

Directed by: Aaron Levy  
Voiceover: Gary Indiana  
Literary Advisor: Jean-Michel Rabaté  
Monologue adapted from: Thomas Bernhard's Gargoyles (U. of Chicago, 1970)

---

1           When we seek a person, it is as if we go about in a vast morgue looking for him. People walk with one another and  
2 talk with one another and sleep with one another and do not know one another. If people knew one another they would not  
3 walk, talk, or sleep with one another. Do you know yourself?, I often ask myself. A depth is always a height, the deeper the  
4 depth of the height, the higher the height of the depth, and vice versa. You imagine that you peer down into an infinite well (as  
5 into an infinite person), into his infinite height, size, and so on... I *believe* that my son is in London because I *know* that he is in  
6 London; I *believe* I am writing him a letter because I *know* I am writing him a letter, but I do not *know* that he is in London  
7 because I *believe* that he is in London.

8           The world as a whole has become entirely provincial. Whenever my son was in cities he always reported that he was  
9 happy, but about his stays in the country the word was always *unhappy, unhappy*. Sometimes he unexpectedly has knowledge  
10 of things that astonish me, though what he knows has *absolutely no application* to anything.

11           We have the highest suicide rate in Europe. Why? Everything is suicide. Whatever we live, whatever we read,  
12 whatever we think—all manuals for suicide. No matter what we are reminded of, what our attention is called to, our attention is  
13 called to death. Standing at the window in the night, watching several acrobats walking tightropes stretched across infinity—to  
14 call out to them is to incur the death penalty. But whenever we speak of suicide there is something *comical* about it. *I put a*  
15 *bullet into (or through) my head, I shoot, I hang myself*. How can I ask you to trust me, I wrote to my son yesterday, when I do  
16 not trust you on a single point?

17           We are continually trying out on others what we do not try out on ourselves. We continually kill others for purposes of  
18 study. This morning, I suddenly felt the need to lie flat on the floor. I undressed and lay down stark naked. At breakfast I told  
19 the others about it, but nobody laughed. I said to my elder sister: *The poetic is suspect to me because in the world it arouses*  
20 *the impression that the poetic is poetry, and vice versa, that poetry is the poetic. The only poetry is nature, the only nature is*  
21 *poetry*. I very often see my son somewhere on a London street that I am familiar with from my own days of studying in London.  
22 Trees. People. People as trees. Trees as people. My son is wearing the same suit I wore when I was in London. Sometimes  
23 he walks across Trafalgar Square or through Hyde Park with *my* thoughts, with *my* problems. And I think: He is crossing  
24 Trafalgar Square and walking through Hyde Park with your problems.

25           Last night, I had got up and gone down into the library and had said to the books: *My food!* But now this food is all  
26 poisoned. Every day I wake up and think: To whom am I going to bequeath everything? Since nobody else is even possible, I  
27 come back to the fact that I must bequeath everything to my own son. Yesterday I had the notion—I was on my way to  
28 breakfast—that I had ordered all the trees cut down. I look down from the castle and see nothing but millions of felled trees. I  
29 saw the whole countryside covered with the sawdust from my trees, and I waded through this sawdust down to the Mur and  
30 then down to the Plattensee. There were no people to be seen, none left. Probably they all were smothered under the sudden  
31 rain of sawdust.

32           There are people who die with the greatest decisiveness and are decisively dead once and for all. I too would like to  
33 die like that. But most people die vaguely, vaguely to the eye and vaguely to the brain. They are never dead. No matter what  
34 we amuse ourselves with, we are always preoccupied only with death.

35           My sisters, but my daughters also, try to keep me going by means of little or big deceptions, and by one outrageous  
36 deception above all: Each of them knows in her heart that the world will collapse when I suddenly am no longer here. When I  
37 lose all desire to go on and have myself laid out in the pavilion, I shall have myself laid out in the pavilion like my father. In the  
38 nature of things it sounds completely different when my son in England, in London, says at Victoria Station, for example, that he  
39 hates people, completely different from the way it sounds when I in Hochgobernitz say that I hate people, yet it is the same  
40 ridiculous hatred for the same ridiculous people.

