

Nº103

Jane Taylor
& David
Nirenberg

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A Conversation

Jane Taylor & David Nirenberg *A Conversation*

Jane Taylor to David Nirenberg
Chicago, 11-11-11

Dear David

I have been re-reading our letters.

And what an interesting discussion we had this week, about the writing that one does for a singular reader; the 'one other' with whom one is thinking. So there has been much dialogue about representation; about performance, and sentiment and sincerity, each thinking to the self through thinking with a companion. And our question returns, often enough, to this: what limits are placed on thought, in the moment that it aspires to be understood from outside itself?

This is not a lover's discourse; it is though interested, and it is interested in the lover's discourse.

Our letters are using their form to provoke us to think about enquiries that we have each been serving for some time. You and I seem to have been reading and writing side by side, for quite a long while, unaware each of each until a chance dinner with friends a year ago, and, oh – we are interested in everything, each to each:

I am a twin –

I have just written a novel about twins!

I work on conversion –

Ha, so do I; Hypocrisy?–

No, not Hypocrisy exactly, I write about Sincerity!

Do you really also work on poison?

Yet I am aware of Paul's caution, from one of your letters, "If we do not share the same language then I am a barbarian to the one that speaks and the one that speaks is a barbarian to me." So the writing of letters allows us to reconsider that easy assumption, that we are common ground to one another because there is so much common ground. We have ventured into an exchange to learn about letters, about one another, about art and artifice.

How many inversions and diversions there have been, during this past year of dialogues. I was going south, while you were rearranging your north.

We meet over a quick cup of coffee. And then all hemispheres, such going out, and coming in. Without these letters I would never have considered quite how much a mirrored interest might expose about one's own habits of mind. Even now, I am conscious of my deep and sustained surprise at finding an interlocutor so harmonious to my thought that it is as if I dream aloud in your company. I wrote to you only this week, "Who else would have any interest in this crazy puzzling?" At the same time I am marvel at the distances between us as well as the proximities.

But in May Carolyn called us to allow others in, to turn our dialogue into a forum for thinking aloud, a small digital notebook for dOCUMENTA. Of course, this is not where it began. How would we have found a voice if that had been the case? The writing of the letters happened because we could not resist the communion. How bloody lucky. And then we were diverted; or, we diverted ourselves, to think in a dialogue.

And now some of the letters of these past months' thinking are to be released, fluttering in the dove-cot. Much of our persistent obsession is here: doubles, puppets, performance, representation and sincerity; it may be a strange space for others, but I hope that, for ourselves at least, once we are inside we each will remember familiar rooms. (Though perhaps here and there we might be uncertain of a modulated color, or an altered shape. In my defense I say only that I have sought to contour the lines of our thinking only a little, and not so much as might disguise the obsessional waywardness of our communion. We met, you remember, only twice in the first six months of the year we have known each other. Once in New York, when you joined me for the opening of *War Horse* at the Lincoln, and we also wandered with irrepressible delight through the exhibit on Cezanne's Card Players at the Met; and then I travelled to Chicago to give a paper at your conference on Hypocrisy. The letters, you will see, pick up our epistolary communication as I return to Cape Town.

I have edited us in the hope that these letters will be able to gesture toward that general reader for whom they were not written. A perpetual skein of thought that can of course stand for any question in the world, has asserted itself again and again. "What is the claim made for truth in the art of being?" It is a puzzle about figuration, and imaging.

The image that I turn to over and over is the puppet. That is because I have learned to think about the body as a technology for the staging of consciousness through working with puppets, and I have worked with such a lovely puppet this year, David. Not you – o no, you may have been a figure onto whom I have projected the expression of emotions (apologies to Darwin) but I have not mistaken you for my puppet. You keep on talking back, so I suppose if I were to make a theatrical analogy, I would have to consider our performances somewhere within the realm of ventriloquism. Why do I make that distinction? A puppet would rather die than admit that it is not alive; while a ventriloquist's dummy is always drawing attention to its own captive status, insisting on railing at the ventriloquist, making lewd and robust jokes about the hand up its ass.

I picture you laughing at that brutish jest. The letters here are pretty much sober thinking and they don't capture the laughter and the astonishment for both of us, at finding an intellectual companion with such exorbitant interests.

xxj

△ △ △

May 8

David Nirenberg to Jane Taylor

And is she alright? Was the threshold a space of joy or tears, or a merciful mixture of both?

May 8

JT to DN

She is being punished by El (!) for all those years of ironic comment about Agamben. Homonid Sacer had to fly to New York last night to fly to SA today. (No morning connection early enough to make flight to SA in one day.) Spent the night in Marriot hotel in NY. Then to JFK for 11 am - then 3 hour delay to be told that flight was cancelled, so now at the Sheraton in NY sans luggage for an announcement at 9 am tomorrow about when my flight tomorrow might leave.

So here is a moment for the expletive "fucking". I am on hold. No sign yet of any threshing.

How nice to be able to whine into your ear.

But I will have a whiskey later. I the meanwhile am going to follow up on some thoughts about Locke, the contradictory.

I need to recover too the epistolary demeanour for our communion - presence somewhat displaced that - but how interesting it was to spend time/space with you.

Jane in Dystopia.

May 8

DN to JT

Shit. I mean "fuck". That is rotten luck. I would be going mad. And it scarcely seems worth going into NY to see friends. Or is there someone you might drop in on for a little distraction?

I was thinking about our epistolary communion, particularly the discussion of puppetry, painting, and theatricality, on the running trail this morning. Perhaps when I get back from Israel I might be able to put something down on paper. I'd like to do that. But I worry that the Badiou Battle will call me to arms at precisely that moment. In which case, as soon as that enemy has been repulsed!

Here Alex (who is in a very bad mood) and I are about to cuddle over dinner. So I can't say that I am with you in Dystopia. But I am with you in empathy.

May 8

JT to DN

DDN (Dear David Nirenberg!) Yes, fuck indeed.

Not rotten luck. Rather, rotten and unlucky. (A bit like the English/Scottish formulations. The English: "Not guilty by reason of insanity" and the Scottish: "Guilty but insane." There hangs (!) a difference.

So you were thinking on the running trail. And here I am on the sedentary trail.

But I have been thinking. About Beckett's Catastrophe, and performance and projection as ventriloquism, and the violences implicit. Do you know the marvelous riff on pure voice in Zizek's "Pervert's Guide to the Cinema." I think you might love and hate it - but if you haven't seen it you might have to wait to see it with me.

But then, Chaplin's *City Lights* (Those brilliant benefactors at the statue's unveiling). Have you had a chance to have a look? It will be a text to think with. And Kentridge's *Monument* all come into view in relation to the Beckett. (*Monument* is, I think, available on You Tube): the sculptural tradition in relation to puppetry and performance - so here we are back at Ba'al. And Henry Moore's *Crowd looking at a Tied-Up Object*. (which you will see quoted in the Kentridge, if I remember). But I am in an incoherent spool of thoughts, just musing: or am being mused. Amused, used. This is my equivalent of going mad. All of a surrender, but pretty interesting to watch. How to conjure out of the air, with a laptop and a copy of Locke's "Essay on HU" as raw materials. . . Desert Island Discs. Later I will start to do some stitching.

Why was the lad foul-tempered?

Hope you cooked him a storm. (What an idea?!)

May 11

JT to DN

On Ventriloquisms, Voices, Idols and Puppets:

I am thinking toward our dialogues. But want to find what we have in our archive: that crazy maze of a shared sensibility. Can we reach each other here, too: is your hand held up to face mine in this also?

I have been thinking about Chaplin's "City Lights?" I think that it is a Diderot machine in a way, as it deals with a blind girl through a silent movie - even though the talkies were already "the thing" - so it's Chaplin's experiment with what 'the talkies' do. So, in Diderot's terms - the film explores what the deaf do as well as what the blind do, and how they do it.

And if you know the film - here's a scene I want to call to mind - back to your mind.

We see the little tramp on a street corner - in the window beside him is an art nouveau nude - it's a rather familiar, languid figure, with s-bends and soft mobility in her lines. He is incessantly drawn back to it - looks at it over his shoulder, peers under his sleeve, etc etc - all dissembling the forbidden erotic of staring at the naked girl.

But here is I think the interesting move - the scene is really at some level about the tramp's illicit authority over the domain of the aesthetic - his mastery of, his captivity to, the art object. In particular, the sculptural form - is this the Jew and Ba'al again; and is this the Jew's sexuality hiding out inside the Jew's aesthetics (materiality) hiding out as sex. in an infinite regress?

Then the Diderot machine takes me back to Miran Bozovic's meditations on Pythagoras's "Acousmatiques" from the Lacan Silent Partners. - Which then leads me to remember the astonishing scene from *Mulholland Drive* - Rebekah del Rio singing "Llorando" in the Teatro Silencia. - the

body as support for the voice. (Remember how the voice continues after the body collapses.") So shockingly sexy, so emotional a betrayal.

I am drawing this cluster together in an argument and will send it to you as a formal letter. Right now I am musing with you because of the joy in that.

my love, jane

May 16
JT to DN

I know that you are well anchored amongst the anchorites but am sending a greeting out of care lest your soul need it.

Tonight I am thinking about Pythagoras's acousmatics: did they participate in the same kind of self-sustaining fiction that we inhabit with our puppets, knowing and not knowing the illusion which held them captive? mmm? travel well when you turn your face toward the west.

May 16
DN to JT

So hard to type with sghort nails on this phone! But I am bursting to write about the Kentridge exhibit I saw yesterday at the Israel museum. How many ideas he has! Two more days here, of wall to wall talks on the exegetical imagination and during lunch breaks, politics! I want to be home! How do you do it, travel so well?

May 16
JT to DN

I don't: I am reluctant, grumpy about the coming trips. Unwooded by Up-sala, belligerent about Brighton. I want to give up flight for walking, snuggle in with friends. RE: Kentridge show: William had such opposition to his taking the show to Israel - had to confront all of that boycott imagination. We had long wrangles - I don't believe in the goods of the cultural boycott. There are too many evils attendant. Still, you having fun? How to keep the suitcase in order???

of communications: Grow the nails and paint them scarlet is one option. I guess you have considered and rejected that one.

May 20
JT to DN

The Beagle has landed?

May 20
DN to JT

After 26 hours of travel, the very bedraggled beagle has landed. And slept four hours. And now sits, with a very sore head, trying to prepare class on the Celestina.

But the mutt's thoughts did wander, over and over again, to what we might do and how we might do it. The only real distraction from this was a slight melancholy induced by Badiou's response (and that of two of his followers) to the poor dog's own growlings: a name-calling ad hominem attack, which requires a week of showers to clean off the muck, before even thinking of a response.

And how is--what shall I call you?-- herself? Has she landed again on firm land? Or is she beginning to doubt whether there is any such thing, or whether even on the hardest ground we all sway on high heels, as if at sea?

May 20
JT to DN

I am so delighted at the anticipation of thinking with you, and we can start that dialogue once your head stops pounding. I would love to hear your thoughts on William's show in Israel too, but don't want them when your brain is leaking out of your ears!

I think it was a version (I had written 'aversion' which was not quite the thing!) of the MOMA show in NY last year.

I am busy preparing the paper for Utrecht and have been writing mainly about puppets as a way of thinking toward you. By the way, how miserable that Badiou is miserable. But at least it confirms what you (what one) suspected. How confounding if he had been a great generous spirit open for play!

4 hours sleep. NOT FAIR!

Nonetheless welcome to your home, its familiar corners, the covert pleasures of surveillance of your neighbours; Z & H across the road - with the good chance of bumping into Bradin buying macaroons; your mad prints of human torment on your elegant avocado green walls. And surely the perfumes of summer breaking in upon you?

Welcome home. When you can sleep, sleep well.

Perhaps we will make contact tomorrow when he is himself again.

May 21
JT to DN

The start to a day.

I have adopted a habit now when traveling and have to talk. This may be something you consider strategically:

That is, I mail any papers that I have to give, to myself, so that they remain logged on in a digital form in cyberspace in case of a technological crisis or theft. (a cost free version of "Mobile Me").

But this is a very short piece: aside from the plenary, I have to give a 7 minute talking point for a roundtable on inter-cultural performance

studies, so have taken the chance to think about some of my perennial obsessions (Why else do this?)

And nowadays (an old fashioned word) when I do that thinking I am thinking also of you and our dialogues. So here are 5 pages about performance, sincerity (implicitly hypocrisy) and the world. [Anything left out? oh yes, good morning. Although you and Morpheus are again, I suspect, lying with your arms entwined]

Around the Table: notes for Discussion, Utrecht 2011.

In trying to engage with the ethical obligations pointed at in the introduction to this collection of papers, I have been thinking about Levinas's injunction that we regard the face of the other. Such an imperative has particular significance for performance studies, because the face is not a neutral canvas notating gender, ethnicity, age and intelligence. It is a performance field, an environment that is schooled, modelled and modulated according to codes, conventions, habits and psychological experience.

Arjun Appadurai has described arenas within which models of meaning and significance are tested, as "tournaments of value." While he is referring particularly to commodities and negotiations managing the world of goods, such as the auction house, I would like to propose that in more abstract terms, sites such as the original Globe Theatre, or the Comedie Francaise, or the Spanish Inquisition, to take three historical examples, or the New Yorker magazine, the World Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as contemporary instances, could similarly be considered such "tournaments of value." All provide stages upon which conventions of affective expression are crafted and expressive bodies are disciplined, measured against some kind of abstract gold standard based in normalizing discourses of self-fashioning.

The presumption that seems to be implicit within these arenas is that sincerity is self-evident. (And here my deployment of *the New Yorker* becomes strategic. Last year in my University of Chicago graduate seminar on Sincerity, I asked my students to suggest what the antithesis of sincerity might be. The response, tellingly was not 'insincerity' but 'irony'.) My contention is that sincerity is a rhetorical and somatic performance within a complex relation of technologies, pleasures, arts, and power relations, in a global arena that demands a particular naturalised relation between truth and self-styling. The power of this process is that, as ideology, it has rendered its own processes invisible. In other words, I have been trained to believe that I can, at a glance 'read' the value of the other, through a myriad imperceptible codes that signal such brute information as 'friend' or 'foe'; 'interested' or 'flattering'; to more potent codes, such as 'scepticism' (a positive value) and 'hostility' (a threat). I would suggest that one reason why recent attacks in such public spaces as underground railway lines are so threatening, is that they reveal that, in our radically porous and multi-cultural contexts, a hermeneutics of performance can no longer deploy 'sincerity' as a given horizon of meaning.

The very idea of the "performance of sincerity" seems a contradiction in that sincerity cannot stage itself. Nonetheless modern western subjects take for granted a certain kind of intuitive savvy. We can, we assume, recognise sincerity when we see it. It is something of an intangible precisely in that it must remain beyond calculation. Sincerity cannot be deployed. While it may be attested to by witnesses, it must neither assert nor identify itself. Anywhere that "sincerity" names itself, it ceases to exist. It is a value that is vouched for through a circuit of social consensus, in which it cannot itself trade.

I am going to provide two brief "Case Studies" through which I am going to alert us to the claims for a transparent affective and expressive truth that arise within Protestant discourses. The presentation of sincerity as a natural good has been an immensely powerful tool of Protestant ideology, particularly because it masks its own discursive operations. (A strong instance might be found in the Quaker traditions, where pious modesty and selflessness ostensibly arise spontaneously from a purified heart.) The moral authority of this position was one of the key instruments of self-justification inside missionary imperialism. Subjugated cultures that might inhabit alternative modes of

staging personhood and authority are dismissed as improper, or disproportionate. The trope of the 'dishonest native' is wide spread within the colonial archive. So, too, modes of grieving and of mourning are frequently characterised as childlike, or excessive. The repressive armature of Western rationalism has been internalised as providing a natural balance, and alternative affective logics are discredited as pathological or immature. Freud's conception here of the psychosexual stages of development has provided a normative grid for adult affect. There are conventions of performance and of reception that have become so habitual and naturalized within our cultural spheres that much of what is transacted between us has been rendered invisible. This is the insight I have been considering in order to locate a semiotics of sincerity. Sincerity could be described as a mode of self-expression generally held to be non-discursive, transparent and outside of ideology. My enquiry explores what is being masked by this set of assumptions.

