

Angelos Michalopoulos

**You put up the dice
and I'll put up the love
(Living between a hug and a shove)**

Translation:

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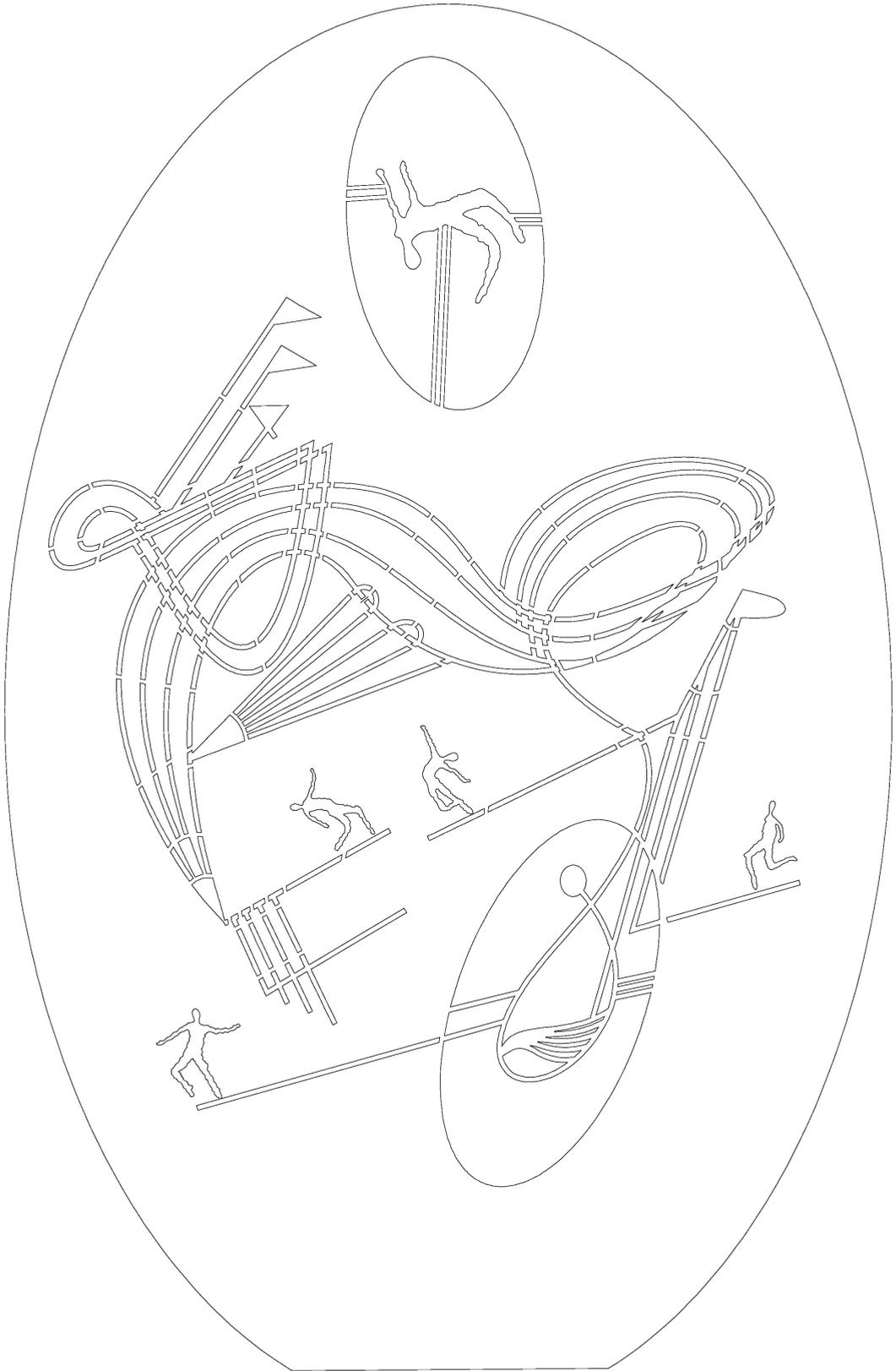
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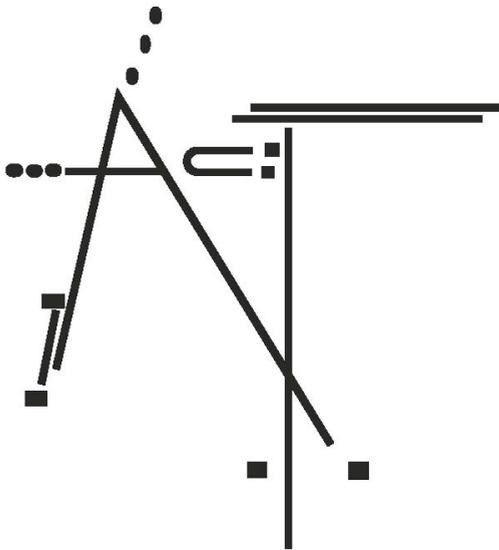