41           In the course of the changes I intend to make in Hochgobernitz, everything is going to be restricted. An enlargement of  
42 the estates involves a restriction of our lives. Again and again I reflect that I have been left alone. And I feel this to be the most

Directed by: Aaron Levy  
Voiceover: Gary Indiana  
Literary Advisor: Jean-Michel Rabaté  
Monologue adapted from: Thomas Bernhard's Gargoyles (U. of Chicago, 1970)

---

43 loathsome of thoughts. Loneliness is man's route to loathsomeness. Age is an enormous loathsomeness. Sometimes I have  
44 the impulse to summon my relatives and shout into their faces that they ought to stop being permanently dead. It is the same  
45 every day. I leave my room, I leave Hochgobornitz—in my thoughts—and everywhere I feel the same cold. It is my duty to  
46 write to my son in London and tell him what is awaiting him here in Hochgobornitz when I am dead: cold. Isolation. Madness.  
47 Deadly monologuing. Madness emerging from himself and appearing as madness of the world, of nature. My father often  
48 spoke of selling Hochgobornitz and everything that belonged to it. For days he talked about freeing himself from Hochgobornitz,  
49 but when he thought of the workmen, of the gravel pit workmen, of the millers, of the sawyers, who were dependent on  
50 Hochgobornitz and therefore upon him alone, he threw up the plan... Toward the end he frequently said: I am tired, I am tired of  
51 Hochgobornitz, but I am too tired to give up Hochgobornitz, I would rather give myself up. He had a miserable end. Suddenly,  
52 two days before his suicide, he ceased his incomprehensible monologue. This highly intelligent person! The crucial pages  
53 were ripped out of his favorite books. He had eaten pages from *The World as Will and Idea*, for instance. Schopenhauer has  
54 always been the best nourishment for me, my father had written a few hours before his suicide, on a scrap of paper found by a  
55 member of the coroner's commission. His madness did not exclude a deliberate intention to kill himself.

56 When someone close to us has committed suicide, we ask: Why suicide? And yet we must say that everything in the  
57 suicide's life—all his life was a suicide—is part of the reason for his suicide. The act of suicide always strikes us as sudden. On  
58 the walls of the castle I can endure my solitude because I am completely alone on the walls. Have I always been alone?  
59 Perhaps I ought to put it: You are not yet alone. Or: The father is always farther along than the son, and vice versa, the son  
60 always farther along than the father...

61 In the autumn I think that the coming winter will put everything to rights, in the winter, the coming spring, in the spring,  
62 the coming summer. In reality nothing happens any more. Suddenly I feel that I am rotting, rotting at a fantastic speed; I hear  
63 myself rotting, I hear it and want to get away from the place which I suddenly become aware of as the site of decay. I look down  
64 upon myself from high above and observe: You are no longer anything. In dreams I am walking through an endless hall toward  
65 an audience which is the most important audience of my life. Since the hall I am walking through is a high, dizzying hall, an  
66 infinite hall, the audience is not possible. I want to know who (or what) is receiving me, will receive me, but I walk and walk and  
67 walk and do not find out. There are times when I tell myself: You have nothing left but hopelessness and you must be content  
68 with that. Every day you picture hopelessness differently, you stick out your tongue at it, so that you can see it laugh.

69 Hochgobornitz I love and I feel it to be a lifelong prison. Calculating machines, that is all human beings are. The truth  
70 is, all we hear in this world is: That is good, that is not good, this man is thus, and so on.... How often we hear: *He* has a keen  
71 mind, *he* hasn't, *he* speaks French fluently, *he* doesn't, *he* is materialistic, *he* isn't, *he* is a Communist, *he* isn't, *he* is poetic, *he*  
72 isn't, *he* is rich, *he* isn't. Disgusting! When I am in the library, everybody thinks I am busy with books because I am in the  
73 library. But in reality I have not read a book for years and stopped studying atlases, and I stay in the library only to be inside  
74 myself. The world is more and more being used up by us; we use up the world more than the world uses us up.