I am going to cite two cases from the public record of inter-cultural dialogue from the past fifteen years. My readings are partial and thus limited by the constraints of this forum, but I raise them for discussion.

CASE STUDY ONE:

I begin by considering the vexing press statements made at the start of the war with Iraq, by Saddam Hussein's Minister of Information, Mohammad Saeed al-Sahaf (who subsequently became the Iraqi Foreign Minister). The press seemed to revel in his statements, which generally vilified the coalition of the willing and declared how soundly they were being thrashed within the precinct of Baghdad, their livers being roasted over the fires of the faithful. These statements were interpreted by the Western media as reckless and flagrant lies, as models of scandalous folly. (In the spirit of this triumphalist chauvinism, a website even sprang up, "We love the Iraqi Information Minister," which was a forum dedicated to lampooning al-Sahaf's statements and general demeanour.) It struck me that what we may be watching was a performance that in fact arose from a distinct tradition with a logic and mode of representation that differs from those presumed as normative within western Protestantism. The more I examined it what seemed to become evident that the statements were discursive, not so much truth claims, as boasts. Boasting traditions have been much diminished in the west largely due to the rise of the technology of writing. Traces of such boasts however do remain in heroic epics such as *Beowulf*, or in fishing stories and second hand car-dealerships.

Here I am not discussing the merits or demerits of the content of the claims, I am pointing to the discursive field of a mode of performance.

CASE TWO:

On January 31 1996 a delegation of traditional healers, under the spiritual leadership of Chief Nicholas Tilana Gcaleka, travelled from the rural South-Eastern region of South Africa to Scotland, in order to retrieve the head of the nineteenth-century Xhosa king Hintsa. Chief Gcaleka, informed by vision, had delivered a message to his nation: that the violence and corruption which seemed to be the post-colonial legacy would only abate once the head of Hintsa was returned to its ancestral place. Hintsa had been shot in 1835 while attempting to escape after a period of humiliation as the hostage of Harry Smith, then Colonel of the British imperial forces in the region. Once Hintsa had been shot, his ears were cut off as trophies. According to documented accounts, the head was never severed; nor was it transported to Scotland. These

matters of historical record were of little significance in 1996, the year in which South Africa began its Truth and Reconciliation hearings. A vision had proclaimed to Ncaleka that Hintsa's head was elsewhere, in the cool soil of the North. The reintegration of the head to the site of the late king's origins would, many believed, begin the process of national healing. In chief Gcaleka's terms, the "hurricane spirits" of the ancestors had revealed the Scottish resting place of the head, because the soul of Hintsa was "blowing all over the world with no place to settle". Escorted by reporters from Sky TV, the Chief undertook what might be described as an ironic pilgrimage, from the Eastern Cape to Inverness, where he divined the presence of a skull asleep underground. The ecstatic euphoria that followed this discovery was somewhat diminished when South African forensic scientists, with the support of the current AmaXhosa Royal household, determined that the skull was "in fact" that of a Caucasian woman; and so Chief Gcaleka's moment was past. Nonetheless, it was clear that the truth which the Chief had revealed was not diminished by the facts. His assertion was not founded on a single event and a literal body, but rather was about a structural set of relations. Gcaleka's unquiet vision had reminded his auditors of the violation of the national body of the AmaXhosa under colonialism; moreover he suggested the dis-ease which is attendant upon the perceived violation of the integrity of the corpse.

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Both of these cases suggest that in the complex terrain of global justice, we should be more attentive to Protestantism's pious claims to a self-evident field of somatic meaning, meaning based on the naturalized staging of the sincere subject of western authority. The world order has begun to shift, and the ideological basis of Protestant authority within the field of affective value has become increasingly visible. (Remember all of the ludicrous performances of sincerity that we have witnessed from figures in public office over the past decade? These are evidence of a fundamental crisis around the representation of what we take to be 'appropriate' affect, as Protestant culture goes into decline.)

MAY 21
JT to DN

OOOPS. Idiot! I didn't send it!

May 21
DN to JT

But you DID send it, in the first e-mail, so not an idiot at all! (Or are you going to berate yourself for having thought you didn't send it when you did?)

I use the same strategy. Fireproof, theftproof, in the moisture of the cloud....

I've read the comments. I hope you enjoy giving them as much as I did reading them! I see what you are onto, and the enormous stakes in the project. You can predict that, if it were up to me, I wouldn't be so emphatic about the political examples: or write the history as a conspiracy of Protestantism/ colonialism, even though you are absolutely right about some of the effects of the global dispersal of the western subject. I wonder if, in our collaboration, we can't find a way of first making clear the stakes for us in reclaiming theatricality from the charge of insincerity, the stakes first as inter-subjective beings, then as artists, and finally as political subjects. I wonder if we couldn't bring together some texts (Ovid, Andreas Capellanus, Celestina, Shakespeare, Kafka) and objects/representations (Kentrige drawings, puppets, porn stills?) that might serve as stepping stones for a redemption of "insincerity", i.e., of revelling in the split between observable and interior, as prerequisites of love and art. This, a positive performance/ reconstruction of insincerity as crucial to our most vital needs as inter-subjective beings, rather than a deconstruction of sincerity as a colonialist value. It might also help us make sense, in our own way, of the glories and the dangers of our epistolary performances as vehicles of love.

All very telegraphic, I know. How to say things more fully, in intertwined voices?

d

May 21
JT to DN
Dear David

How much it matters to have your sensibility engaged in this with me, because your vigilance about the implications is so fitting. I don't want it to be a conspiracy - I don't think it is one. What I think, is that ideology works its effects this way - I become captive to a habit, a practice that embodies me. It is not an intended will to power, it is about the production of the self within a zone of well-being, that is natural, comforting to me; it disciplines me and I discipline it. So a circuit of affirmation is naturalized. Then I watch, say, a woman wailing at the loss of her child, and my demeanor has me trained to understand this as excessive, infantile, disproportionate - perhaps, even, inauthentic, for show, because my inhibited self would not allow me to make such a display of grief within good grammar. It is curiously, almost a de

Man -ian effect: a blindness toward others' embodiment of affect premised upon the good governance (the insight) of my own. (And of course I am not at ease in this inhibited, and burdensome regimented modality of expression; but nor am I at ease outside of it. But the effect - not the intention - is that I am stitched into an aesthetics and performance of authenticity that is premised on a set of attitudes that I am not even aware that I have because sincerity is natural, an appropriate response always of the rights scale - do you see? Does it make this more meaningful if I clarify some of this, spell it out in such terms, or is this worse?

The cases I have selected arise from the context of the round table - it is a roundtable about inter-cultural performances: looking at global sites, trying to make sense of what is happening in "global performance studies." My considerations are trying to see how I produce theoretical instruments premised on codes and habits that mask themselves from me.

But I am so chastened to find that I seem to 'fall into' a habit that makes itself invisible to me - so thank you for the promptings.

Of our transaction together - I love that folding over of the page, passing on to receive it back with you inscribed upon it, ever shifting the ground. yes, I love that. I will start sharing with you a bouquet of textual blooms that will pulse their perfume into the night air beside your mirror.

xxj

May 21
DN to JT

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I didn't know there was a digital option. It would indeed allow us all sorts of things. But how does one do such a thing? I never imagined the possibility. Is it within our expertise? Does documenta provide the technology? Beckett and Chaplin and your girl and Ubu and the Truth Commission and Kentrige holding his mother and what else. How exciting!

Alex and I have just returned from our mega tour of the Castilian meseta. It was so delightful to look at things with him. He has a way of saying what he sees that I can only envy. And there is also just the joy of being together. Plus it was nice to be in air-conditioned hotels.... Now back to 38 celsius and perpetually beaded brows.

I am experiencing some terror of the canvas (or should I say stage-fright, given our theme). But that terror will be overcome, tomorrow, a.m.

Alexander will sleep (till 11 or so, I'm sure), and I will rehearse misdirected replies to misdirected letters.

Last night I had dinner with Nicholas Sanchez-Albornoz, one of the great Spanish historians of this generation, son of the greatest Spanish historian of the 20th century, and most relevant to this discussion, a prisoner in Franco's forced labor camp building the Valle de los Caídos, the monument to Franco and the fascist fallen, until he broke out in a daring escape involving Norman Mailer's car. It was like dining with the Guernica. I still haven't seen the painting, but on your instruction, will set off for the Reina Sofia with Alexander. Who sends, by the way, his regards.

X

JT to DN
May 22

Very Dear

I am thinking that it would be awfully nice to sit in an airport with a handful of Ovid to puzzle over; or in a Hotel room when silence sets in. SO if there are a few lines that I could push about on another continent - would you put them in a suitcase and send them after me?

Carolyn has sent me a batch of the first Docuemnta notebebooks: they are by : (some of whom you may/may not know -- me too:

Kenneth Goldsmith
Christoph Menke
Peter Gyorgy
Emily Jacir and Susan Buck Morss
Etel Adnan
Vanessa Shiva
Lawrence Weiner
G. M. Tamás
Paul Ryan
Jalal Toufic
György Lukacs
Erkki Kurenniemi
Michael Taussig
Ian Wallace
Alejandro Jodorowsky
William Kentridge and Peter Galison
Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.

xx

DN to JT
May 22

A distinguished list! Was that all in one year? Quite a reading assignment. And here is the reading assignment you requested. I think that it is a jewel, not least because of the emphasis it places on ACTING in love (and NOT

ACTING in love) in order to become (or not become) in love. But the delights of Ovid are without end.... If this doesn't make you smile like a lunatic in your airports, nothing will.

<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/CuresforLove.htm>

JT to DN
May 22

I imagine that you are aware that Leo Africanus was a spirit guide for Yeats. I only just discovered this - how bloody interesting

DN to JT
May 22

Hamlet might be an interesting text-trigger ("I know not seems"), an inquisition frontispiece an interesting iconic image background, for our musings. About Leo Africanus I have heard much from Natalie Davis, but I've never paid much attention (just too many balls in the air for me to track). If it matters to us, of course I will.

You must by now be in the air yourself?

JT to DN
May 22

It is an absurd 11 pm flight - and there is apparently ash in the air - a new eruption. But I trust that all will be well.

JT to DN
May 22

Hey, David - throwing rocks? I hope that you are Ninja-like and that they bounced off your carapace.

Will be thinking of you with your balls in the air - perhaps I will fly past them?

x j

JT to DN
May 25

And so one composes, disposes, decomposes

Dear David

So, then, today I consider you. Having received such a lovely gift of Ovid with (*is it* your hand?) your hand having traced unsteady lines of attention, of excitement around Ovid the physician, the pharmacist, ministering to remedy the infections of love. And I remember early delights, at a common/

uncommon ground of shared fascinations. Who might he be? I asked, this strange man with curious habits of attention. Well, perhaps he was you.

Also today you are in mind because of a paper, by Brian Rotman, on mathematics and philosophy; so there you are, I think. A gesture of love is never gratuitous. So in exchange for the Remedy For Love, a gift of Love, a lingual love, to a notional you. Who is also not a notional you, because I have *your* Ovid, before me, with *your* unsteady lines of attention.

So it might as well be you that I am prompted to remember, not a notional David Nirenberg, not at all.

I am filled with a day of astonishing papers, such challenges and provocations.

Tonight I turn my mind to my plenary for tomorrow; but now I am pleased to be thinking of you; notional or not, my dear reader, my dear writer. So a greeting from here; because to give is what we have.

DN to JT
May 25

Dear Jane,
it must be morning where you are, if you are reading this, and you about to give your plenary. i hope you enjoy that as much as they will enjoy you.

i am loath to say it, for i hate to deprive us of a communicative mark, but the lines are not mine, and do not map my attention. the pdf came from somewhere, i know not where, and the traces are anonymous. did they inspire thought?

i did not know the work of brian rotman. his wikipedia page points to a nicely idiosyncratic intellectual itinerary, and posts a picture that promises friendliness. is the promise fulfilled?

today i met with josef stern, who hoped that you might be lured to continue our hypocrisy and dissimulation collaboration. i promised to try my best to convince you. and i suggested an interlocutor of a sort, freddie rokem, of tel aviv, whose work might make a good foil for yours. Do you know his writing? a dramaturg and theoretician of theater....

May your plenary fill the sails of all souls assembled. I wish I could hear it. in the meantime, i have your disk and your gertrude stein (what a story), and your greeting of love, which I return without any notion of notion.

your d

JT to DN
May 25

Small Rain

It is just beginning to drizzle - a soft small rain. My lecture was in a great old Protestant barn that was once a proud Catholic kerk. So a good place in which to explore sincerity; but terrible acoustics, so had to speak very very slowly because of echoes; so didn't finish and felt rushed - you know how awful that is!

But then spent the last two hours being quizzed by a great plane tree of a man - an earnest open American German/Italian; and I thought of a dear

subtle and dark juniper filled with complex thought and discontent and how I missed him.

So here is an interesting puzzle - about your Ovid - Here's a serious question, theoretical as well as personal. Why did you tell the truth about the marked up page? Here we are exploring theatricality, so I am interested to know why you chose to be honest in this. If the marks had been elegant and cleaner would you have owned them, or would you feel compelled to tell the truth? Did it not occur to you to lie? Would you lie about this under other circumstances? In what situation would the lie be good not bad? Theatrical, not dishonest?

x

DN to JT
May 26

What a beautiful note. Not only because of its theatrical moments ("very very very"), but also because of that stunning arboreal personification (i feel like daphne, or an ent....) I've just got in from dinner and too much gin, but what i am trying to say is how very moved i was to be your dark and discontented juniper.

it never occurred to me to lie. But perhaps this was too underdetermined a question for me. i didn't know that there were lines, nor whether they were clever or dull, scrawled or arabesque. I didn't know enough to imagine that art on my part could be called for. From here, to the rest of your question, an ocean of possibility makes it impossible for me to sail to answer. Surely there must be a large number of circumstances under which I would lie about this (some terrorist threatening to kill 100 school children unless i admit that the lines are mine?). But why would theatrical in this case be applied? Why would it be the antipode of bad dishonesty? Is a good lie necessarily theatrical? Or is theatricality a mode of striving to express some connection between interiority and its sign, rather than a disjuncture between inner truth and outer falsehood?

I love your description of a kerk's metamorphosis into barn. But nowhere do you say what i most want to know: that you have laughed, smiled, been absorbed here and there sufficient unto forgetting.

xd

JT to DN
May 27

How lovely - a complex riddling. I am not so much asking just about these annotations, these lines, but rather asking about whether an epistolary exchange is a theatre or a dialogue with the Soul; and whether it is sometimes one sometimes another - surely that's the case. So i am really thinking about codes and conventions of letter writing and how and under what rules we write our 'letters to one another' (once we signal that that is what we are doing, in a formal way, because that frame will change the way this is possible, when we are a little theatre (but are we not already?) so that's the kind

of puzzling I am doing. How will we know when we 'begin to write to one another' - will the codes have changed. Of course my question was too terse, under-formulated to really imagine that you could really imagine . . .