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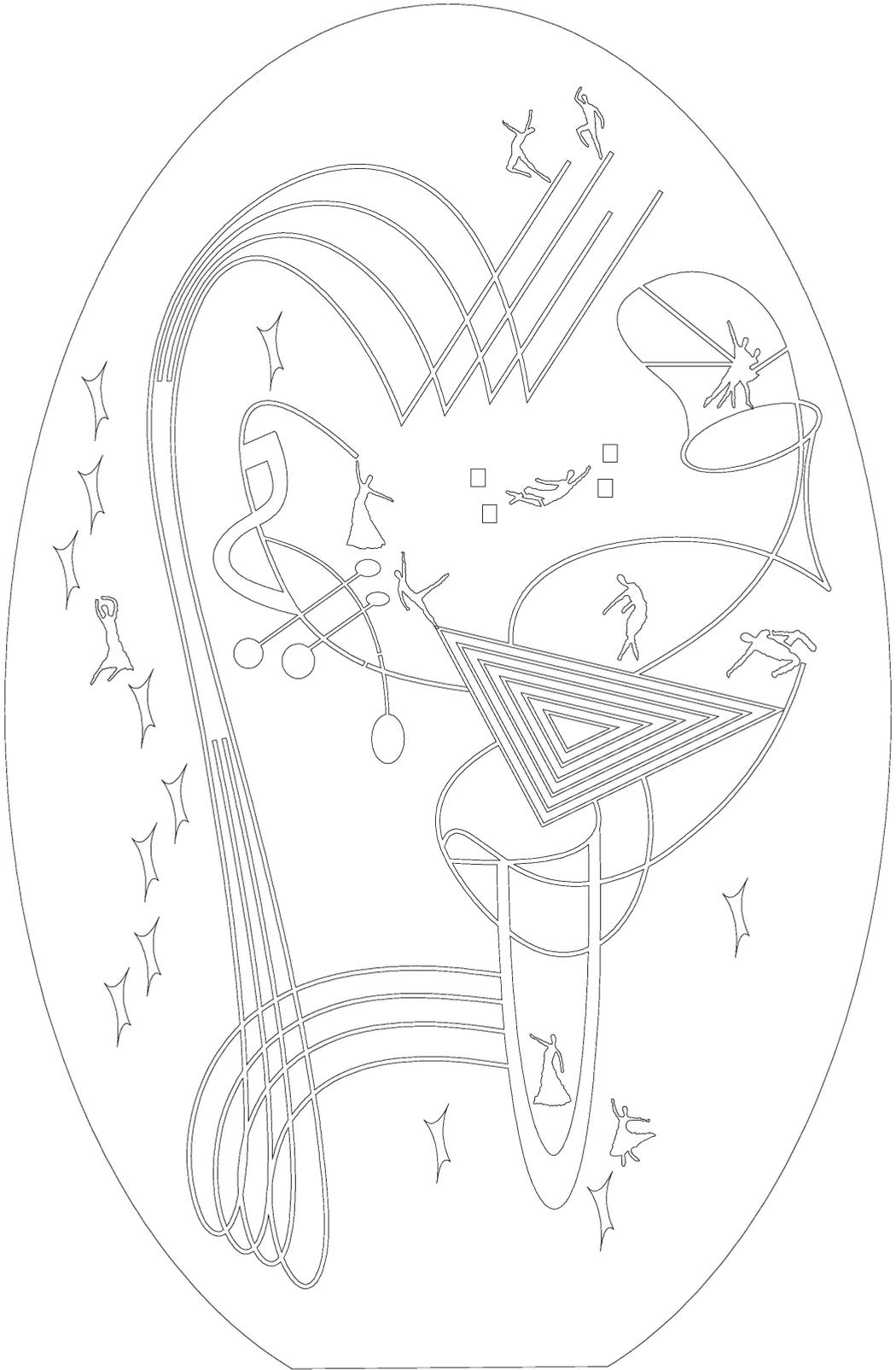
CHARACTERS:

DENIS
GEORGE
GREGORY
THOMAS
MICHAEL
STEPHEN
JASON



If you cannot translate into smiles
everything you have achieved until now,
lift the lid of your trash can, toss it all in
and, before you close it, throw in
the part of your logic that gave birth to it.