75 Torment is inside my body like a second body, inside my whole body like a second whole body. I have earned the  
76 right to an idea when I have worked (metaphysically) all my life for this idea, when I have lived for it, existed for it, been  
77 mistreated and denounced for it.

78 You can say of many of them that they grew up in a dry, a damp, a warm, or a cold house. Your home was cold, you  
79 could say to many, and to many others: You come from a dry home. Hochgobornitz is the proof that a building can destroy  
80 people who are completely at its mercy. But it does not do any good to leave the building that will destroy you.

81 I once suddenly awakened in the middle of the night and saw a gigantic note pinned to the sky on which the word *open*  
82 was written. My laughter awakened everyone in the house. They rushed to the windows and saw nothing. I kept saying, *Open!*  
83 *Open!* is written there, *open* is actually written up there, but they saw nothing, thought me crazy, and I chased them back to their  
84 beds. In the nature of things I am more and more afraid of myself. In court I once met a person I had never seen before, but

"in which the thinking man finds himself in a gigantic orphanage (where people are continually proving to him that he has no parents)"  
2004, DV, 24:20 minutes

Directed by: Aaron Levy  
Voiceover: Gary Indiana  
Literary Advisor: Jean-Michel Rabaté  
Monologue adapted from: Thomas Bernhard's Gargoyles (U. of Chicago, 1970)

---

85 who reminded me of all the people I have ever seen. He said he had something magnificent in store for his head. He put a  
86 knife to my hand and said: *Cut my head off, my dear fellow. I have long waited for you to turn up to cut off my head. For I have*  
87 *something magnificent in store for my mind. Don't be afraid,* this eccentric said, *I have calculated everything in advance. It*  
88 *cannot go wrong. Here, cut!* I seized the head and cut it off. I was astonished at how easy it was. The head then said: *You*  
89 *didn't seriously imagine you could cut off my head, did you? Or did you?*

90 We are without parents. We are orphans. That is our condition, and we shall not, Europe will not escape from this  
91 condition ever again. Never before has Hochgobernitz been so utterly cut off from the world and simultaneously so dependent  
92 on the world. I have the idea, that we are writing letters, sending letters, and receiving letters, and that the signatures on all  
93 these letters are illegible. Suppose I were to write an essay in my room, a study bearing the simple title *My Room*, into which I  
94 would squeeze the entire world. I would squeeze the entire room into my room and into my study--no, not a study. The thinking  
95 man's task is more and more to remove images from his memory. His goal has been attained when there is no longer a single  
96 image in his brain. I bear no guilt, I often tell myself, I know I bear no guilt. As long as I have been alive nothing but the attempt  
97 to communicate has consumed me. At first, my mother thought of me as a crime against herself, later as a crime she had  
98 committed. For parents, children are an incurable tumor which deforms them for life. I withdraw more and more into my room  
99 as a sickroom. Best of all to be in bed and be able to fall asleep—for a long time now that has all I want or need. Have you  
100 properly made use of your body? Of your mind? Of life?

101 If we say, *he is a catastrophic person*, without knowing him, if we say, *he is dead*, and so on... We see in a person  
102 frailties which at once make us see the frailties of all communities. Even as a child my father toyed with the thought of killing  
103 himself. It cost him the greatest self-control, whenever he crossed the Ache, not to throw himself into the Ache. The millions of  
104 experiments lead back to the source. These experiments in the mass and in so called untrammelled nature. We always live in  
105 the delusion (because we think it will enable us to live) that we can escape completely from at least one of the elements of  
106 nature. We are no longer fearful unto death, we *go* to death.

107 The catastrophe begins with getting out of bed. With putting everything on a philosophical basis, with making a public  
108 display of oneself. My sickness is underlining important things; all these underlined sentences begin with the destruction of  
109 these sentences.