On the question of laughter, dialogues, interest, and the Mathematician: we had a nice discussion in the lobby as he was loitering before going out doors for a cigarette - (I was tempted but its been more or less twenty years since I smoked anything but that cigar and am wary of the fall). He was positing that writing as a technology removes all affective traces from itself in the interests of utility - and somehow we then strayed onto Yahweh (of course he is an interesting Jew!) who in becoming written had lost his affective power; and I responded that I thought that The Song of Solomon and the Psalms still hold that in place. So however incompetent the late night thinking, we did manage to have some odd interest.

But dear Juniper, I came back to my room so pleased to imagine that at some stage in the dark hours we would have this exchange, these exchanges.

xx

DN to JT

May 27

ahhhh! now i begin to understand! i was frustrated even with myself at not being able to figure out what was at stake in the last. maybe the gin had something to do with it....

today though will be almost riddle-less. i leave for a coffee with a colleague in 45 minutes, and then it is all meetings and class (my last of the term!) and office hours and dept. receptions and yes, going out late to see Hang Over 2 with Alexander.... So your juniper will rustle very little at your windows on this windless day.

Oh, just so you don't say i never sing for you, here is the song i'm singing now, sung by someone who doesn't have the voice i have.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FGeLUQQH6w>

May 28

JT to DN

“Water comes creeping in, sly, from a neighbouring stream”

Am I to read these *Remedies For Love* as remedies for love? Impossible. Rather, they are prompts, instigations, prickings of the heart and mind at the recollections of the beloved; a falling in love at the filling of one's eyes, ears, palate, with the taste of one's love. Pointless are Ovid's injunctions to remember the details of the beloved to recall why he is unlovely. Think of his flaws: you bring him to mind; keep him at heart.

Ovid cannot teach one how not to love. I have tried to follow his plan: considered all the lacks, the deficiencies in the beloved: a too much of this, a too little of that. Oh, how yielding; . . . ha! how inflexible; but the antidote requires us to call to mind that peculiar, that singular, particular being that (outside of reason) is its own reason.

The homeopathic trace that will treat the ailment? No. These little flaws are all that make such a one just such a one, and cannot be the cure.

He knows it too, the old dissembler; full well Ovid knows that when he talks to me of stemming a passion, or calming a riot, that he seats me in his theatre; the Anti-Masque is a Masque, no?

Surely he needs me to love, if he is going to persuade me to read his remedies. So he woos in the instant that he avers. That's the old man's trick. Ovid is the old liar, luring in while driving out. The doctor infects his patient, so that he can trade in cures.

But of course one reads the Remedies for Love because one remembers being in love; remembers removing oneself from the place of safety.

I remember. I am the lover. Do I seek the Remedy for Love? I never want to love again; I never want to be not in love. The only Remedy for Love is to be in Love. I am the remedy for Love.

May 30

Alder trees and creeping water

DN to JT

Dear bolted, bathed, bent-winged, and bedded Jane, welcome home. Thinking of your plane trees and junipers, I send you some music involving their kin, alela diane on alders. Not meant, of course, as exchange for your shimmering remedies of love (is the creeping water a quote? if so where from?). Of course he is a sly physician, he confesses it, I think: I am not to be trusted, for I too am diseased. But somehow I feel that through pretending the negative, the antidote, he tells us something positive about the poison. That is: love too is theatrical. It is in performing our love, in speaking of and remembering, that we nourish love. And if we are not capable of performing it in a way that is visible to the other, that helps them to see our passion for them in our actions and hear in our sounds and syllables our desire and attention, then love will wither. In love, as in sex, we need to make our pleasure sufficiently visible to the other so that they feel desired, but not so visible that the desire feels false. Except, of course, in “kinky” relations (here I confess ignorance), where I imagine that even hyper-theatricality can feel loving....

So in the spirit of beginning a meditation on art, love and inter-subjectivity, theatricality, here are two texts I wondered if we might not comment on. One is Matthew 23:

23:1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, 3 so practice and observe whatever they tell you—but not what they do. For they preach, but do not practice. 4 They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, [1] and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. 5 They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long... 25 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. 27 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you also

outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

I am struck by the extreme confusion between appearance and truth, beauty and meaning, material exterior and spiritual interior, that swirls around this figure of the Pharisee. I might almost say that the Pharisee has become (among other things) a figuration of the art object, something crafted to be beheld. But as art he is negatively “theatrical”: a representation that is motivated by, encourages, and comes to represent misplaced priorities, the wrong kind of absorption, an attention that focuses on the killing delights of this world, rather than seeing through them into the next. This seems to me a key moment in the stigmatization of our awareness of and desire for the eye of the other upon us.

Within our conversation, I would like to put that text in relation to one from a very different time and place: Franz Kafka’s first published story, “Conversation with the Supplicant/Gespräch mit dem Better,” of 1908. Here it is:

=====

There was a time when I went every day into a church, since a girl I was in love with knelt there in prayer for half an hour in the evening and I was able to look at her in peace.

Once when she had not come and I was reluctantly eyeing the other supplicants I noticed a young fellow who had thrown his whole lean length along the floor. Every now and then he clutched his head as hard as he could and sighing loudly beat it in his upturned palms on the stone flags.

Only a few old women were in the church, and they kept turning their shawled heads sideways to watch the young man at his devotions. Their awareness of him seemed to please him, for before each of his pious outbursts he cast his eyes around to see whether many of them were looking. This I found unseemly, and I made up my mind to accost him as he left the church and to ask him why he prayed in such a manner. Yes, I felt irritable because my girl had not come.

But an hour elapsed before he stood up, crossed himself punctiliously and strode jerkily towards the basin of holy water. I set myself in a direct line between the basin and the door, knowing that I was not going to let him pass without an explanation. I screwed up my mouth as I always do when I want to speak decisively, I advanced my right leg and rested all my weight upon it, balancing my left leg carelessly on the points of my toes, that too gives me a sense of firmness.

Now it is possible that the young man had already caught sight of me when he was sprinkling himself with the holy water, or he might even have remarked me sooner with some dismay for he made a sudden unexpected dash through the doorway. The glass door band shut. And when I came out immediately behind him I could not see him anywhere, for there were several narrow streets and plenty of traffic.

He stayed away for the next few days, but my girl was there. She was wearing her black dress with the transparent lace top over the shoulders—the crescent of her petticoat showed under it— from the lower edge of which the silk hung down in a beautiful cut ruffle. And since she had come I forgot the young man and did not even concern myself with him

when he continued to appear regularly to do his devotions in the usual manner. Yet whenever he passed me he always seemed in a great hurry and turned his face away. Perhaps it was only that I could not think of him except in motion and so even when he was standing still he seemed to me to be slithering past.

One evening I stayed too long in my room. All the same, I went along to the church. My girl was not there, and I thought of going home again. But there was the young fellow lying on the floor. I was reminded of my first encounter with him and my curiosity revived.

I went on tiptoe to the doorway, gave a coin to the blind beggar who sat there and squeezed in beside him behind the open half of the door; and for a whole hour there I sat, perhaps with a crafty look upon my face. I liked being there and made up my mind to come again often. In the second hour I began to think it foolish to sit there because of a man at his prayers. Yet for a third hour in growing irritation I let the spiders creep over my clothes while the last of the people came, drawing deep breaths, out of the darkness of the church.

And then he too came. He was walking cautiously, testing the ground lightly with his feet before setting them down.

I rose up, took a large stride forward and seized him.

“Good evening,” I said, and with my hand on his collar pushed him down the steps into the lighted square.

When we were down on the level he said in a fluttering voice “Good evening, my dear, dear sir, don’t be angry with me, your most devoted servant.”

“Well,” said I, “I want to ask you some questions, sit; you slipped through my fingers the other time but you’ll hardly do that tonight.”

“Sir, you are a compassionate man and you’ll let me go home. I’m a poor creature, that’s the truth.”

“No,” I cried, against the noise of a passing train, “I won’t let you go. This is the kind of encounter I like. You’re a lucky catch for me. I congratulate myself.”

The he said, “Oh God, your heart is alive but your head is a block of wood. You call me a lucky catch, what good luck you must be sure of! For my bad luck is like a seesaw teetering on a very fine point, and it will fall on anyone’s head who lays a questioning finger upon it. Good night, sir.”

“Right,” said I, and held his right hand fast, “if you don’t give me an answer I’ll begin to yell here in the street. And all the shop girls that are coming out now and all their sweethearts waiting for them so happily will come running up, for they’ll think a carriage horse has fallen down or some accident has happened. And then I’ll point you out to the people.

At that he tearfully kissed my hands, one after the other. “I’ll tell you what you want to know, but please let us rather go into the side street over there. I nodded, and we crossed to it.

But it was not enough for him to be in the dusk of the little street where only a few yellow lamps hung at wide intervals, he drew me into the low hallway of an old house underneath a tiny lamp that hung dripping before a wooden stair. There he took out his handkerchief gravely and spread it on a step saying, “Do sit down my dear sir, and you will be better able to ask questions, while I stand here, for so I’ll be better able to answer them. Only don’t torment me.”

So I sat down and said, looking up at him with narrowed eyes, “You’re an utter lunatic, that’s what you are! Look at the way you carry on in the church! How irritating it is and how unpleasant for onlookers! How can anyone compose himself to worship if he has to look at you?”

He kept his body pressed against the wall, only his head could move freely to and fro. “Don’t be angry- why should you be angry about things that don’t concern you? I get angry when I behave badly; but if someone else does the wrong thing I am delighted. So don’t be angry if I tell you that it is the aim of my life to get people to look at me.”

“What a thing to say,” I cried, much too loudly for the low-roofed hallway, but I was afraid to let my voice die away again, “truly, what a thing to say. Of course I can guess, of course I guessed the first time I saw you, what kind of state you are in. I’ve had some experience, and I don’t mean it as a joke when I tell you it’s like being seasick on dry land. It’s a condition in which you can’t remember the real names of things and so in a great hurry you fling temporary names at them. You do it as fast as you can. But you’ve hardly turned your back on them before you’ve forgotten what you called them. A poplar in the fields which you called ‘the tower of Babel,’ since you either didn’t or wouldn’t know what it was a poplar, stands wavering anonymously again, and so you have to call it ‘Noah is his cups.’”

I was somewhat disconcerted when he said, “I’m thankful to say that I don’t understand what you’ve been talking about.”

With annoyance I answered quickly. “Your saying that you’re thankful shows that you do know what I was talking about.”

“Of course it shows that, my dear sir, but what you said was rather peculiar, too.”

I laid my hands on a step above me, leaned right back and in this almost untacklable position, which is the last resource of a wrestler, asked him, “Haven’t you a comic way of wriggling out of things, projecting your own state of mind like that on other people?”

That made him pluck up courage. He clasps his hands together to give his body unity, and put up some resistance, saying, “No, I don’t do that with anyone, not even with you, for instance, because I can’t. But I should be glad if I could, for then I wouldn’t need to make people look at me in church. Do you know why I need to?”

This question rather dished me. Of course I didn’t know, and I believed I didn’t want to know. I never wanted to come here, I said to myself, but the creature forced me to give such a hearing. So all I had to do was to shake my head, to convey that I didn’t know, yet I found myself unable to move my head at all.

The young man standing opposite me smiled. The he dropped on his knees and with a dreamy look on his face told me, “There has never been a time in which I have been convinced from within myself that I am alive. You see, I have only such a fugitive awareness of things around me that I always feel they were once real and are not fleeting away. I have a constant longing, my dear sir, to catch a glimpse of things as they may have been before they show themselves to me. I feel that then they were calm and beautiful. It must be so, for I often hear people talking about them as though they were.”

Since I made no answer and only through involuntary twitchings in my face betrayed my uneasiness, he asked, “Don’t you believe that people talk like that?”

I knew I ought to nod assent but couldn’t do it.

“You don’t really believe it? Why, listen; once when I was a child and just waking up from a short afternoon nap, still half asleep, I heard my mother calling own from the balcony in the most natural voice, ‘What are you doing, my dear? It’s so hot.’ And a woman answered from the garden, ‘I’m reveling in the grass.’ She said it quite simply and without insistence, as if it were to be taken for granted.”

I thought an answer was expected from me, so I felt in my hip trouser pocket as if I was looking for something. But I wasn’t looking for anything, I only wanted to shift my position to show that I was paying attention. And then I said that the incident was remarkable enough and quite beyond my comprehension. I added also that I didn’t believe it was true and that it must have been invented for some special purpose which I could not fathom. Then I shut my eyes for they were hurting me.

“Oh, how glad I am that you agree with me, and it was most unselfish of you to stop me in order to let me know it. Why indeed should I feel ashamed- or why should we feel ashamed- because I don’t walk upright and ponderously, striking my walking stick on the pavement and brushing the clothes of the people who pass by so loudly. Shouldn’t I rather venture to complain with justified resentment at having to flit along the house walls like a shadow with hunched shoulders, many a time disappearing from sight in the plate glass of the shop windows.

“What dreadful days I have to live through. Why are all out-buildings so badly put together that tall houses sometimes collapse without any discernable external cause? I go clambering over the ruins asking everyone I meet, ‘Now how could such a thing happen? In our town- a brand new house- that’; the fifth one today- just think of it!’ And nobody can give me an answer.

“And people often fall down in the street and lie there dead. Then all the tradesmen open their doors that are hung with a little of goods, come trotting out, carry the dead man into a house, and then appear again, with smiling eyes and lips, saying, ‘Good morning- the sky is overcast- I’m selling a lot of kerchiefs- yes, the war.’ I go slinking into the house and after timidly raising my hand several times with the fingers ready crooked knock at last on the porter’s little glass window. ‘My dear fellow,’ I say to him in a friendly way, ‘a dead man was just brought in here. Do let me see him, please.’ And when he shakes his head as if undecided, I say positively, ‘My dear chap. I’m from the secret police. Show me that dead man at once.’ ‘A dead man,’ he asks, almost in an injured voice. ‘No, there’s no dead man here. This is a respectable house.’ And I take my leave and go.

“And then if I have to cross a large open space I forget everything. The difficulty of this enterprise confuses me, and I can’t help thinking, ‘If people must build such large squares out of pure wantonness why don’t they ass a stone balustrade to help one across? There’s a gale from the southwest today. The air in the square is swirling about. The tip of the Town Hall is teetering in small circles. All this agitation should be controlled. Every window pane is rattling and the lamp posts are bending like bamboo. Th every robe of the Virgin Mark on her column is fluttering and the stormy wind is snatching at it. Is no one aware of this? The ladies and gentlemen who should be walking on the paving stones are driven along. When the wind slackens they come to a stop, exchange

a few words and bow to each other, but when the wind blows again they can't help themselves, all their feet leave the ground at the same moment. They have to hold on to their hats, or course, but their eyes twinkle merrily as if there were only a gentle breeze. No one's afraid but me."

Smarting as I was, I said, "The story you told me about your mother and the woman in the garden seems to me not in the least remarkable. Not only have I heard many like it and experienced them, but I've even played a part in some of them. It was quite a natural incident. Do you think that if I had been on the balcony I couldn't have said the same thing and got the same answer from the garden? Such a simple affair."

When I said that, he seemed very delighted. He remarked that I was well dressed and he particularly liked my tie. And what a fine skin I had. And admissions became most clear and unequivocal when one withdrew them.

=====

It seems to me that here the "Pharisaic" becomes the necessary condition of everyone who is truly alive to language. Whereas the comfortable Christian who knows how to "appear" stable without "being" stable, and without seeming wanting to be seen to appear (i.e., without being theatrical) who is stigmatized as dwelling in the realm of appearances and dead letters. (In the description of the well-dressed worshipper "in a beautiful cut ruffle" the German is "wohl geschnitte," well cut, well circumcized.)

I want also to write to you about Aristotle in theatre, but I realize that this is becoming more a "data dump" than an epistle....

Belfast, Galway... do you never sit still, you whirling dervish?

