

NEAL ZIRN

Homeless on Ste-Catherine Street

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It's early evening. Men wrapped in sleeping bags, urban caterpillars, still on the sidewalk around the corner from Cinemania, *festival de films francophone*. The best of francophone cinema.

The Imperial Cinema, home to Cinemania, has been renovated and restored to what would now be its ancient glory. The washrooms (bathrooms in the US) are, however, modern, with *tres* artistic faucets, muted lighting, and a genteel ambiance. Peeing in such surroundings is *magnifique*.

I'm here with my girlfriend, a.k.a., significant other, partner, or *who I don't know what to call*, watching Gérard Depardieu in *Quand j'étais chanteur*, ("The Singer"). Gérard plays a small-town crooner who falls in love with a younger woman. The venues are discotheques and senior citizens' homes; a metaphor for the life that most of us are destined to live. Somehow, to its credit, the movie comes off light despite a fairly depressing theme.

Leaving the theatre and returning to my car,
I see the same itinerant men, at the same location,
in their same positions, as when I saw them earlier
in the evening. Only now it is night, a November,
Montreal night, the wind coming up Ste-Catherine
Street like a two-fisted pug, the storefronts electric,
the traffic alive and desperate. I'm here with Gérard,
in a smoke-filled dance hall, backup singers in place,
band poised to play, my microphone in hand, ready
to sing all the French love songs that I never knew existed.

And sing, like a Yankee gigolo in a Paris café.