## Project Overview

Four monumental staircases at Founder's Hall, a magnificent Greek Revival national landmark on the campus of Girard College, lead to a room that houses unconventional archival material such as nineteenth century laundry and food receipts for the construction of the college, heating repairs, utility invoices, bank ledgers, food receipts, and visitation logs. These seemingly mundane records highlight the degree to which the immense wealth of Stephen Girard, which financed the grandeur of Girard College and endowed its operation as a boarding school for underprivileged children, was secured through minute transactions. This material culture exists in a state of haphazard accumulation and romantic degradation that is startling in juxtaposition with the building's architectural splendor. The video documents the third floor of Founder's Hall and the monumental staircases leading up to it. The voiceover, read by noted artist and critic Gary Indiana, has been adapted from Thomas Bernhard's *Gargoyles* (English trans. 1970), in which a paranoid prince laments his orphan status, material accumulation, and inheritance.

## Historical Overview

Girard College is the steward of several significant historical collections. In this project, we filmed an entirely unprocessed archival collection of records concerning the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century American education, dating from as early as 1833 and haphazardly stashed in a room on the third floor of Founder's Hall. The materials include bound volumes, full file drawers and stacks of papers, institutional records and drawings relating to the building of Founder's Hall and the operation of Girard College. While the papers have never been processed and inventoried, we have seen glimpses of mid-nineteenth century records of campus food purchases, laundry bills and heating receipts, as well as original drawings by J. Walters for Founder's Hall. We see visitor sign-in books from the 1860's and 1870's, when Founder's Hall was one of three major tourist destinations in the city, and also staff and student records from Girard College's earliest years. Girard has served as a model for other pedagogical experiments in Early America as well as private boarding schools for the disadvantaged, such as the Hershey School in Hershey, Pennsylvania. In addition to the textual materials, the room contains notable artifacts associated with the school, including the huge chunk of anthracite coal which was mined from Girard Estate lands in northeastern Pennsylvania and shipped down to the Board of City Trusts in Philadelphia. This piece of coal represents the source of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century wealth that enabled the Girard Estate to grow and operate the school.

Numbering about 3,000 objects, the Girard Collection -- the inventoried, conserved historical collections that comprise the personal and business records of Stephen Girard, as opposed to the disheveled school and building records on the third floor of Founder's Hall as featured in the video -- is Philadelphia's premier surviving intact single-owner collection from the early national period.

## Organizational Background

When American financier and philanthropist, Stephen Girard, died in Philadelphia in 1831, he bequeathed the bulk of his fortune to the establishment of a school for orphans, founded in Philadelphia in 1833 as Stephen Girard College. He also set aside funds to build Founder's Hall and gave specific instruction about how it should be built, instructions which created unprecedented challenges for the architects and engineers working on Founder's Hall.

Girard's will was specific in outlining the type of education Stephen Girard College should provide, stipulating that students "be instructed in the various branches of a sound education: comprehending reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic, geography, navigation, surveying, practical mathematics, astronomy, natural, chemical and experimental philosophy, the French and Spanish languages... and especially... that by every proper means a pure attachment to our republican institutions, and to the sacred rights of conscience, as guaranteed by our happy constitutions shall be formed and fostered in the minds of the scholars."

Girard, who was born in France in 1750, referred to the school in his will as a "Collège." Stephen Girard College opened to students on January 1, 1848 as the world's first residential school for disadvantaged children, grades one through 12. During Girard College's 150 year history, spanning the American Civil War, two World Wars and the Great Depression, it has grown in size and spirit and adjusted to social and technical changes. Founded on the belief that disadvantaged children should be given the opportunity to cultivate the skills necessary for a successful journey through life, Girard College continues to provide disadvantaged students with a free liberal arts education in a residential setting.

Although enrollment was originally for white, male orphans, following a series of Supreme Court challenges, half of Girard students today are now female and the overwhelming majority of them are from a minority group, nearly 89% being African American. At the time of filming, 640 male and female students, grades one through 12, are enrolled at Girard College. Most come from Philadelphia area, but the number of students from outside the Philadelphia area has grown over the years. Each student who attends Girard College receives a full scholarship of \$25,000 per year. All Girard students lack one or both parents, and have extremely limited financial resources. Most of these children come from areas of such extreme urban blight that their contemporaries are often dead, jailed, addicted to drugs or pregnant by the time they are middle school age. For the past two years, 100 percent of Girard graduates have been accepted to four-year colleges and universities.