Alela Diane
<http://youtu.be/5ZGYIdv7Mo>

May 31
JT to DN

Dear David - How lovely to be so many B's.

And thank you for the texts - such a rich forest of meanings. I am busy straightening the tie of my paper for Belfast right now, though can't wait to get back to this dialogue with its now very subtle and complex colours - like this fawn-to-brown-to-gold-to orange moth wings. All of the full range, but fugitive, as if seen through the half light.

I didn't know Alela Diane and was thrilled to meet her with her little green helicopters- I watched a wonderful pirate's song of hers on YouTube.

I have been advised now that Chomsky was the previous speaker in the series of talks given at Utrecht; what that means is a bit of an enigma, but it has glamour. I surely am hoping to meet Brian Friel in Belfast, and to all that riotous Irish behaviour. Fiddles in the pub at midnight and lots of blarney I imagine, and more punning than a human being can bear. I am going to have to watch the Irish whiskey.

And by the way: I want to sit still.

May 31
JT to DN

Dear Cuckoo, how lovely to have your voice in my branches. Is it summer, really summer - are there blue skies, sultry nights, jazz concerts? I suspect that summer will be a drizzly affair in Ireland.

(By the way, of Utrecht, the Nicholaskerk in which I 'preached' had the most brilliant enormous old iron machineries for a bell-pull: a huge square of interlocking boxes and spirals and circles all mechanically interlocked. It reminded me so of the wondrous grasshopper escapements of our stupifying coupling of early discoveries.)



The paper for Utrecht was perhaps too much familiar ground for you, to be of interest; but I am, because of Irish violence, thinking about martyrdom - that ghastly figure of ghastly sincerity. What is the moral economy of all those hideous devices of torment in Counter-Reformation images- the wheel, the severed breasts etc etc, endlessly mutilating aesthetics. I know that this is all supposed to be the logic of synecdoche but it strikes me that surely there is something more going on? What is it that makes mutilation an emblem of sainthood? Is piety of attitude just too hard to paint? Are these 'props?' Are they indexical? Are these theatres of war?

By the way, do you know about the controversial Santiago Sierra's site-specific installation in a synagogue - rubber hosing linked to car exhausted pumping carbon monoxide in through the windows - There was a paper on the controversy it launched at the conference.

What to make of its violently offensive engagement?

May 31
Last gasp
JT to DN

Apologies for the asymmetries but the next day or so will be unpredictable. So I am storing up credits! Also, though, am just talking to you!

Here is a link to the fabulous opening scenes of City Lights - remember I mentioned them in relation to the work of art and sex in the cultural coding of the Jew - I am not sure what this says about the pharisee but I think its really a key motif in a way. The first scene - of public art is pretty great but it's really the scene, "Afternoon" which has the tramp avoiding gazing at the nude statue that is a telling motif - linked as it is to the threat and avoidance of the abject self (falling into the open shaft, which is a grave of its own kind.)

I hope you laugh out loud. xxx

<http://youtu.be/y0rnDH7GKYg>

Jun 1
JT to DN

And do we think that the detachable finger of the glove is a circumcision motif?

Jun 1
DN to JT

So much to respond to! But poor Charlie, first fucked up the ass by the monumental sword, then castrated by a young 'un, and in between... well yes, a grave, but what an enormous phallus arises out of it! (And uncircumcised: the goon wears a cap.) Would you tell me more of what you mean by art, sex, and the cultural coding of the jew? I'm sure that it is key, but I'm not yet sure to what lock....

Your martyrdom point is key too. Martyrdom so often, in the early church, meant to be a seal of authenticity on conversion.... But it surprised me to learn recently just how early the early church began to wonder if martyrdom was any more secure from dissimulation than any other performance. Thomas Sizgorich has some very nice pages on this in his book „Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity“ (pages 124 ff. which, looking this up for you, i note juxtapose an analysis of the writings of the late antique monk Shenoute with modern studies of the performance of female orgasm in pornography!).

Oops, my house guest (my old Israeli friend and boxing instructor Eran) has just arisen. But I shan't leave without saying: yes, summer! and last night, as Eran and I walked in the muggy eve, we DID hear jazz wafting from a party on the quad. So your description was simultaneous with reality.

Do you leave today or tomorrow for verdant lands?

Jun 1
JT to DN

how funny - your, „the goon is wearing a cap“!

I am so interested in this fragment of film. Chaplin at his most beautiful but performing himself as unlovely. Then he comes across the sculptural form, cannot withdraw from its appeal. He is abashed, not wanting to be found prurient, overtly sexualized); and so feigns an aesthetic interest - it is the eye of the connoisseur that he returns to the object. But that is a trick of a kind, I think, because what starts out as an evasion of the cliché of Jewish male sexual appetite, ends up disguising itself as Jewish male, aesthetic arbiter of value. (and dealer.) So it seem to me that the sexual engagement and the aesthetic are in some ways co-articulated; each provides an alibi for the other; each provides a pretext for derision because of the conjunction of sexual/aesthetic/commodity acuity. So Charlie hides his gaze as the 'disinterested' scrutiny of the connoisseur but that condemns him as the Merchant. my ducats, my daughter.

I go to see a play tonight - also to drinks to celebrate my dear friend Ingrid's birthday (the one who stamps her foot because I never talk to her about myself. For her birthday I sent her a letter about myself. How odd of me. But I am also taking her a bottle of Glenfiddich and some earrings!).

If I am still alert when I get in I will sit before your lovely Kafka for a while; and think of your Pharisee, poor fellow. It is, in a way, his legacy that is Charlie's burden.

oh, and 'faking it?' What an anxiety for everyone. And what of 'giving a better performance?'

Nice to think of you and your boxing champ together, A colleague here has just compelled me to read his first novel - he wants to know if I will write a 'shout' for the cover. The book, „Bad Sex“ is about, well, bad sex, but also about the arcana of boxing. Many rounds of both.

x

Jun 1
Jt to DN

So here we have the figure of that grave that Chaplin avoids. How interesting. But the real grave is the body and the rage is against mortality, surely. The art object, like the whole object world threatens to exceed us because it lives longer than we do, shows no signs of time. A sepulchre can be white-washed, regain freshness; the tomb that is full of dead people's bones is me (that's not how I feel; that's his accusation!) This is an early version of Mrs Veal and Mrs Bargraves from Defoe - the dialogue between the Body and the Soul; (remember that trace: Veal as surely, flesh, and Bargraves is beyond mortality?) yet the form that it takes, to mask its fear of mortality, (nature) is to raise a tirade against the art object that as Keats knows exceeds all things, potentially lives forever. But there is no embrace of death and the flesh here either - mysteriously the attack is against art; but via a loathing for the not-art (the flesh, mortality, decay). How does one get out of that double bind? What does piety look like for this accuser. I wonder? How I assault you with my thinking aloud.

I am off tomorrow, and am not sure what internet access I will have. I will do what I can to seek you out. Have lovely days, sublime evenings. When do you take yourself off to Spanish pleasures for the summer?

j

Jun 3
JT to DN

And good dog! good dog! for tracing this meditation on the martyr. Perhaps at some stage (!) I might look at Donne's "Pseudo-Martyr" to consider what he is doing there? It had never really struck me before that the squeamishness about martyrdom may in some ways be an anti-theatrical trace.

Jun 3
DN to JT

As I slept, you winged, northward, northward toward volcanoes and fresh grass. And now you are in Belfast, one colonized accent meeting another.... I've never been to Ireland, but Alexander (who is after all half Irish) flies there next Sunday. Please leave pebbles to help him find his way.

I've been thinking about your "death and the art object." In the Charlie Chaplin, that makes so much sense, and why not, in modernity as a whole. But I'm not sure about that yawn of time stretching a millennium from Paul. (Not that this matters to us.) I think that before the 14th century or so, the art object was not thought of in terms of this immortality (poetry got there first, perhaps, thanks to Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and their monuments more enduring than bronze). So I'm wondering how the two go together, how art's overcoming of its theatrical stigmata, and its achievement of immortality, are related....

Safe and enjoyable travels, delightful interviews, rave reviews: I wish them all for you. I leave here the 14th of June, and will have internet. Do you please write, whenever you find secure tether.

love, d

Jun 3
JT to DN

Belfast - An astonishing day though a bit zombie-like (sleep deprived as much as anything else.) Taken up and down the Shankill and Falls Roads, where republic and unionist homes face one another down over a 40 ft high corrugated steel and rocket-proof mesh fence. The city locked closed at mid-point every evening still. A sobering walk with my host, Mark, amongst the graveyards - all of the factions that had murderously keen political finesse. And fascinating discussions about miscarried infants who allegedly went to limbo. Mark's own mother's first-born died at several days in the hospital (drowned! somehow) and then went to limbo. She was never given the little body, and was told it was in limbo. The church has

apparently just come out with a statement denying that limbo was ever a doctrine. The bastards. Outside the graveyard they have discovered a mass grave with about 10000 infant corpses that are presumed died without baptism and were disappeared. Spontaneous funerary gestures are shooting up like daffodils: simple crosses, marked 'baby Doyle' or 'baby Margaret.'

BTW - I don't mean the Chaplin as a lineage - really a way of thinking about the aesthetic and value and somehow distinct from the erotic. Is there anything particular in Jewish masculinity in this, I am asking. Still, really just musing.

Will Alex be coming to Belfast? Or is he Dublin-bound?

Jun 19
Varia of an interesting sort
JT to DN

Summer Sunday in Spain. Cape of Storms here.

Have you ever read Cymbeline? I hadn't, but investigated it because it has a wager, of the sexual fidelity kind, which struck me as of the kind that is 'at the heart' of the Cardenio story in Don Quixote, so have been playing with the text, as a way in to the Greenblatt Commission. I have found some rather wondrous pieces that are of interest for our epistolary circulations, and of interest for you in your own enquiries:

SO: CYMBELINE:

The plot: King Cymbeline's wicked Queen is trying to compel her step-daughter Imogen (the King's daughter and 'apparent' only surviving heir, because two sons have been stolen in infancy), to marry her own loutish son, Cloten. Imogen is though in love with Posthumous Leonatus, who is in hiding. Iachomo arrives with a letter from Leonatus, but also to test Imogen's fidelity. (That is the 'wager' in the play). So here are some threads. The first, really just for fun, and your entertainment:

1. Is an old interest, The Nose. Domination and resistance are figured through the trope of the Nose, which stands here for British insularity and genetic purity (Act III; i; 12):

Cloten: (who is the lout of the piece) comments that his people will not pay tribute:

'Britain is a world by itself and we will pay nothing
for wearing our own noses.'
HA!

2. And here is our interest in theatricality; outsides and insides: There is a rather lovely image. Iachomo, who has come to test Imogen's fidelity: on first meeting her, notes of her beauty:

"All of her that is out of door most rich!
If she be furnished with a mind so rare,
She is alone th' Arabian bird. . . "

I love that curious conjoining of the outer being as an “out of door”: immovable property; while Imogen’s inner universe, her mind and sensibility are furnishings, portable property of a kind. This is how Hume figures the mind - who knew the trope was there so early on? And somehow that meditation calls up a metaphors of the Arab: this is partly about singularities, [but is it also about trade? How is the Arab trader figured in the seventeenth century? Is this anachronistic in me?]

3. And finally, for your delight, quite brilliant deployment of poison as a figure:

The wicked Queen(!) has asked for poisons from her Doctor, and is going to test them: Chilling, her words, in the light of history and medical science:

QUEEN:

I will try the forces
Of these thy compounds on such creatures as
We count not worth the hanging - but none human -
To try the vigour of them, and apply
Allayments to their act, and by them gather
Their several virtues and effects.

As she departs, the Doctor, uneasy at her diabolic temperament notes,

DOCTOR:

. . . I do know her spirit,
And will not trust one of her malice with
A drug of such damn’d nature. Those she has
Will stupefy and dull the sense awhile,
Which first perchance she’ll prove on cats and dogs,
Then afterwards on higher, but there is
No danger in what show of death it makes,
More than the locking up of spirits a time,
To be more fresh, reviving. She is fool’d
With a most false effect; and I the truer
So to be false with her.

When you get a chance, won’t you sail the Aristotle into my waters? Or you could send it by Air (and how is that vessel, the new MacBook?) I hope the work is going well and that the play is abundant.

xj

Jun 20

DN to JT

How odd that we seem to be always wandering along such proximate paths in the forest.... Having never read Cymbeline, I took a look recently, because I had read something by one of your compatriots, one Schalkwyk, on the topic. I had been much struck by the discourse on dreaming, when Imogen imagines, then hopes, that she is dreaming, and then clings to the dream quality of experience:

These flowers are like the pleasures of the world,
This bloody man the care on ‘t. I hope I dream,
For so I thought I was a cavekeeper,
And cook to honest creatures. But ‘tis not so.
‘Twas but a bolt of nothing, shot of nothing,
Which the brain makes of fumes. Our very eyes
Are sometimes like our judgments, blind. Good faith,
I tremble still with fear; but if there be
Yet left in heaven as small a drop of pity
As a wren’s eye, feared gods, a part of it!
The dream’s here still. Even when I wake it is
Without me as within me; not imagined, felt.
(4.2.298-309)

This is for a project on the ontology of dreams I’ve been dreaming of, and doing nothing about. But on our own subject I had not noticed any of what you point out. This out of doors/indoors as a metaphor for the double subject, very sweet indeed! And here is one less sweet, that I took note of for us, from a different play. I was much struck by Shakespeare’s adaptation of Paul’s notion of eye-service. The voice, of course, is Iago’s:

I follow him to serve my turn upon him:
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly followed. You shall mark
Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave,
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,
Wears out his time, much like his master’s ass
For nought but provender, and when he’s old, cashiered.
Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are
Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by ‘em and when they have lined their coats
Do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul;
And such a one do I profess myself.
(1.1.42-55)

And from Aristotle:

I think I had in mind his condemnation, in the Poetics, of the Deus ex machina:

The Poetics (chapter XV), that

the unravelling of the plot, no less than the complication, must arise out of the plot itself, it must not be brought about by the deus ex machina – as in the Medea /.../. The deus ex machina should be employed only for events external to the drama – for antecedent or subsequent events, which lie beyond the range of human knowledge, and which require to be reported or foretold; for to the gods we ascribe the power of seeing all things. Within the action there must be nothing irrational. If the irrational cannot be excluded, it should be outside

the scope of the tragedy. Such is the irrational element in the Oedipus by Sophocles.[1]

[1] <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.2.2.html>

(Last accessed on April 21, 2011)

I was wondering how this notion might be adapted to puppetry. Now I'm not at all sure of what I could possibly have been thinking. But whatever it was, it was inspired by these pages from an (as yet unpublished) article by Freddie ROkem:

“Aristotle’s ideas in the passage from The Poetics could be summarized by saying that since the gods are both omniscient and irrational, they should not be a part of the ideally rationally motivated course of dramatic action. If the irrational elements – by which he no doubt primarily meant the gods – cannot be disregarded; they should preferably be kept outside the scope of the tragedy itself like in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, where the Delphic oracle and the encounter with the sphinx are the initial motivations for the tragic action, but have not been formally included in the stage events, thus marginalizing these irrational elements.

It is interesting to note that while Plato had proposed to ban the poets from his ideal, utopian state because they blaspheme the gods, Aristotle in effect expelled the gods from the stage because of their irrationality. Even if their solutions were radically different, both Plato and Aristotle presented theoretical positions seeking to keep the religious and the theatrical discourses separated from each other. And – it is necessary to add – the reason why both so strongly advocated for such a separation between these two discursive practices was no doubt that religion and poetry were – and are still – so closely related; and even fatally ‘attracted’ to each other. It is quite remarkable how fervently Aristotle rejected a practice that was quite common among the dramatists he knew, with for example more than half of Euripides’ approximately twenty remaining plays ending with a *deus ex machina*.