(Walking alone in the park, Denis comes to a bench where a homeless man is sitting next to supermarket cart filled with his belongings)

DENIS: May I sit?

GEORGE *(Turns and checks him out top to bottom):* Sure, go ahead.

DENIS: Nice night.

GEORGE: For what?

DENIS: For taking a stroll.

GEORGE: Where?

DENIS: Around here, the streets, the park...

GEORGE: Maybe round the world that lives inside you too?

DENIS *(Doesn't reply right away):* Maybe there too... What's your name?

GEORGE: George. What's yours?

DENIS: Denis... *(Pause)* What do you do?

GEORGE: What do I do? I sit in the park and keep the trees

company so they won't get bored and leave. I also hang out with the solitudes so they don't forget what not being alone feels like.

DENIS: How long have you been living here?

GEORGE: Several sorrows ago I stopped measuring time in minutes and began measuring it in smiles.

DENIS: Great... You seem to be doing great here.

GEORGE: Yes, great. (*Pause*) Especially if you're someone who can be happy having realized that because he can no longer climb the steps life places before his feet, he has to find a way to coexist with the downhill that's been in love with him for quite some time.

DENIS: The downhill?

GEORGE: Yes, the bewitching downhill.

DENIS: What's your relationship with this downhill?

GEORGE: An especially good one.

DENIS: Meaning?

GEORGE: Here in the park I let every downhill that appears before me show me where to go, since no uphill will let me search through it anymore to find my happiness.

DENIS: What do you mean?

GEORGE: Look at me. What do you call a human being everyone says is a leper even though he feels perfectly healthy? I don't know. Maybe I'm a leper living among people who seem outwardly healthy but, by God, there are times when I think that they are more leprous than I am.

DENIS: There are people who outwardly seem perfectly normal while inside they are completely rotten, they're, like, lepers within...

GEORGE: You know, every day I see hundreds of people who come here to get out of their world, to get away from it all, to take a breath far from the reality in which they live, a breath far from the public image they are forced to constantly maintain, a breath away from their own self. I watch them come here carrying their gravely wounded image, like soldiers after a battle. You see, in defeat one's image is usually more severely wounded than he or she is. It might even sacrifice itself to shield the person from being seriously wounded.

DENIS: Their image you say?

GEORGE: Yes. Their image... They do all they can to tend to its wounds because they know that if it loses its luster they will instantly lose their self-confidence. The poor devils really need to sit a few feet away from their own self and try to figure out which part of their life they must look through to find it again. It's really interesting to watch people who, while walking alone, are struggling to find a way to move faster than their own self, because they feel such a need to get away from it. It's almost as if they need to breathe a different kind of air, fresh air that smells less of them.

DENIS: How can you overtake your own self?

GEORGE: By finding a way to remove the burdens you weighed yourself with and then throw them into the ditches your life carefully placed right next to the road you are walking on. *(Pause)* You see, these people are in a rush to fill their lungs with a different kind of air than the one they've been breathing all the time, an air that can bear to contain more honesty than smartness.

DENIS: Maybe a kind of air that wants to host in it, for the

length of time it takes a word to fly from a mouth to an ear, sentences that contain more honesty than smartness.

GEORGE: Sure, sure... Do you know what all these people have in common?

DENIS: What?

GEORGE: They are in love with the part of their character they are most afraid of.

DENIS: What do they hope to accomplish by coming here?

GEORGE: You can't take a walk in nature without taking a walk inside yourself at the same time.

DENIS: You seem to know a lot about human nature.

GEORGE: Maybe because damn human nature doesn't want to know anything about me...I don't know, there are times when I think that everyone I ever met in my life inadvertently taught me all they didn't want to know.

DENIS: What do you mean?

