



Source: Dexter Filkins, 'Circling the wagons in an Iraqi city', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 05/06/07.

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Emilie doesn't talk to me these days. We're in Paris for the summer as she researches her doctoral thesis on some anachronistic French harpsichord techniques of the early eighteenth century. We've taken an adequate apartment in the Marais district. Day time temperatures hover around 38 degrees. Most outdoor excursions have been cancelled because of the probability of heatstroke. The curtains are closed. The place reeks of too many cigarettes and two too many bodies pressed together for too long. Emilie sitting transfixed at her computer. I, standing around at a loose end, watching today's Coalition games in Iraq on CNN.

'Once I've killed this thesis off, we'll invade Italy for a month,' promises Emilie. My eyes drift across the lurid orange flocked wallpaper.

Come nightfall. 'I'm going out...grab a bite...you hungry?' 'Not really', mumbles Emilie. 'Bring me back a baguette or something.' I swipe a few pages, unnoticed, from her pile of reference notes. Perhaps I should show some interest in what she's doing.

Hoche is only a half hour from the Marais by train—nine stops from République, direction Marie des Lilas. Reading those few pages from Rameau's *De La Mechanique des Doights sur le Clavessin*:

*'La perfection du toucher...Perfection of touch consists of the well-controlled movement of the fingers. This movement can be acquired by a simple technique, but one has to know how to apply it.'*

A ten minute walk along rue Hoche. Tobacconists, internet cafes, low-rise Arab tenements. Past the brutal edifice of the Centre Nationale de la Danse and down to the canal. A handful of nervous expectant men and boys loitering along the banks. Standing, sitting, watching...each other...rarely talking.

That's when I see you.

*'Cette mécanique n'est autre chose...This technique is nothing more than frequent exercise of a regular movement: the aptitudes for which it calls are natural to everyone—much the same as in walking or, if you like, in running.'*

I circle around where you are standing with that other gentleman. I see your fingers reaching for the space between his two open buttons—that desperate chest laden with domestic duties and an ambiguous marriage.

*'J'avoüerai cepedant que...I will however concede, that which implies a lot of practice to the majority of people*

may perhaps, for others, be a blissful encounter. But who would dare to anticipate natural aptitudes? How can one hope to discover them, without having done the work necessary to reach this stage of experience? And to what might one attribute the success which one will then experience, if not to this very work?'

Your index finger circling his hardened nipple, you ask if he is cold. I interrupt. 'It's still 30 degrees.' 'I AM 30,' you reply. I don't know why I believe you so easily, but it is dark and I'm in a rush.

'Emma,' says the other man. 'That's my wife's name.'

'You're not married, you liar,' I laugh. 'You're a fucking liar! Turn around!' And I punch his head into the bonnet of an abandoned, uninsured Renault.

*'La jointre du poignet...The wrist must always be supple. This suppleness, which is then transmitted to the fingers, gives them all the ease of movement and all the lightness necessary.'*

There is blood on his nose, and his final expression is a kind of astonishment. And then he cries for his loneliness as you and I laugh. We kiss, and I think for that short moment you love me. 'Can we go somewhere?' you ask me. 'No, I'm cooking dinner for my wife.' And I walk away. The other men down by the canal seem not to have noticed anything...standing, sitting, watching...each other...rarely talking.

Back in the apartment I draw Emilie's attention to a passage from Rameau's keyboard treatise:

*'Mais qu'on se souvienn...It must be remembered, though, that the more one perseveres with the first principles, the further one will advance in one's career. For he who wearies of these principles is almost always the dupe of his impatience.'*

'But on the whole, that which will be found to be too difficult can be omitted, because the player must not be bound by the impossible.

'I have endeavoured to spare the memory an infinite number of rules which can be applied only when one knows how to pass them from judgement to the finger-tips.

'All I have said with regards to the harpsichord applies in like manner to the organ.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Nigel Kellaway, acknowledging Brian Fuata and Jean-Philippe Rameau.*