The appearance of supernatural creatures in the fictional world of literary works, in this case on the theatrical stage, directly intervening in the flow of events on the stage can be viewed from two perspectives. First it can be seen as a meta-theatrical device through which the theatrical medium self-reflexively examines its own conditions and limits. Shakespeare’s Hamlet is no doubt one of the most prominent examples of how the supernatural, with the appearance of the ghost of Hamlet’s father, activates the theatrical machinery, igniting the dramatic action. Already in the first line of the play, the arriving guard who is afraid that he will encounter the ghost asks, “Who’s there?” And in line 21 of the first scene Horatio (or Marcellus, depending on which of the early editions of the play we consult) asks “What, has this thing appeared again tonight?” These questions immediately introduce the supernatural into the fictional world of the drama. But “this thing” is not only the ghost of Hamlet’s dead father; it is the performance itself, appearing again tonight in front of the spectators watching the performance of Shakespeare’s play in the Globe, because as Hamlet says after having decided that the actors will “Play something like the murder of my father / Before mine uncle.” -- “The play’s the thing/ Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King.” The appearances of gods as well as supernatural figures like dybbuks, ghosts, demons, angels, devils

etc., are inherently theatrical. They constitute an integral aspect of the theatrical machineries

It is even possible to claim, at least from an aesthetic perspective, that the improbability or the irrationality of the *deus ex machina* device is exactly what has made it so attractive for theatrical use. And this, I want to emphasize seems to be one of the reasons why it has always been such a prominent feature of the theatre and why it still is, even on the 20th century stages. Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* turns this theatrical playfulness with the appearance of the supernatural on its head by depicting two vagabond tramps waiting for someone called Godot, who obviously – alluding to Hamlet – does not appear again tonight. Beckett’s play depicts how the age-old machinery of the *deus ex machina* does not seem to function anymore. As I argue in this paper, modernity has a deeply ambiguous relationship towards such phenomena.

Second, it is necessary to consider the *deus ex machina* from a philosophical or theological perspective, trying to resolve the issue why the *deus ex machina* has continued to serve as a powerful metaphor not only for an open-ended futurity through which Utopian notions are critically reflected and refigured, but also for ideological, social and personal conflicts, frequently involving strong components of excess, violence and cruelty. The modern theatre has no doubt been caught in the paradox formulated by Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, that

God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.[1]

Nietzsche reminds us that even after the illusions of religious beliefs have been revealed we still remain prisoners in Plato’s cave, where the shadow of God will continue to appear for thousands of years.

Many thinkers have confronted the challenges posed by Nietzsche. Among them Ernst Bloch in particular explored the possibilities of the arts to represent a utopian state, a “no-place” where history will reach its end and fulfillment and where some form of otherworldly, supernatural existence is chronotopically revealed, in temporal as well as in spatial terms. According to Richard Wolin, according to Bloch, who was much more overtly Messianic in his thinking than Walter Benjamin, works of art remain merely aesthetic, symbolic totalities that fulfill an essential anticipatory function in the re-creation of totality, but which can never embody the latter in an of themselves. They are for Bloch Messianic promises which explode in the dark and meaningless continuum of contemporary life to light the way toward the long sought after homeland (‘Heimat’). [However, he /Bloch/ is careful to point out that as aesthetic symbols they remain only fictive, imaginary incarnations of this ideal, and thus are merely one aspect of a larger process of coming to self-consciousness on the part of the species, a process whose traces are equally discernable in the mystical and esoteric aspects of the great world religious systems, the tradition of Western metaphysics, daydreams, fantasy, etc.][2]

The *deus ex machina* can be seen as such a chronotopos.”

Good morning. I had a delightful evening watching fragments of David Lynch that a friend brought over in exchange for his dinner - a show and tell from bits and pieces of his favourite explorations of the cusp between the banal ordinary and the sublimely grotesque. He has made me copies and I can't wait to share them with you. (Perhaps in exchange for a dinner, and so on . . .)

Thanks you for the so-thoughtful letter. These are such very rewarding and provocative exchanges, David. (I will craft my formal letter one this week.) I am attaching here a link to a great little performance - Harold Pinter and Rebecca Pigeon and John Gielgud in Mamet's production of Beckett's "Catastrophe". I cite the Beckett because it is a three minute version of "Godot" in a way and so a short-hand point of access to the argument being made in your letter. But it is also a wonderful scene of puppetry - the human figure as raw material for projections from mentalities that claim their subjectivity in an elsewhere. The Pinter figure and Rebecca Pigeon claim a supercilious detachment from the brute body, (Gielgud here in a performance weeks before his death, so he must surely have felt so profound a captivity to his fleshly limitation). Gielgud's body is that instrument through which they comment on their own luminous 'mentality', a sheer will-to-power. (You will see what I mean once you watch the piece. If you have the chance, maybe watch the piece before reading the rest of my mail - it makes sense of some of the dialogue we are having, in bright and startling ways).

Though sadly, Bradin tells me that Mamet has revealed his hand as an arch conservative, anti-labour, pro-Palinite! In light of this small film that is an irony and would align him with the figures that are damned by Beckett's writing, I think.

<http://youtu.be/COZ0QXyDgYI>

I think the reason why the inside/outside split is so productive is absolutely captured in the two fabulous fragments (sweet and bitter, alternately) that you quote at length: in Cymbeline, the rapture at watching oneself watching - a childlike awe - is in Iago the chilling deployment of the self as a technology through which to achieve one's ends; wholly different ideologically and psychologically but substantially the same function.

The unease is the straddling of this in/out through the arc of one's life - it is that ghastly unease within which the so-called 'professionalization' of oneself within the academy resolves itself into watching as relationships are instrumentalized in order to attain 'ends'. It produces a kind of mortal dread in me. But seems inescapable; and ironically esteemed as a value, a due regard for the self as product. Aaargh - an inescapable - and in these terms Iago is not the devil but the exemplary contemporary. Othello's orality, vitality and passions are his ludicrous archaism, the wondrous fellow, who lives inside his life, for all of the dangerous mortality of that. Bruter, indeed, but how fine.

The continuities of thought in your conversation between the Deus ex machina, the dream, and cinema are all so coherent - perhaps a kind of Screen theory. Asking how we are never unambiguous about our situation as viewer - "do I watch myself watch, producing the action as a miasma; or

am I inside the action?" So the puppet alerts us to both figure and ground in ways that call attention to the invisible puppeteer. Is that part of it?

I am fascinated, and not wholly surprised, by our dangerous doubling. "Dangerous" because I have been reading a fragment about twins, and the Giradian monstrous double in a piece on the disciplines by John Mowitt:

"Narrativized as a description of disciples, the system operates thus: a collectivity (however restricted) forms when two persons or groups realize that they share an interest in something held by one of them; initially, this object serves to distinguish the two groups and facilitate the exchange between them, but soon the object is subordinated to the rivalry that ensues as the two persons or groups subject themselves to the structure of identification that binds them together - we are the ones who know *this*; under these conditions the object is, in effect, displayed by the dynamics of subjection wherein disciplines and models alike struggle to free themselves from the doubling that obscures their distinctive relations to the now lost object ----"

So, David, I cite this because I am about to indicate my own interest in dreams - but so that I don't strike you as a pseudo-scholar and a late-comer, I am going to include a small fragment from my Cardenio piece, the play-text I am writing for Greenblatt, in which the puppet as dreamer, thinks about early interpretations of dream: The puppet figure, Dorotea, has just been revived after surviving her hanging:

=====

ANNE/DOROTEA:

A doctor? Am I ill then?

DOCTOR PETTY:

No, you are dead. (*As he says this he is suddenly surprised at the words.*
The Assistant breaks out in a braying laugh)

ANNE/DOROTEA:

She too breaks into a ghastly laughing. This is too painful, leads to moans, grasping of herself, her arms wrapped about her.
I remember. What is it that I remember?
I lost my heart.
And then my mind went a wandering.

I cannot see.

Silence. At this moment, Dorotea puts her hands to her throat. She rises from her gurney and is sleepwalking. She is clearly wrestling with someone.

DOCTOR PETTY:

Wake you! (*He calls out. She does not react.*)
Wake you!

DOROTEA, *startled, cowers, yet still asleep.*

DOCTOR PETTY:

Be easy.

(He observes her with fascination.)

The Assistant, shaking his head and 'tutting' wanders to the corner where again he writes notes in a notebook.)

DOCTOR PETTY: *(as if studying the case he observes).*

Her eyes are open.

Is this a scene that knows it is watched?

I have heard it said that one life is not sufficient;

And we enact through our dreams those things

That we do not perform in life.

ASSISTANT:

Some have written that our dreams are prophecies.

DOCTOR PETTY:

Yet another has suggested that when we sleep,

The outward senses, as hearing, seeing and smell,

Retreat from their ordinary activities,

And the inward powers, as memory and phantasy are enhanced.

Perhaps the Soul does at such times inspect its self?

ASSISTANT:

I did dream once that I was the devil

And the devil I was, did dream of me.

Jun 22

JT TO DN

I have to tell someone who might know what it means!! The script for Cardenio is DONE. Yaroooooh.

Perhaps a bit of fidgetting with text yet to do, but it is now WRITTEN. And I have seen my little theatre space as they are making it - it is now a splendid little grim confection in Victorian colours - an ox-blood red and deep charcoal. (It was a Victorian anatomy theatre now refurbished FOR MY SHOW!) So now I surrender to bloody logistics, rehearsals, casting and all that stuff 'in the world', (lights, sound, bodies) but at least the stuff in the head is out there! You have no idea idea how hard it always is. And I send it through to Stephen this evening.

But I am mainly writing to ask you, if you are a free man on the evening of October 12th between 5.30 and 6.30, to keep yourself in readiness. I will be doing a reading at Northwestern and would so love you to be there, because at least part of it will be reading from some twin or another. And of course just because I would like you to be there.

Jun 22

DN to JT

Oh Jane, you must be so happy to have such a major piece of work assembled! And I am so happy that you thought of me to tell, and to invite on the 12th! I have put it in my agenda, and will start thinking about what to wear.

I watched the Beckett. It is quite incredible, and quite incredible for us. Amazing to me how it so effectively confuses the line between actor and, say, puppet, slave, or machine, between animate and inanimate, between the theatrical subject and object. The piece occupied my mind for hours, until it was driven out by fever. I've spent much of the day in bed, feeling sorry for myself. Sorry, that is, until I received your invitation for the 12th. It will be a thrill, even if it won't be in a victorian anatomy theater (will the South African performance be filmed, like some of your other plays were? I hope so...)

Yaroooooh!

Jun 24

JT to DN

David Dear

I am doing one last test-drive before I formulate the first letter, but it is a draft that is written both to you and with you, that is the burden!

In your last mail but one, you sent me a bundle of fascinating fragments, as provocations for our dialogue. I want to draw these into the discussion I have been prompted to, with Stephen, in thinking about Cardenio:

Even the most cursory of trawling in the waters of the internet, when investigating the Shakespeare/Cervantes links, will snarl up one's net with ideas thrown overboard, as well as antique drifting mines (of the sort last known from a Nicholas Monsarrat novel) that threaten to blow one's own vessel (wry recollections!) to smithereens. In the expressed anxiety of influence between Spanish and English literary traditions, there are serious queries about sources and the history of translation but also rather wilder suggestions, for example, that Cervantes is Shakespeare; and ultimately of course that Shakespeare and Cervantes are Francis Bacon. (That personal output would constitute such a rebuke to the rest of humankind that it had best be dismissed out of hand.) So here is my interest in the question, and it relates in interesting ways to the meditations on Aristotle, by Freddie Rokem:

And here I quote from your extract by Rokem:

"It is even possible to claim, at least from an aesthetic perspective, that the improbability or the irrationality of the deus ex machina device is exactly what has made it so attractive for theatrical use. And this, I want to emphasize seems to be one of the reasons why it has always been such a prominent feature of the theatre and why it still is, even on the 20th century stages. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* turns this theatrical playfulness with the appearance of the supernatural on its head by

depicting two vagabond tramps waiting for someone called Godot, who obviously – alluding to Hamlet – does not appear again tonight. Beckett’s play depicts how the age-old machinery of the *deus ex machina* does not seem to function anymore. As I argue in this paper, modernity has a deeply ambiguous relationship towards such phenomena.”

This consideration of the dualities implicit within the literary/dramatic tradition, pointing BOTH to a reliance on the “effect” of dramatic ‘illusionism’ (the *deus ex machina* as the prime instance) on one hand; e psychology of human agents, takes me to my comments to Stephen that the unlikely literary event of a “Cardenio” (a text from *Don Quixote* that provides a source for Shakespeare) points to the dual imperatives toward realist psychological pragmatism (of the sort evident in your citation from Iago in your mail) with its self-serving ‘interestedness’ on one hand; and a will-to-self-delusion, of the idealistic sort, that is wholly at odds with self-interest; the Utopianism of a chivalric tradition that either does not know its self-interest or that manages to mask it utterly from itself. (Othello is the tragic instance, Don Quixote its comic counterpart).

So here is my thinking: modernity is premised on such doubling implicit in the Shakespeare/Cervantes binaries. (After all, as Rokem implies, the *deus ex machine* is itself already within Shakespeare - here he cites Hamlet’s father’s ghost as the obvious figure, but of course the three witches are there, and surely countless others (Cleopatra might herself be interpreted as such a supernatural one - from Enobarbus’s description of her sublimity, to her feigned death within the tower - pure opera! In Hamlet the arrival of the ‘players’ to provide the mousetrap at just such a moment might itself seem a divine intervention (perhaps implicit in Stoppard’s joking play on Pascal and probability theory at the start of “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead”); proving Rokem’s point that theatre and religion are implicated in one another.)

SO: Perhaps it is not so much what Nietzsche suggests, that modernity is the emergence of the rational in its path to renounce the delusional, but rather than modernity is precisely that which is both the pragmatics of realism and the delusional fantasy. This might give some way into considering Marcuse’s account of our relation to the Utopianism of popular culture.

SO: In thinking about the Old Fool with his windmill-tilting, and his broken-toothed nag as a gleaming steed, I have tried to consider his dramatic appropriateness in relation to the story of a girl hanged in 1650 for murdering her infant. I want to hold together the brutal fact and the absurd idealism, and so have resolved on a dramatic conclusion in which the Old Knight takes a washing line of clothing for his illusory army: it is a folly that must kill him, but he dies deceived, thank heaven, in a state of ignorance similar to Lear’s, and the girl speaks the words of Lear over the old knight as he dies. These are of course Lear’s words over the corpse of Cordelia so the figure is inverted:

No, no, no, no. Come. Let’s away to prison.
 We two alone will sing like birds i’th’ cage.
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down
 And ask of thee forgiveness; so we’ll live
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh

At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news, and we’ll talk with them too –
 Who loses and who wins, who’s in, who’s out,
 And take upon’s the mystery of things
 As if we were God’s spies.

Naturally I run the risk of everyone saying of these lines, “Oh what fabulous writing in that last scene. Why is the rest of it not written in the same style?”

Such is the risk, but I am aware of it at least!

And so Cordelia meets Cardenio. (The names are equivalents after all, just a troping along the Greek and Latin figures of the heart). The *machina* proves to have no *deity*, sadly, though.

Too many words too early in the morning. For visual reward I pass on an image you surely know (- Ma ‘a’ seh Toviyah. Author, Toviyah Katz, (c. 1652 - 1729.) A woodcut, Venice, 1708. Katz was one of the first Jews to study medicine at a German University, completed his degree at Padua, served as court physician to the Ottoman Sultan.) I would be so interested for anything else you might know of interest about him. Almost no presence on the internet.



