouble free. There are the Spartans in Corridor 10 who marinate their chollas in whiskey in the hope of making them attractive to passing truck drivers. They periodically attempt to fake suicides in a bid to be photographed – seems it cleanses the soul of their leader, Harrar Wellspot, though I've never bought it.

There is the three lane highway – here, let me show you – that runs through floor 12, another relic Gorkweller's utopian scheme that our architects were not able to fix. You can buy roses from the Moonies who hang out there. I rent Bollywood stuff over here. They got a movie house I used to take my kid to here – saw *Shrek* three times – but I think it's a fruit stand now. Oh well.

The president of Spectacular Decor lives on this floor, and you'll notice here – this is where the nail entered his forehead and where it is still lodged.

This floor – called the Morphology of a Pun – well, don't worry about that one, just – try to avoid her if you can.

Christopher: Who?

Klaus: The Muse. One merely has to arrive on time to insult her.

Christopher: But you want me to be on time, right?

Klaus: I said *avoid the floor*. (*sitting down*) You can get there by accident. You can't pencil a visit in. She'll know.

Christopher: How will she know.

Klaus: And how will *you* know? By reading the manual!

Christopher: (*to himself*) Passionate love comes infrequently, but even then, there is rarely innovation.

Klaus: I wouldn't think about it too much.

Christopher: She might have gone insane soon after we graduated from high school, and I wouldn't have known... I had moved far away.

Klaus: Keep your eyes on your pension.

Christopher: Or is the obviousness of heterosexuality just another caustic ingredient in the miasma of societal uncertainty – our fear of risk ossified into 300 cable channels, the internet, all you can eat buffets?

Klaus: (*looking at resume*) You don't seem to have any experience with summer jobs.

Christopher: Whatever it is, make it work. And don't claim, lazily, that every day presents you with new "surprises." They are probably older ones mangled in the sieve of your unarticulated death wish. If you found the language for that, you would no longer be lying about yourself to those whom you choose to condemn for hating God!

Klaus: You have the job, little man!

Christopher: Will this day, its clouds, somehow be rendered perfect in the memory, even as I discovered a rat in my garbage can yesterday, even as it scurried behind the sink not

to have been seen since? Can living in such suspense be equated with pleasure? All the bases covered – but does the score count in such natural Surrealism? Here is some froth. Excuse me, it's a sign of my budding manhood. It's a sign of increased imbecility. It's a sign of a morose passion. It's a sign that I'm taking you much more seriously, even than you want. It's a sense I have a future. It's a sense I have a future in talking. It's a sign that I make sense. It's not a matter of much debate, it is froth. It is, of course, sweeping the nation. It's not a matter for debate, not for your dissertation, not for quoting in the media. It's got nothing to do with genital warts. It's froth, I am frothing. It's not a sign that our democracy is threatened. It's not a sign that you trust your President. You don't trust your President, yet you trust the sky, and the plants, and your room – just an illusion of dimension you get by buying colorful things and arranging them in piles. It's a sense of froth, following close upon the frisson of truth. It's the need to floss, to froth as you floss. To get on. To mean. To debate. It's a sign that there is something that can be honestly equated with one's own sense of worth, which is merely a steaming pile of froth. It's chicken froth. It's beef froth. It's a toss off froth, a froth and a song! It's Katz's famous deli froth. It's the head on a tall glass of wheatie beer. It's froth that makes you smile, which you'd do except – they'd see you froth! Never let them see you froth. It's a sign that, leaving here tonight, you have a new found sense of responsibility when it comes to buying genetically modified – ostrich parts! You have been handed a family tree; in it, you see that you are descended from Count Dracula, not the one played by Bela Lugosi but the one played by (. . .) and from there, it's only a downward spiral into old age, anti-semitism, autobiographical porno, corner spots on the Hollywood Squares, some session work for Bob Dylan, and, of course, a starring role in *Cobra Verde* by Werner Herzog, in which you still treated like an Australian pop star and can almost drag a sailboat to the sea with your bare hands but are slowly losing the height advantage over your dentures. It's the superman that I mean, Mr. Reeves – a bumpkin done good in the city. But I'm afraid to understand.

Sometimes I wake up with the fear of being audited.

I, in the future, will be less negligent with my follow-throughs, but only incrementally so.

If I finish this before August, I will be surprised.

Passionate love comes infrequently, but even then, there is rarely innovation.

Klaus: (*seeing that he's spent*) See you Monday.

Christopher: OK, great. Where's the parking garage?

Klaus: I thought you'd never remember.