

About Bistro Mirage

Re: Bistros

I've had a series of really evocative, powerful dreams over the last 20 years. May I tell you about them? They started out centered on a building--a house, I guess it was. Yes...a house. At times the house was uninhabited and at other times there were strangers living there. Sometimes my family and I were renting the house. Sometimes I was visiting it while on vacation from somewhere else as if the dream-dwelling was a place I used to live. Yes...there have been many dreams of return. Sometimes the house was in Seattle, sometimes in Decatur, sometimes here in Madison. Sometimes it was nowhere at all.

In every instance, however, regardless of set and setting, I was engaged in some sort of *work* on the house. One dream would find me building on an addition. In another I'd be repairing the basement foundations. After a year or two of dreams centered on work in the basement, the dreams began to find me framing out rooms in the dwelling's enormous ramshackle attic, an attic ascended to via narrow stairways but huge, the attic itself, and airy and filled with light from many windows badly needing repair but promising excellent views and even better light.

Occasionally in my dream I would stumble unexpectedly upon the attic and feel such a thrill to have found a new room in the house I thought I knew so well. There were the scents of plaster dust and sawn wood, and clean but stale, dry air. It never felt moldy or dank. It was always a pleasant, if unfinished, space, its

spaciousness promising first enjoyable work then something great, maybe transcendent, when the work was done.

In recent years as my dream-work progressed, I'd return to the attic to find it was becoming occupied by unusual and beautiful objects intentionally placed--little shrines started showing up on the stairway consisting of tarot cards and candles, for example, or old second-hand furniture and mismatched lamps. There was one display of lovely European beer coasters featuring Mutsig and Grimbergen and St. Bernardus.

And recently, to my continual surprise and delight, people started popping up in the attic. My middle son showed up there in two successive dreams last year--first as a young boy, then as an adult. I was overjoyed to find him there.

But always, (until recently, that is) there was an *unfinished* quality to the attic...piles of lumber to be taken down to the garage, drywall to hang, painting to do and carpets to install. Whenever I was there in my dream, I was aware that I had work to do that I had been neglecting; work I had clearly begun in previous dreams and was excited about finding time to take up again.

So, imagine my surprise when, last winter, I ascended the narrow, dreamscape stairway after falling asleep one night and found in my attic not more planks to cut and drywall to hang, but a finished room filled with--get this--*cafe tables* graced by place settings and unlit candles (it was late morning in the dream, as I recall). A menu was open at one table. Smoke from

a still-burning, hand-rolled cigarette framed the scene. A black leather tobacco pouch...an empty espresso cup.

It turns out my subconscious has been building a cafe in my head all these years.

Can you even imagine how delighted I am to have discovered this fact?

Is there anything more lovely than a perfect cafe? This image lies very near the center of my universe--small, cozy, maybe windows, maybe mirrors, dim corners where light is simply too relaxed to approach. The random rhythm track of saucers and steaming milk...the birdsong melody line of barrista/patron conversation. Cufflinks on bar top zinc. Stacatto scooter riff outside sings in mandolin as it dopplers down the cobbled street. Yeah, maybe an open window at that.

Ah, the scents... Ah, the coffee/croissant/cheesy/vin rouge/pastis/cognac/chocolate kisses these lovely cafes gently plant on my ever-willing mouth every single time.

Now, as far as the difference between a Bistro and a Cafe is concerned, I'm not clear. The consensus among sources is that bistros and cafes are different names for the same thing. However, Bistro sounds considerably Frencher than cafe, and the shittiest French cafe I've seen pretty much whips the shit out of the best of the rest I've seen, so I'll go with Bistro.

Re: Mirages

Every great city is thoroughly populated by innumerably many ghosts from centuries past. They live, these ghosts, in a parallel plane a quark's-width away from what we'd call "reality."

Marcia has perfected a technique for capturing glimpses of these extra-dimensionals. Not to divulge any trade secrets or anything, but Marcia's breakthrough photographic method involves scrupulously avoiding eye contact with these paranormal subjects (they vanish an instant before we spot them in our peripheral vision, you see). Lucky for us, the camera's lens, for whatever reason, seems not to disturb the subjects allowing it a glimpse behind the veil. The camera brings us back these just completely transcendent images.

Isn't it just the best feeling in the world, that making of contact with the infinite, that momentary transcendence beyond ordinary reality? It's so *satisfying*, isn't it?

Now we here at Bistro Mirage are big fans of satisfying and satisfaction. However, *transcending* into some altogether new, awe-filled space--that's what we *crave*, and it's what our favorite places occasionally give us. Transcendence is what the artist, the scientist, the philosopher in us lives for--a glimpse behind the curtain of ordinary reality into some new dimension, and a chance to bring back out impressions, filtered through the many singularities of ourselves.