Jun 24
JT to DN

David Dear

I am engaged in the schizophrenic activity of writing to you here and writing to you there - I think I prefer here, but will do what I can to make there as ordinary and as extraordinary as this. But I wanted to attach here in our small circuit, a quick shot of the horse in the room - it doesn't really capture how fab it is when large scale and on beautiful textured paper but gives a real sense of the oddness of being alongside the animal. Makes Cora almost tame. But the horse is also a technology. Something of the Beckett here - the domestication of the power. And of course that famously in the case of the horse not transferrable generationally. The horse has to be broken every time. That is why we admire it so.

And I have included another horse by way of a prompt - it is a horse by Bourdelle. I want to suggest that when you have a chance, do go and visit the Bourdelle Museum in Paris - it is one of the GREAT small museums of the world - principally because it is in the home and studio of Bourdelle, and is one of the nicest living spaces in Paris. I went there two years ago with Adrian when he was studying horse-arts for the making of his War Horses. There are fabulous bronzes - some of the greatest modernist friezes; and also it is the home of the fab equestrian statue of General Alvear. And Bourdelle's fascinating centaur - the horse strapped onto the self.

But I also want to know how Spain is - are you modeling projects and plans? Are there interesting colleagues? And is that all fascinating for you? What of the financial mood in Spain? Maybe we could catch up on a chat sometime?

My languages are so poor as to have no credibility, (really pretty well hopeless. Even after a month in Paris I can't ask for a train ticket) though I am passingly better at faking it in the Germanic languages than the romance - because of Afrikaans/Flemish/Dutch.

And Columbo/Peter Falk is dead. That's a passage. So is the gay marriage bill in NY.

I am now turning to the other letter, which won't be elegant or clever like a Gertrude Stein would be; or terse like a Hemingway. Damn.

Jun 24
DN to JT

There are few joys as great as those of the perfect gift. That fact says so much about what is best in us. And the gift you've found "the boys" is indeed perfect. Plus its finding seems to have entailed a good many delights of its own!

The more I think of the Beckett piece, the more entranced I am. Your commentary on it opens up so much for me. "A gag, for God's sake." As if hyper-theatrical bad taste were the only lapse involved in torture.

Re Cardenio, I suddenly realize how little I know about this project. Long ago you asked me about my knowledge of Quixote, and I confessed to having none. Now I mourn! I don't even know such simple things about you, like whether or not you read Spanish, or French. The French I ask

because of a talk Roger Chartier gave on Cardenio, available on the web (but not, apparently, on my computer) at

http://www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr/FR/_Video.asp?id=1044&ress=4083&video=5187&format=22

I think that your points about the ambivalence, the double dependence, of the modern (might I circumscribe more cautiously, of modern theatre) on, on the one hand, extreme dramatic illusionism (of which theatricality is our governing case) and on the other, rationalism and realism, is exactly right. Unlike Freddie, I wouldn't push the thing toward religion (or miracle) or magic (though there is a lot of work on the relationship between modernity and the public fascination with magic), but on ... on what? theatricality and sincerity? subjectivity? Here I am at something of a loss.... But anyway, in a way that confuses any clear line between the two. Part of what was so amazing about the Beckett play was the way in which the everyday business of acting (blocking, make up, direction) was heightened to such an extreme that the actor lost (almost) all subjectivity, stopped being a (romantically conceived?) artist capable of summoning up personae from his inner life, and became (almost) a dead thing, a puppet or mannequin. And the point of the pushing to the limit case wasn't to suggest that one or the other could be done without, but that both are always present in every production. The same holds true at the level of the individual, something I might prefer to illustrate with Irving Goffman (the presentation of self) than with Marcuse, but the more the merrier! And here I think your Quixote is such a brilliant way of staging these issues, in part because he is a figure who has himself lost the ability to distinguish between an inner life and the heightened representations of love and courtliness through which we make ourselves visible to the other (Ovid here), while at the same time re-shaping our-selves. SO not knowing at all how you use the puppet/human distinction in order to map out these others, I can only say rather clumsily, but genuinely nonetheless, how exciting! Will we have stills of your play to work with?

I don't know the print (how embarrassing!). But you could send it to Pawel and ask him about it. It looks like it would be right up his alley!

Anxiously I await your letter. xxd

Jun 25
JT to DN

David Dear

Here I am up against the limits of my competence. In the next weeks I have to go from recalcitrant words to reluctant beings. So may strands from our exchange are implicit in those sentences.

As you took yourself off to work in the depth of the Chicago blizzard last winter: "mush, mush", I joked.

Huskies were not your favourite breed, because of their resistance to paideia. Couldn't you rather be a shepherd of some kind? (A photo of Cora had passed between us.)

I think of Fanie Jason's fine image of a horse within the house on the Cape Flats. It is such an enigmatic figure of the managing of power, of a being that is subordinated to a technological purpose. The horse is inside the house, casting its shadow on the living room wall.



Yet a tattered rope hangs limp at its neck, seems to lead, loosely, to the hand of the youth who sits beside his sister staring at the photographer, at us. We are the surprising presence in the room, not the horse. And I am prompted also to think of Bourdelle's fine bronze horse, so much a machinery of combat: its trained flanks taut, the tail and neck arched into S-shapes containing contradictory energies as the beast strains inside its own managed power. There is no rope, but the animal is clearly inscribed with the marks of possession: a bridle is worked about the muzzle; and thongs encircle the neck. A small ornamental numnah or saddle pad is just visible on the animal's back, and three of the hooves appear to be 'pulled' from within the bronze plinth on which the beast stands. A fourth hoof hovers in the air, as if the animal is mid-stride, or as a demonstration of its harnessed energy (perhaps this takes us back to our discussions of Caravaggio's "Conversion of St Paul" with the horse's hoof held dangerously poised above the patriarch who lies on the ground in total sublime surrender to the potency of the spirit that has overborne his will. How brilliant that gesture, to figure the metaphysical as pure animality hovering above the 'slain' subjectivity of Saul.

And our last dialogues about Beckett's "Catastrophe" are surely all of this, too. The figure (the actor) is subjugated to the imperious will of the director, who has him prodded and probed by an assistant who is herself bullied in similar terms; she too is a technology for the sheer will-to-power of the director, and is somewhat obscenely gratified to have herself deployed in this way. The rewards arise from the relation of subjugation.

Jun 26
JT to DN

David Dear

Your last letter says such interesting things about the Beckett piece, and in ways that stray across our dialogue. It occurs to me that this might mark a beginning, although it is as ever a reply.

Of course *Catastrophe* has been steering me in my attempt to grasp something of the profundity of the puppet. You know how that interests me. No need here to reiterate all of the evidence that our instinct is to delineate the human form in almost any figure. That is of course child's play. (No returning to that).

It is also the anxiety about the dialogue between outside and inside: am I an adequate figure for myself? Will my form bespeak my content? In *Cymbeline* when Iacomo first meets Imogen he is so moved by her outward beauty that he can scarcely credit that her inside will be of like compare:

"All of her that is out of door most rich!
If she be furnished with a mind so rare,
She is alone th' Arabian bird . . ."

Jun 30
JT to DN

I am not sure if this is what I want it to be; or if this is what you want it to be, but it became necessary to place something in the space. I am not sure that it has a productive tone; or whether it opens the thoughts you want to have prompted in you, so I table this as a first venture. It is not clear to me if it is more incoherent than generative.

LETTER ONE which doesn't go where it is told.

JT to DN

"Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd."
(Did you recognize it? It's from the opening paragraph of *Milles Plateaux*.)

And shall I place this sentence in a dialogue with John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*?

(Alike yet most unlikely.)

Here's the question posed by Locke:

Could we suppose two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses acting the same Body, the one constantly by Day, the other by Night; and on the other side the same consciousness acting by Intervals two distinct Bodies: I ask in the first case, Whether the *Day* and the *Night-man* would not be two as distinct Persons, as *Socrates and Plato*; and whether in the second case, there would not be one Person in two distinct Bodies; as much as one Man is the same in two distinct clothings.

This instability as posed by Locke has been solved by modernity, and it produces it. But if we read well, we will see that the matter of "being" is a

matter of “acting.” Locke’s riddle examines “two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses acting the same Body.”

And so the fundamental equation for Identity in Locke is premised upon a theatre. That’s for us to reconsider.

(Oh, I am caught out, hoping to produce the conditions of possibility for our ongoing dialogues about theatres, selves, identities. In these letters, our circuit of selves. And we can bring in the prejudice against Hypocrisy, the art of the Actor. And that Hypocrisy has become surely, most surely, one of the key terms of one of our key terms now: Security.)

The commonsense presumption of modernity is that each human body is paired with a single consciousness; and that this amounts to a Person.

(That is a proposition that always seemed to worry Diderot, and always was worried by him. Reading *Rameau’s Nephew* I move from aligning myself with the “ME” of the text, to owning the rather too loutish, too insinuating “HE,” the nephew; as “ME” becomes just a little too complacent, too assured.)

Person, says Locke, is a ‘Forensick Term.’

(And there, I think, is a space to return, if either of us chooses, to the Hypocrite and the Law.)

But the road taken to that resolution by liberal philosophy, in its defense of personhood (that is wedded to a defense of property) is crossed with a series of possible diversions, collisions. Only occasionally is there a warning sign of Roadworks Ahead.

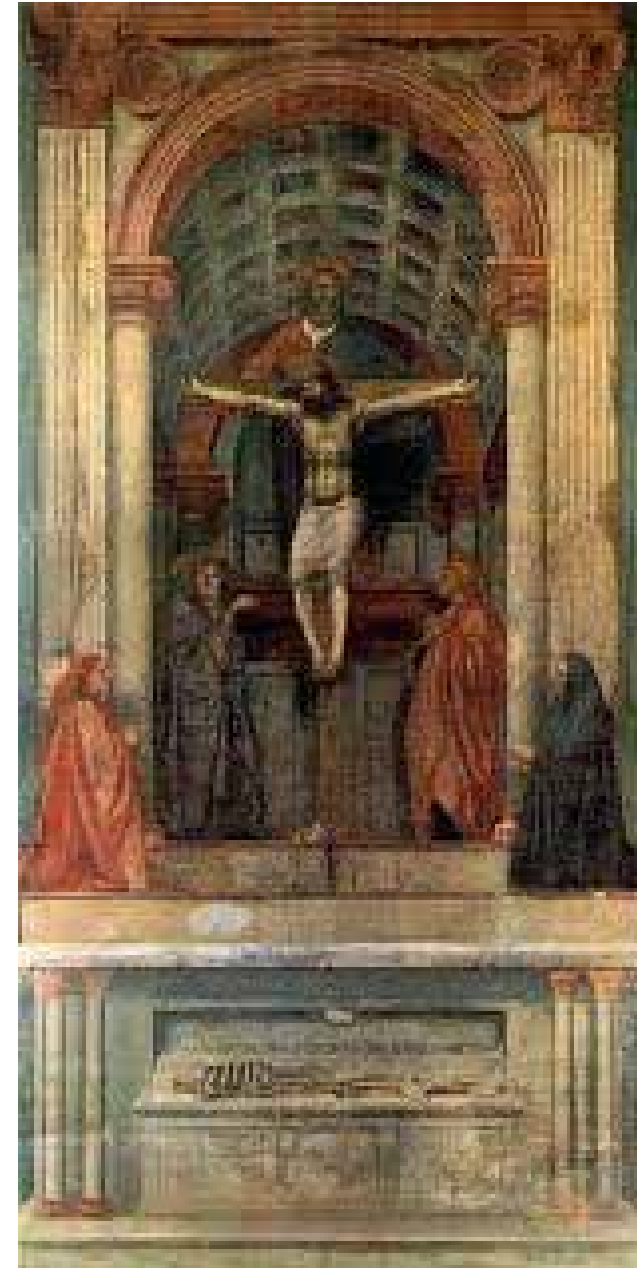
(Remember how those have helped us in our dialogues?)

One mad detour on the path to our solid and substantial unitary being is *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, an insanely pleasurable read. Do you know it? Martinus finds himself captivated by the nonpareil of charm, Lindamira, while he himself is the object of jealous passion for Indamora. Such triangulated desire is more common than strange in art (as in life), except in this instance the women in question are Siamese twins. Martinus contemplates Ovid’s *Remedy of Love*. (One of our texts! Some weeks ago, you began to tease out for me the ways in which Ovid enumerates the flaws of a lover as a Remedy. Not always so, I felt: the beloved’s flaws are singular as fingerprints, so bring that being to mind.)

But back to Locke. I am thinking just now about these questions of persons and number because I am at present immersed in puppets, trying to imagine how to make my puppet, my fine tall girl, animate herself, animate an audience. (I am making a puppet play, with a long-limbed, life-sized figure, sculpted then covered in vellum by Cape Town artist Gavin Younge.) Is the puppet the exemplary prosopoeian machine?

My favourite early modern puppet is Masaccio’s “Trinity” in the Brancacci Chapel of the Santa Maria Novella in Florence. Each of the three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) is given extension, a material presence, and the artist has to contrive a way for them to exist simultaneously in one space/time set of coordinates. As a result, the Holy Spirit is embodied as a kind of sublime neckscarf around the throat of the Father, who holds the tormented Son aloft in his arms.

So is Christ on the Cross the exemplary prosopoeian engine, precipitating a self through the spectacle of that not-self?



Masaccio's Trinity. (c.1425)

My play (let us return to my play) arises in part from a broadsheet in the archive, of the execution by hanging of “Anne Green” of Oxford, sentenced to death in 1650 for the murder of her infant. I am no women’s archivist, but every woman who enters the archive will find there the archive of women.

Because poor Anne lives (and dies) in Oxford her body is given over for an anatomy; and she comes back to life on the table. She is not in

fact dead. So astonished is the university community that she becomes a cause célèbre, and over thirty poems are written for Anne, one of which is by Christopher Wren who will himself be celebrated for the resurrection of the City of London. Another wag (one Davenant, Fellow of a College) writes

That Life's a Vapour I'll no more complaine:
As this, so that, takes leave to come againe.
Strange metamorphosis this *dead-live* Woman,
Now differs from her self; and are such *Common*?

Locke enters Oxford in the mid-1650s, studies Medicine and Philosophy. It seems to me improbable that his meditations on Identity, Person and Number are not defined in some way by what must have been a lively dialogue within the subculture of the university. This, I know, is an argument that can be hypothesized in a piece of theatre more readily than argued in a scholarly paper, for there may well be no more proof than can be asserted from Locke's discussions on Resurrection, on the persistence of identity, and how it is that one can change one's mind and still retain unity of one's consciousness.

And in the past weeks (while writer-in-residence at Northwestern University) I have found the trace I have wanted. Dr Willis, one of the two anatomists who saved the life of Anne Green, is represented now as 'the father of neurology (a term he coined). WE can be little surprised that he became fascinated by the brain, and coma, and dream states in relation to the anatomy of the brain. Remarkably, Willis's lectures are available because they were transcribed by two of his students; one of whom was Richard Lower (an early student of the heart, who would go on to conduct the first blood transfusion) and the other was Mr John Locke! It is not credible that Locke's interest in identity, and in the relationship between body and soul at resurrection, is not informed by his relationship with the celebrated resurrectionist of Anne Green.

So here is a byway (by the way.) Joseph Leo Koerner raises the question about Self and its boundaries through his close scrutiny of Dürer. Remember Chapter One of *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art*? It's titled "Prosopopoeia" and the chapter opens not with a discussion of fantasmatic or absent beings, but with the question, "What is the moment of self-portraiture?" In other words, the question of the representation of the Self is the consideration of the figuring of one's objects, one's others.

