

## On new mimes

Marcel Marceau had sympathy for Michael Jackson. He saw in Michael Jackson something of himself.

“Michael has the soul of a mime,” he said.

What is this soul of a mime? What is this soul that belonged to Marcel Marceau and to Michael Jackson and to all actors who stand onstage making gestures?

“The soul of a mime is a complex one, part child and part artist, part clown and part tragic figure.”

“I’ve seen Michael on TV for years, and I think that he is a poet. But now he is in the tradition of French poets like Verlaine and Rimbaud because his subject is the lost childhood.”

On December 4, 1995, Michael Jackson was promoting his HBO special at the Beacon Auditorium. His career was at its pinnacle.

More than ten years before, he modeled the moonwalk after Marceau’s “Walking against the Wind.” And ever since, he has been turning his focus, ever so slowly, away from the voice and toward the body. Two days later, he would collapse from exhaustion. But that night he faced the reporters.

One yelled, “Are you still married?”

Another, “Say hello!”

Michael Jackson gave them all the same response: silence.

Instead, he brought out a mime to speak for him.

Marceau announced, “For the first time, the King of Mime would work with the King of Pop.”

They were two men on stage with whitened faces and agile bodies. Held under a beam of bright light, Michael Jackson performed the invisible box routine. A metaphor for both their lives.

The journalist Neal Strauss agreed with Marceau. He also thought that Michael Jackson was transforming into a mime. He wrote: “After Mr. Jackson’s collapse, a medical technician said there was so much make-up on his face that medics had to lift his shirt to check his complexion.”

“Marcel Marceau is honored by those who draw on the Marcel Marceau style of mime to create their own work,” said Marcel Marceau.

He pushes against the floor, to make it look as if he is pushing against a heaviness in the air. The fabric stretches over his torso, clinging to juts of bone, so that a hollowness makes itself known. This body is composed of absences and devotions. The clothes don't constrict. They wrap around his sinewy limbs like skin. They fit better than his own loose skin. His costume is smooth like a porpoise. The attached red rose is a dorsal fin.