GEORGE: I mean that victories try to find vanities that have yet to learn how to despair, while defeats try to find hearts that no longer remember how to hope. (*Denis doesn't respond*) Anyway... people come here to take their loneliness for a stroll, a loneliness which is usually wrapped in a brand new defeat life just gave them as a gift. It's really incredible, as time goes by, how our life becomes better and better at handing out victories that at first seem to be free, but ultimately end up being very expensive, and defeats that at first seem to be very expensive, but in the end prove to be completely free!

DENIS: Maybe...

GEORGE: No, not maybe, for sure... Believe me. I see it every day in the park. Here you can find thousands of defeats, thousands... Many of the people who come here bring at least one of them with them. To tell you the truth, I am tired of watching them all these years slobbering all over the people they belong to, holding them tightly around the waist pretending they're in love with them. It's a disgusting sight, disgusting... And you know, after a while the people suddenly leave those defeats here and return to their world, and they end up living here all alone, wondering around the park like spooky ghosts...

DENIS: Maybe that's the way someone can persuade the most conscientious fog he has in him to hide the one sunshine he hates most of all.

GEORGE: Or maybe this is the reason the summary of my life is no longer talking to me.

DENIS: How strange... I always thought that a park is where millions of visiting thoughts, thoughts that never became acts, are condemned to walk around like spooky ghosts, as you said. (*Takes a deep breath*) Let me tell you something. I've become so good at making clouds that there are times I can't figure out why I should even bother to describe to myself what color the blue sky is. Quite often, when I have no other way to trip the people around me, I thrust my hand as far within me as I can and start pulling out one cloud after another. Then I leave them on the ground all around me, ending up unable to see where I'm walking after a while and unwittingly tripping up my own self.

I take them out to see what material I made them of, because there are days when even I can't remember. So a few hours ago, as soon as I gave my hand to my arrogance so she can drag me towards my future once again, I unexpectedly started seeing those beautiful, unpolluted dreams I dreamt with such ease when I was twenty reappear before me, reflected on the face of the defeat I gave my radiance long ago to carry for me.

GEORGE: How nice. Two people sitting together at 1:00 am discussing two things they seem to know a lot about. Me about defeats and you, apparently, about victories. It is remarkable how this pursuit of victory really knows how to find new ways each time to put blinders on us, making us chase nothing but our next triumph, the next confirmation that we're still winners! How come the older one gets and learns how to use the victories he achieves in his life to shake off his adolescent insecurities, the more he gets trapped by brand new ones which until yesterday he didn't have? How come the more one uses his old victories to secure new ones, the better they become at taking advantage of him? How come the more one gets free of his mental shackles, the more he realizes that he feels more comfortable when he is emotionally chained up? How come the more one gets away from the stress of youth's failures and identifies with the person he will ultimately become by succeeding, the more he ends up enslaved by the rules his own success imposes on him daily? Why do I feel that success entails more enslavement than any other outcome?

DENIS: You do it to justify your failures.

GEORGE (*Smiling*): Yeah. Sure... I've been living well for years, arm in arm with my various failures... (*Laughing out loud*) I've even been having secret affairs with each one of them...

DENIS: I can't afford this luxury.

GEORGE: Isn't it strange how, though dirt poor, I have the luxury of truth in my life, while you don't have it anymore, despite being filthy rich? Why be so rich then? Tell me something. Why would one want to be rich if that doesn't lead to being happier? Why, while generously offering yourself so much success all these years, do you deny yourself the greatest luxury you can have, namely your truth? Oh, yes my friend. The greatest luxury in the world

is truth. Are you sure you didn't become rich for the wrong reasons? (*Pause*)

DENIS: Tonight I don't know where to look to find the reasons I succeeded in my life. A few hours ago I could have answered you in a second. Now...

GEORGE: Tell me something. At work is there someone above you?

DENIS: No, I work for myself.

GEORGE: You're wrong. You are working for your shortcomings. You're their employee, the best one they have. I'm pretty sure that you rich people work harder for your shortcomings than we poor people do! Tell me something. Do you think that someone who loses his authenticity will lose his freedom too soon after?

DENIS: I haven't lost...

GEORGE (*Interrupting him*): So why do you do that? Perhaps because the next victory in your life has become more important than your next happiness? How important can another victory be when every time you win to satisfy your logic, you simultaneously sow in your soul the seeds of a defeat that is invisible at the time, but with every hour that goes by, takes out and reveals to you another part of its ugliness? It is the defeat that, when it finally comes, will do all it can to see you slump and suffer. How important is staying ahead in a match when you know that once it's over and the referee blows the final whistle you will end up losing?