Prosopopoeia is, as we are told by that most authoritative of texts, the OED, 'a rhetorical device by which an imaginary, absent, or dead person is represented as speaking or acting, or a figure of speech by which an inanimate or abstract thing is represented as having personal characteristics, esp. the power to think or speak.'

Along the path toward Dürer's experiments in self-portraiture are his drawings of his face, his hands (those elements associated from the start with the self-portrait, Koerner reminds us), but included in the argument is a page composed of six drawings of his pillow, puffed, scrunched and bunched, personalities, each of them, from the Pardoner to the Wife of Bath.

Each pillow has received the impression of his face; that is what I note. The pillow is the negative space of Dürer's portrait. It is the soft ground that has taken up the mark of the self.



—Now I have diverted you too often, taken you along too many side-roads, but not to worry, all of this will lead us back, I feel assured, to our highway.

And in remembering that the human habit of prosopopeia leads us to see a human face wherever it can, I bid adieu as a friend did when he signed his recent email to me thus

:)

Jun 30
Mind the Gap
DN to JT

Dear Jane, I have now read your letter once, twice, thrice. I have to come into some sense of how to proceed, which of its provocations and temptations to succumb to, what lanes to explore here in the tortured library of the CSIC, that might lead to something generative for you. Tomorrow I leave for a road trip with Alexander, to see things roman and medieval (Segovia, Salamanca, Avila, Zamora). I will take this with me to read four, five, six times and more. And Monday I will draw a little map, and set out to explore.

One question already: an image of Masaccio rather than of your girl? Why? Doesn't your girl deserve her place at documenta?

Jun 30
JT to DN

Your mapping and your traveling are two wholly distinct activities. One internal the other in the world. How Borgesian!

Which of these activities will chart La Mancha?

I remember a road to La Mancha on my travels. I remember, too, walking the walls of Avila in a deep snow storm; I remember Salamanca, looking back on the bridge in its sleet-coloured glory. I had a play performed there - well, an opera, the Confessions of Zeno, some ten years ago.

I am so glad you are concerned for the celebrity of my girl. It's not a 'rather than' for images, though. I imagine that I will be prompted to write back to you, won't I? Probably not just once and perhaps we will find a momentum that drives us into deep puzzles? And I hope to bring my girl's modest but directed gaze into view at some point.

I hope the letters will be of playful interest for you; for that is surely what they have been for me, in the months of mad first affection. I too go on a road trip, with two visitors from Minnesota this weekend. Do you know Adam Sitze from Amherst? Such interesting work. Next week I audition performers.

How did your youth enjoy Dublin?

And how is the library tortured?

jx

or

:) but even :(is interesting!

As Bourdieu says, "the mind is a metaphor of the world of objects."

Jul 1
JT to DN

This is a moveable beast. If you remember we had originally talked about possibly reworking letters as we liked so you should perhaps put up what engages you and we can structure the exchange as pleases us.

Sent from my iPhone

Jul 1
DN to JT

A moveable beast! And also, the re-arranging of anatomy can become part of the exchange itself: making the process of making visible can produce the alienation of communication into art. But whatever I send back, you can be sure that the rule of re-working applies: we can dismember into new Frankensteins. Preferably by Skype, which I'll get on as soon as I get back. Prosopopeia: what a great idea, to put it at the center of all.

All very telegraphic, I know. How to say things more fully, in intertwined voices?

d

Jul 5
JT to DN

I have just arrived home and am pleased to have you here, with the door open to welcome me, your sensibility a candle in the window. Both you and Thisbe wagging as I drop my bags.

I am not sure about our access to the digital but will ask Carolyn if you also think it might be a playful field. I will write to you tomorrow when my feathers are settled, but wanted to note two quick things. To say welcome home; (one); and (two) also to indicate that the Guernica in my previous was the village such as now is; but also that what drove me to visit it was the Guernica in the R-S. I am fascinated to get your response to the work - it's domesticated in a way now, but hard to imagine how shocking, how transgressive -it must have been - the vast cartoon [in the modern sense] depicting slaughter: the baby that is just a handful of foreshortened lines, held upside down. What an unholy scene.

I am pleased to hear about your marvelous encounter with the historical lineage - it must have consolidated your sense of your Spano-self. Norman Mailer's car! Are you enjoying the 38 degrees? Swanning about in the night air at 10 o'clock?

I auditioned my Cardenio crew tonight - oooh - it was lovely.

I can't wait for our dialogues again - long for them.

Of our transaction together - how lovely to read beside you. Yes I love that folding over of the page, passing on to receive it back with you inscribed upon it, ever shifting the ground. yes, I love that. I will start sharing with you a bouquet of textual blooms that will pulse their perfume into the night air beside your mirror.

J

July 6
DN to JT

I'm writing! Two paragraphs already! This is delightful. So many ideas, so many possible avenues, and each derailable by the other!

Speaking of those, I can only imagine the delights of casting a crew.

I am sorry I have so few hours for intense work this week, with alexander here. He will wake in some 21 minutes, and then I will take him to see the Guernica.

Love,

d

Jul 6
JT to DN

Ah, Delightful. That is delightful.

And I cannot, do not begrudge the play with your young man.

X

DAVID NIRENBERG TO JANE TAYLOR

Madrid, 6 July, 2011

Dear Jane:

I was a little hurt that your letter did not address me, who am its addressee. It begins instead with epigraphs and citations, as if a scholarly paper, and not a letter to... to an intimate, with more intimacy its animating desire. Do the demands of art—the demands of documenta—weigh upon you? If so, then I propose that we call attention to the pained conditions of our medium. How can letters—not the single-authored conceit of epistolary novels, but real letters, genuine attempts at communication across the vast voids of space that separate two beings—become an object that aspires to art?

I suppose that behind this little snit of mine lies the same question you ventriloquize through Locke—“could we suppose two distinct incommunicable consciousnesses acting the same Body, the one constantly by Day, the other by Night...?” In this case the body is this byte-sized agglomeration of our letters, a collection of texts and images that claims a non-schyzoid coherence, and ask to be treated as a singular work, with a fate of its own.

Of course that demand seems fantastic. But is it any more fantastic than the ways in which, like Locke, we grasp for the possibility of a unitary subject? The yearning for some Principle of Identity akin to the one that underpins logic and mathematics, some $x=x$ or $I=I$ that can reduce our fractured and divided selves to some semblance of unitary consciousness: this is a recurring dream, dreamt not only by the defenders of “Forensick” personhood, of property and contract, but even by those who have claimed to store all their treasure in heaven, transcending the things of this world. “A double minded (δίψυχος) man is unstable in all his ways,” says the epistle of James (1.8). And according to the first century St. Clement, whose letters are among the earliest Christian epistles we have outside the New Testament, “when the Lord himself was asked by someone when his kingdom would come, he said: ‘When the two shall be one, and the outside as the inside, and the male with the female neither male nor female.’ Now ‘the two are one’

when we speak with one another in truth, and there is but one soul in two bodies without dissimulation.”¹

You say that modernity solved this “instability,” but it seems to me that Jesus here is wiser than many moderns, for at least he recognizes that his demand for transparency, for the full legibility of one being to another in the words and signs exchanged between them, is an eschatological ideal that cannot be achieved before the messianic perfection of the world. In the meantime we must deal with the “double-mindedness” within and between us, from which no one and no communication is secure. Not even by speaking in divinely inspired tongues can we avoid them, for as St. Paul admonishes the Corinthians, without the translation of such utterances, “I am a barbarian to the person who is speaking, and the speaker is a barbarian to me.”

No, the only answer—again from Paul—is to embrace the duplicity inherent in communication, and to exploit the ambivalence of language. I don’t only mean here his famous splitting of words into body and soul, dead letter and living spirit, literal and allegorical meaning. I mean also his explicit characterization of his own letters as a form of virtuous dissimulation, a speaking of things not as they are, but as the audience needs them to seem to be. “But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready....”

“Even yet”: are the letters of Paul’s Epistle, as we read them, themselves an artful Ersatz of the truth necessitated by our cognitive infancy? The conclusion should be troubling to those who seek scriptural certainty, for neither human artfulness nor spiritual childhood were innocent states for Paul: “Be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive,” he writes in Ephesians 4.14, stigmatizing both childhood and artfulness in terms of each other.

Myself, I think that Paul understood his adulthood, like Jesus’ univocality, to be realizable only in end-time. He himself did not expect the wait to be long, but in the meantime he recognized that we remain children, dependent on artful communication, both for good and for ill. Still, he spent much more time worrying about the “ill” than recognizing the good. At one key moment, in the first chapter of Romans, he even explained the salvation history of the world as if its animating error were a mistaken taste for representation. In the beginning, he explains in the first chapter of Romans, man knew—or should have known, from the creation—about the existence of the one God. But gradually, their attention attracted by created things they “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an imitation [homoïōmati, counterfeit], for the image [eikonos, icon] of a mortal human being, or of birds, or animals, or crawling things,” becoming so confused that they not only became idol worshippers, but homosexuals as well.

Dear Jane, you will smile and say that I am going on, as I always do, trying to say everything in one sermon, as if the long history of an idea could ever be grasped, let alone in a letter. But really how else to express why I think your puppets are so important? Can I put it in a nutshell? Ever since Paul, the signs, symbols, and objects we pour meaning into have struggled under the stigma of being dangerously divided, promising one thing with their “outside,” their letter, appearance, or material form, while containing something quite different within. “You are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones

and all uncleanness.” Jesus addressed these words to the Pharisees, but they could be (and were later) just as well applied to written words, painted picture, plays and theatre.

To its Christian critics Representation has responded (if you will forgive the prosopopeia!) either by attempting to convince them that its (dis)simulations are virtuous, or by trying to deny its double-mindedness, contain its hypocrisy, repress its theatricality, striving as it were to achieve the appearance of “one soul in two bodies without dissimulation.” To all this it seems to me that your “girl” calls a halt. Proudly straddling the gulf between animate and inanimate, it demands that we confront the other chasms that confront communication and representation: between letter and spirit, death and life, subject and object, self and other, to name a few.

Or to put it another way, the puppet occupies a no-man’s land between the human subject and the art object, and thereby explicitly confronts questions of relation between the two states. When I watched *War Horse* by your side in New York, I saw puppet-men and puppet-horses perish in the staged massacres of World War I. The experience disturbed differently than any other death-scene I have seen on stage or screen, from the most melodramatic to the most murderously realistic. Somehow the passing of an object “brought to life” by the powers of the puppeteer and our own projection is more unsettling than the enactment of a passion from which we know the living emerge unscathed. We seem reluctant, once the puppet has been imbued with artful life, to return it to pure objecthood.

Could confronting this reluctance—as the death of a puppet provokes us to—tell us something about art more generally? Painting and sculpture, after all, pose some of the same questions that puppets do, although not, of course, in the same way. Each has generated a field of fantasies about animation, a series of inquiries about its “thingness,” and a range of ideas about how (for example), the object mediates and mediatizes the subjectivities of artist and beholder. Masaccio’s scarf of spirit—what a happy sartorial metaphor!—is an excellent example.

My friend Felipe Pereda tells me of another, so I just rushed over to the Prado, where it forms part of an exhibition on “The Young Ribera.” Jusepe Ribera’s *Sts. Peter and Paul* is a particularly self-conscious painting, because it is itself about the moment, related in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, in which Peter and Paul met and disagreed about the proper relationship between letter and spirit. According to Paul, Peter refused to sit with gentile followers of Jesus because they were not circumcised, and did not observe the dietary laws of the Jews. In response, Paul taxed Peter with a misplaced emphasis on circumcision of the flesh rather than of the spirit, which he called “Judaizing” (Galatians 2.14), and called Peter and his followers “hypocrites.” In other words, Ribera is painting a key moment in our history of anxiety about the duplicity of representation.

for now:

[http://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting_268194/\(after\)-Jusepe-De-Ribera/Saints-Peter-and-Paul](http://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting_268194/(after)-Jusepe-De-Ribera/Saints-Peter-and-Paul)

The painting shows the two saints deep in learned discussion, but apparently in concord. They are both clutching the same unrolled scroll, one side of it marked with (Greek? Hebrew?) letters. Paul is looking out at the beholder, as if preaching to him. Peter instead looks at Paul, listening intently. But what interests my friend Felipe most about this painting are the shadows on the scroll. For in them he discerns a distinct face, the ghost of a child emerging from the materiality of the scroll.

If the face is indeed that of a child, perhaps we should see here an allegorical gesture toward another text of St. Paul’s: “When I was a child, I spoke as a child... when I became a man, I put away childish things.” (I Cor 13.11) In that case we might take it as an exhortation to avoid the danger of dissimulation by looking beyond the materiality (the “letter,” so to speak) of the painting, and striving instead for its spiritual meaning. A medieval artist would certainly have done such a thing. But I prefer to think that for a seventeenth-century Caravaggista and “tenebroso” like Ribera, shadow was meant to expand, rather than limit, the spiritual claims of the object. Manipulated by the hands of disputing saints, the scroll produces—in what is almost an inversion of your example of Dürer’s pillows—the appearance of a living face: a puppet, as it were, that asks us to resist with equal fervor the reduction of the painting to mere object, and its elevation to presence, spirit, or grace.

How frustrating it is to write to you of paintings we should be seeing together. Everything turns into ekphrasis and thesis statements, and the eros of revelation disappears. Do you think we might recapture that through memory? I remember looking with you at a drawing—or rather, a .jpg on my great big Apple screen—by your friend William Kentridge, of the artist holding his elderly mother in his arms. He is holding her, I said to you, as if she were a puppet. That seemed to me a moment in which puppet and painting (I realize it’s a drawing, but alliteration will out), painter and puppeteer, were brought into close proximity. Our conversation was interrupted by the oven-timer. What would you have said if you had replied? Can we look at the drawing on our split screens and pretend that we are side by side, looking at the one?

Jane Taylor to David Nirenberg

Dear David

I have been accused. Of evasion, deferral. Yes, yes, you may have surrendered to my suggestion that we turn (turn back) to draw together a dialogue from our ongoing body of letters; but still, I feel as if there has not been an adequate engagement with your last, if there is an implication even in jest, that I am not paying that missive due regard. I don’t wish to seem ‘dis-missive.’ There are so many corridors beckoning me, but I will begin rather with the open window, the image you have scrutinized, of “Peter and Paul” [after de Ribera]. So now here we are, you and I, seated as those two patriarchs are, holding the unfurled scroll between us; only in this instance that text is your letter. (And I am reminded that whatever sacred document is being held here, Paul is and remains a dialogical presence: the letter writer who authors a church through epistles.)

You refer to the Caravaggist quality of the canvas. And so you point me back to the Caravaggio painting that has generated so much of my thinking, and that served also to tease us into a tangle of reciprocal interpretations). In fact, appropriately the one painting is in fact two, works that are now generally accepted to be two versions of *The Conversion of St Paul on the Road to Damascus*, the one rejected by his patrons (now held in the Odescalchi collection in Rome) the other accepted and now installed at the Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome.

(By the way, I have only ever seen the latter, the one in the Cerasi Chapel. I have not seen anything but a reproduction of the work in the Odescalchi Balbi collection. Perhaps we could undertake a Caravaggio research tour

and see these, and some of the astonishing pieces in Naples, and write about the works together? This would trigger our research for that other big project that we only dream about!)

These two canvases have Paul as an aging red-bearded Jew of stereotypical iconography in one version, and Paul as the Roman Imperial youth in the other, as if across the two canvases Caravaggio tries to work out the problem of Paul's two identities, the crisis of conversion; and the invention of an identity without ethnicity invoked by Paul as a Utopian ideal. Those canvases were a key to our first dialogue, when we met at Alan and Julia's and spent the evening blathering to one another, about twins, and Paul, and gifts and poison, and conversion, as if everything we had thought we had been holding in store for one another all along. (Oh, and you were planning your conference on Hypocrisy, tentatively suggested, 'perhaps you would join us . . .?')