Certainly those extra dimensions exist. Millions of wise observers and truth searchers have found their transcendences, glimpsed the lifting of the veil: Bohr and the quantum guys in Copenhagen; Ginsberg and the Beats on Rue Git le Couer...and of course, the many ancient paths to religious ecstasy--endless the list of routes humans have taken in hopes of accessing the transcendent, the divine. Here's to the poets and madmen, the natural philosophers and religious mystics who acted as if the "ordinary" universe was holding back a little, hiding something essential just behind the mirage of the obvious, and who went searching and who returned rich with their secrets. To their health and ours!

The mirage of the obvious...is there any doubt about it? These solid-seeming walls, nothing but probability waves. Sure, in the aggregate we would be fools to run into one head first, but on a small enough scale the wall is simply not there at all. And neither is the there.

We train from birth to make sense of all this input by noticing patterns, making assumptions, imagining our convenient frameworks represent the truth about the world. "Matter is made up of tiny balls." "An object can't be in two places at once." Nothing can travel a trillion miles in zero time."

These beliefs are so comforting to us, but that doesn't make them real. They are all mirages...just like the wavy light bouncing off of wavy surfaces the hitting my eye to make a few electrons in my brain do a particular little dance...my brain,

that's 99% filtration unit trying to not overload itself with too much sensory information.

It's all mirage, this stuff we're sensing. And that makes it all the more desirable to seek out the next level. Some find it in the dance of quantum strings, others deep in opera or swimming in absinthe and poetry. You don't need to schedule a vision quest to taste transcendence...the secret is simple. *You don't need a particle accelerator or Burroughs Dream Machine to storm the citadels of enlightenment. Somewhere inside every seemingly mundane moment there's an invisible, essential event horizon where particle and wave re-unite like separated twins and meld into a seamless unity, suddenly at one with every other speck of space and time that's ever been. It is everywhere all at once.*

That's maybe what Marcia's camera's picking up in some her images...Parisites from the past, sidewalk cafe dreamers blissed out in the midst of their own long-ago transcendence...and we are *their* mirages.

Folded into the fabric of all our everyday moments, the extra-dimensional nature of reality lies hidden. The underlying unity we all secretly sense lies just beyond our sight, our touch, our hearing. This ordinary world of objects that seem discreet and moments that seem unique masks a deeper, truer reality. *This ordinary world is all illusion. Specter. Mirage.* Oh, sure, it's all *real*, insofar as that designation takes us anywhere. Sure, you can photograph it and taste it, squeeze it and hear it, weigh it and laser it into dust in order to explore its spectrum.

But you can photograph mirages, too, right? Y'all know that, right? And that doesn't make mirages real, does it?

Just because an ordinary object impacts our senses doesn't make it real. Seeing may be believing, but neither seeing nor believing makes an ordinary object deeply real.

Still, mirages, have their worth. (If you live in a world of mirage, you'd *better* find some worth in them!) Maybe the key lies in appreciation. If you appreciate your mirage deeply enough, maybe it becomes the place from which you mount your assault on what lies beyond.

What's your favorite mirage? Does day five of a camping trip in the mountains get you to the next level? Is it peyote and a sweat lodge? Your first second set of a third Dead show in four days?

And me, what's my sturdy footing for a well-balanced leap into the infinite? What's my favorite mirage? A cafe. My cafe. The cafe I built in the dreams that I dreamed from inside my own head. And my cafe is called Bistro Mirage.

Re: Bistro Mirage

So, I built this cafe in my head and I hang out there a lot because I love cafes just about as much as any other earthly experience.

Sometimes I think a cafe day is the *perfect* day to me.

(go to a cafe and describe it....)

If you love cafes as well, you can come hang out and listen, read, write, sip, sup...enjoy.

In my cafe there's always music playing. Often Django gypsy jazz, but not always. You'll hear King Oliver and Pops and Professor Longhair too. While you're visiting you should definitely check out the "Cafe Tunes," which are small audio collages consisting of one extremely cool song paired with the live-recorded cafe sound.

When I'm hitting my cafe day stride, I usually start messing around with my own personal music in one form or another. I might work on lyrics, I might remix some stuff from yesterday's basement studio work on the laptop, or maybe I'll just sing through some old tunes if I have a banjo with me. I sometimes pop on the headphones and listen back close to any early AM recording sessions I've managed to pull off lately--those half hours with a cup of coffee and light coming up on the gardens across the street from my upstairs window that I get if I can get out of bed early enough.

A lot of this recording work I've done recently is on the music menu at the cafe. You can listen to my songs here at the cafe one at a time or in Triads (three songs woven one into the next by ambient Parisian street sounds and cafe background birdsong.) You can download as much of my stuff as you want.

The thirteen tunes grouped together as Bistro Mirage--The Album are meant to compose a single opus (plural, Opera, no matter what your waiter says) . At this point (whenever “now” now happens to be), the rest of my songs that show up on the menu must all be either stuff that came later (not yet imagined as of this writing) or old tunes that I later (that is, than now, at least) felt like trying to get a good recording of.