DENIS: First time I hear death being called a referee!

GEORGE: Sure, death is the most famous referee, the most famous...

DENIS: For me winning is no longer a way of life, it's the reason for living. Man is an aggressive being by nature, a being constantly in love with his next victory, with unrelenting attack, with conquest. In prehistoric times, he threw the bones of the animals he killed around the cave he lived in to constantly remind his ego, along with the people around him, how good he is at attacking, at winning, at killing. So man got slowly addicted to winning, to conquering, until victory stopped being a way of life and became the reason to live.

It didn't take too long for him to realize that every time he went hunting and brought game back to the people around him he gained their admiration, which he quickly deposited in his soul, recycling it as quickly as he could into smiles he proudly displayed to no end. So these bones that were left over after every victory, after every feast, became his trophies. In our time these bones have become social position, houses, cars and yachts. These are the contemporary bones, today's trophies, the proof that we have won, that we have conquered. Whenever we are not actively winning we use these bone-trophies to remind everyone around us who we were and, therefore, who we still are.

GEORGE: We tend to forget though, as we said before, that the more we use these trophies we won in the past, the more they start slowly using us in a terribly insidious way, without us even realizing it. So over time, from owners of our victories we became their ordinary employees. We became the volunteer servants of our triumphs. There are few things in life that man is so easily enslaved by as his own victories.

DENIS: You know quite a lot about something you just told me you know nothing about!

GEORGE: Isn't that though the definition of a happy life, when someone can explain to another who he really is without having to resort to a single lie? When one can look

his every defeat in the eyes and ungrudgingly describe it without having to unbearably pressure himself to forget whatever is not convenient for his ego to remember? When one can fully own every moment he humiliated his fellow man, pushing him lower so he would seem taller? You can tell a man is happy from the way he describes his defeats. You can tell he's miserable from the way he describes his triumphs.

DENIS: I just described my entire life to you. *(Pause)* I got to know myself pretty well because the way I grew up forced me to constantly stumble on my biggest shortcomings. And boy, what teachers they are! In any case, every time I let my mind write its thoughts on my words, it always did it from one side.

GEORGE: Why?

DENIS: So it can easily turn them over and prevent them from revealing to the person I'm talking to something I couldn't bear to tell him myself.

GEORGE: Do you mean to say that in the back side of every word we utter we have carefully buried the piece of our silence that believes in it the most?

DENIS: I always believed that the front side of each word that comes out of our mouth contains what we want to tell the person we are talking to and the back side everything we cannot tell our own self.

GEORGE: It really bothers me when I realize that my damn words have become the accidental brokers of my truth.

DENIS: More like the pimps of your lies.

GEORGE: I, again, never learned in my life how to protect myself from what I want to say and perhaps from what I always wanted to be. We are very different! Anyway, tell me about yourself, I really want to know more about you.

DENIS: About myself... about myself. (*Pause*) Let me tell you, when someone asks me where I'm from, I tell them where I was born. When someone asks me where I was born, I tell them I was born right outside the emergency exit of the nicest dream I've ever dreamt in my life.

GEORGE: Well... Have you ever tried to figure out how good a person you can bear to be without having to betray who you already are?

DENIS: May I answer you by describing how I feel right now?

GEORGE: Go ahead.

DENIS (*Long pause*): I am a sunbeam that was born blind. I am a victory that knows how to win for everyone else except itself.

GEORGE: Wow! I hear you my friend, I hear you... (*Pause*) Tell me something. Can a rich man's shiniest gold instantly lose value when it touches a poor man's rusted tin? Is a successful man's confidence in danger when on the street it accidentally comes across one of those humble crumbs of self-confidence a beggar is forced to consume daily to stay alive? Come here, come close to me and untie your honesty from whatever spot of your shortcomings you have tied it for so long, let it free, let it come next to me, let it freely paint whatever it wants on the surface of my own. Let it free...

DENIS: Watch out. I'm warning you, don't underestimate my honesty. You don't know it well enough. It's much more dangerous than you think. It's one of those honesties that upon meeting it seems gracious and refined, yet as soon as you look away even for a second will throw you down on the mat and try to crush you, pressing its boot on your neck and pushing as hard as it can to humiliate you. And the worst thing is that, right when you feel like it will tear you apart,