Given these origins I am so struck by the figure of Paul here, his long red beard a finger-print for the artist. He is that figure of stereotypical representation, the trope of the Jew. The volume of sacred writing that lies half-furled on the table between himself and Peter seems to be inscribed with marginalia, a clear suggestion that the sacred text provides a point of intersection between imaginations: not just the lateral dialogue, such as the canvas ostensibly addresses, with Peter and Paul at the table together, but also trans-historically, inter-generationally, as author and interpreter similarly constitute a dialogue.

Your friend (and interlocutor) Pereda sees a child emergent in the shadow on the scroll; if there is a fugitive figure here, it is for me a dove, so I am again back at the image of the Holy Ghost in Masaccio's "Trinity" as a scarf around the neck of God the Father. Neither of us is, can be 'correct' in any sense – we are both interpreters merely, manifesting once gain the reciprocal call and response of the interpretive act. The relative claims to legitimacy of either of us are established through an inter-textual series of citations, for the moment one invokes the tropological chain of meanings about the child within the discursive field, an accidental play of light and shade (perhaps) becomes evidence of a conscious or at least unconscious ordering of signification.

But how I love your meditations on the child, through which, as you so beautifully suggest, the child and artfulness are stigmatized in terms of one another (for all that they might seem to be antitheses.) I think here of how artfully Blake deployed artlessness in his figuration of the child.

Your meditations on the War Horses are wonderful. I am always in all ways shocked by the puppeteers who step out of the horse-carapace when the animal dies, and are no longer body to that body, but soul only, yet remaining bodies to themselves. This is something of the mystery of the mask and its double-service. The equivalent is evident in the South African Xhosa praise singer, who, having completed his task, and finished his performance, utters merely, "Ncincillili" ("I disappear") as he is instantly assimilated back into the banal realm.

Would you puzzle with me about your comment that slips from idol-worship to homosexuality? What forges that bond in the patriarchs' discourse, can you imagine? It's implications have been so profound that I wondered if you would wonder with me.

Oh, and you suggested in your letter that we might stare at the Kentridge image of mother and son on a pair of simultaneous screens. Does that still interest you?

I notice only now that your cerebral retreat with the classicists is into Spanish wine country. I hope your Body is celebrating the Spirits.

xxxJ

Jul 21

JT to DN

the key to all mythologies OR the idea that is none

Dear David

(AHA! Adressed!)

I love this working of thoughts with you. Our communications seem so real and substantial precisely because they are. I wonder whether we shouldn't in fact just write as we do in this dialogue through which we enable thinking in one another. I have never received such textual love, and it moves me in a way that I hadn't imagined. I hate to see this joy shrink into a formal obligation in the face of the task. Perhaps we could just carry on, and include a small false start in which we share the two formal letters that we have written and demonstrate the burden of writing to a public readership? Maybe this is the real secret of the manuscript: it is written as a hunger for an erotic/intellectual attention, that is so diminished into an appetite, merely, not a hunger, once it is swilled about in the public eye. We could select some of our favourite letters to one another from those who have shared and structure them a little, but not too much? Perhaps include even one or two of our misunderstandings and agitated attempts to find common tongues?

I think that must be part of the interest of those curiously experimental eighteenth century novels that don't know how to maintain the threshold between intimacy and publicity. The move into the digital for me erodes the danger of the private communication, so it may be an experiment in the epistolary that we are undertaking. As you have suggested, I think, this is the dialogue between Body and Soul: I am Soul to your Body at the same time that I am Body to your Soul: we are severally each both; yet the internal contradictions of the Self precipitate a restless to-ing and fro-ing between us.

Do you remember Cat Stevens' brilliant interpretation of "O Caritas"? I sing it to you now. Or you can click onto the link here.

<http://youtu.be/IlzRFHV9Zo>

Of course this may just be an alibi because I face that next formal letter.

But I do have a meditation that is interesting me, in my theatre space. I have indicated that I will be working with artist Penny Siopis (whose name I am pleased to write 'out loud' here, because we have worked and played together several times and I have some of her works on my walls at home). Penny and Colin in fact had breakfast with me on Sunday. Penny brought a perfect bowl of berries, in just the colour range that you see in the images attached here of her works. She is going to perform an artist making work in my *After Cardenio*, generating a large anatomy drawing on stage throughout the performance. And how lovely it is that she is Penelope, because she is Penelope, weaving every night to her audience of suitors. Though I suspect we won't undo her weaving each day. I am interested in the protracted emergence of the drawing as a kind of metaphor for the theatre work itself that is never going to be quite the same two nights in a row, that its

meanings constantly shift incrementally. This also stands in for the skein of stories that is Cervantes' novel: it is so multiple, so fractured, disruptive as a text, its attention always glancing elsewhere; yet with an insistence that this is a unified 'plot', a substance that is one. And here we are again at our puppet that is held in the arms of others. I know that you are an abashed Spanish scholar who does not swim easily in Cervantes' baggy text, but it does of course pay homage, through its own plot, to puppetry, with an adventurous sequence of mad Mediterranean puppetry.

If you are interested - as you seem always to be - you might google "Penny SIopis artist South Africa" and you will get a riot. I attach here a tag that you might follow.

Is this an interesting day for you?

xx

<http://www.onesmallseed.net/profiles/blog/show?id=2219100%3ABlogPost%3A42195>



Jul 21

DN to JT

O you cunning evader, ever opening up new fronts of engagement through deferral! I did take the bait, and explored a bit the Siopis sites. Her work is so powerful, and also so funny. Reminds me a little of the young Dali, the way in which an eruption on a stippled color field of canvas can be turned into a witty comment on the nature of painting itself, without ever losing its claim as an aesthetic object, or in her case, an erotic one. I am trying to imagine her presence on the stage, drawing, painting, throughout the performance. It is a little like that Kentridge piece (several video projections) I saw in Jerusalem, of him at work, except here the performance of the painting occupies a secondary space to the performance of theatre, and thereby becomes mediatically self-conscious in a totally different way. Besides, since it isn't a closed loop about finished work, the background of her activity is always changing the meaning of the play around her. Wish I could see it.

I think your idea of choosing letters might work. I would not put the formal ones at the beginning, but let them come somewhere in the middle, as a communicative crisis occasioned by the demands of "Art." It will still behoove us to overcome that crisis: selecting from the past won't do THAT for us. But yes, I can see how this might help us to stage and overcome our dilemma. So here is a new dilemma: how to do the selecting?! I don't want to confess to you the sorry state of my e-mail archives....

I didn't know the Cat Stevens. It is terrific. In the multiple senses of that word.

Tonight I am taking the train to Logroño, a small city in Spanish wine country, to go to a conference of classicists. I probably won't have internet (nor even my computer) until Sunday, so please don't be troubled by any silence. It will be a symptom only of insufficient modernity.

Xd

Jul 21

JT to DN

The naughty Siopises are so very naughty: the little girl in the peter pan collar has "I'm Sorry" stamped in ink over her mouth: it is produced by a commercially sold 'stamp' such as one might keep to impress on a letter or to personalize stationery. So the idea of the commercially driven production of an "I'm sorry" stamp was irresistible to her. I will get her to send us some good images so that you can see them properly. We might want to include some, if we are virtual.

And yes! I agree with you about our 2 “letters”: that they should be inserted as an attempt to solve something that can’t be fixed because they aren’t broken.

So - off you go into the world. I can’t begrudge you because you are going to be with classicists, not bureaucrats. Is the insufficient modernity yours, or Spain’s?

[:~)

Meanwhile tonight I am going to see the very pleasing Jeroen Kranenberg, who studied at drama school the one year that I was there - he is a wild, tall, gangling deranged man, full of brilliant loopiness and spontaneous generosity - the performer of Russian stories about madmen. He is going to be my Quixote and we are both overjoyed at the idea of working together and of recovering our friendship after so many years.

Enjoy your meandering dear traveler. Look after your person(s); The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.

xj

We shouldn’t be beguiled into thinking that this new strategy absolves us of urgency and seriousness in the intellectual call and response, of course. Our personal communications now take on their full weight, as they are now in the public domain!

Jane

Jun 5

JT to DN

Look at who awaits me: I have been hailed!

Dorotea awaits you

Gavin Younge to Jane Taylor

Dear Jane

I had thought I might see you last Saturday, but I gather you were in town for only a brief moment.

Well, here she is. She is hanging on a special hook attached to a light stand (although the photo might give the wrong impression). Her head is fully rotatable and she can nod her hand by virtue of a little trigger on the pistol grip device hidden in her neck.

I think the light inside her that we discussed might be too much - also, the script has her suddenly sitting upright, so, for the moment that is not catered for. I presume you will need to start rehearsing with her so you must let me know if I should drop her off at Capricorn or hang on to her until you arrive.

I leave on the 12th so things will be tight next weekend - look very much forward to seeing you - best, gavin

Jane Taylor to Gavin Younge

But Gavin she is gorgeous, so wholly fabulous. Aren’t you thrilled? She will bring so much emotional meaning to the stage. I am absolutely transfixed by her!!! I would so like to see you on the 11th - have you got ten minutes for a visit. PLEASE say yes.

XX jane

October 25

Jane Taylor to Gavin Younge

So Gavin, as I go back through the archive I discover your early misgivings. But here is an image of Dorotea precisely doing what you feared she would not: sitting suddenly upright.



Dear David

How interesting it was to see (or rather) to hear Richard II at the Newberry Library yesterday. Three treats: the pleasures of companionship; the Newberry; and Richard II.

Your companionship in the past year I have experienced as a storehouse, and so the Newberry is the exemplary Borgesian figure for our dialogues. Do go and investigate its holdings. I prompt you, especially, toward the enormous volumes arising from Napoleon's savants. (*The Description de l'Égypte* is a set of volumes of astonishing size, assembled by some 160 scholars and scientists who took part in the expedition to Egypt between 1798 and 1801. As many as 2000 artists and technicians, and 400 engravers took part in the vast enterprise.) The books cover architecture, botany, archaeology, as well as ethnographic impressions. There are various editions of the books, with editions being of various sizes. The edition given to Bernardino Drovetti has 29 volumes (the standard seems to have been 23).

I know Drovetti, the notorious plunderer of Egyptian artifacts, by curious accident, because I worked for several months on a pilot project with Handspring Puppet Company doing research for the show that ultimately was developed by them as *Tall Horse*, an experimental piece bringing together Handspring with the Malian puppet company of Yaya Coulibaly from Bamako. Here is an image of the piece that will show you how the aesthetic of the play embraced the puppetry idioms of Bambara puppets.

Aren't they magnificent, as if of beaten gold? These are the large "puppet stages", mobile forms distinct to Malian puppetry, that are inhabited by six or seven performers who, as a unified beast, rush into the open performance space and with exuberant swirling and swishing, create a riot of cloth, wood and straw, as the animal takes the stage. From inside the figure, puppeteers masked by the cloth and grasses will perform small events with miniature puppets that emerge from within the carcass of the puppet itself.

It is performance and rite and play all at once, with the role of the self switching between performer and hierophant. (Thinking of this, I remember your jocular singing, to Bradin and to me at the Museum of the Oriental Institute at Hyde Park, "Baal, we worship you!" It was a very funny recapitulation of the terrors conjured up inside your self as a boy when you sang those diabolical words from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, chanted in imitation of the voice of the dark forces.)

Several years ago I took William to see the Napoleonic books, when he was working on his *Magic Flute*. I have in mind his iconography, every time I now as I look at the savants' great etchings. William's architectural drawings for the recent Louvre show strike me as directly in this line. What is so notable though is the rough and often crude mark made in William's images, but they pretend to all the diligent detail of the original etchings with the meticulous recording of hieroglyphic detail.



And I remember now, too, how you meditated on that one image, of William holding a sphinx-like infant, who is also an ancient, a harpy or a sybil. This is the riddle of the Sphinx in distilled form, the compression of the cycle of life: What begins life on four legs, then on two, and finally on three? The human.

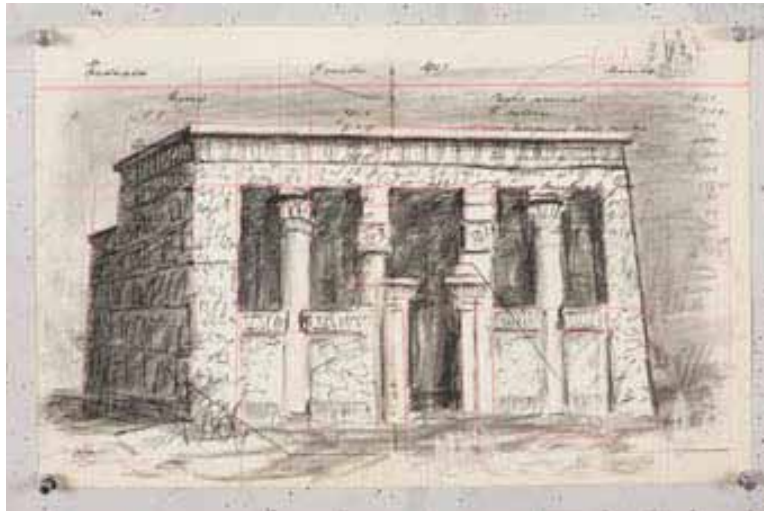
William's drawing constructs a triangle with just two figures, transforming mother into infant and son into father. This volatile circuit is reminiscent of William's own constant return (!) to the legend of Perseus, a story that he discusses as the figure, for him, of the circularity of fate.

Perseus flees the oracle's blight that he will kill his grandfather; but of course that path leads the two to meet in a mortal accident. Perseus, on passing a stadium, Each child fathers its destiny. That anticipation of the always already necessary is in the title of his anamorphic film "What will come (has already come)", of the Italian aerial bombardment of Abyssinia by Italian Fascists in the 1930s. There the motif is given a political and historical dimension; but in recent performance piece, "Dancing with Dada" William puns multiply on the given name, "Dada" of his dancer; the title invokes simultaneously the aesthetics of Dadaism that have informed so much of his own work; but also the immense figure of his father, Sir Sydney Kentridge QC, the human rights lawyer who represented the family of murdered anti-Apartheid activist, Steve Biko. The "dance with dada" allows him to spurn the call to take up the Oedipal challenge; while yet allowing him total mastery through his own competence within the sphere of anarchic play. This is the child's revenge, just as is the scene above, of the son nursing his frail mother.

With that drawing of William himself as father cradling the ancient infant (above) we are made very aware of the hands holding the puppet-figure.

"Look", you said, "It's a puppet!" And of course you are right, it is. In the past year I have been made to give attention to hands again, as I have watched them hold aloft the puppet 'Dorotea' from my *After Cardenio*. See below for what I mean. Here the puppeteer, Marty Kintu, is very overtly holding and manipulating the arm and hand of the vellum girl that he is animating. What latitude there is. The viewer can hold in place a simultaneous

acknowledgment and denial of the puppeteer as motive force. Perhaps here we see something of the mirroring relation of the infant who observes the mysterious competence of others, while trapped in an embodiment of childish incompetence?



Nov 10
DN to JT

How does psychoanalysis end, asked Kohut in a famous article.
But what about letters? What needs to be said, as statement but also as prayer: the ending of your dOCUMENTA project is not an end to our inter-subjective scribblings.

Love, d

Nov 14
JT to DN

We meet this evening to pore over these letters. And this afternoon you have a singing lesson. I have to hope that the pork you are cooking for dinner will compensate me for the fact that despite the roads traveled together you still will not sing to me!

jxx

Jane

Taylor

&

David

Nirenberg

A

Conversation