

DOT DOT DOT 20
Summer 2010
ISBN-13: 978-0-9794654-5-1

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Published twice a year
by Dexter Sinister
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PRINTING
Logotipas, Vilnius, Lithuania

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ERRATUM
Due to a technical error, Domenick Ammirati's "Either Or Or Or: How I Got Religion" in DDD18 was left suspended in mid-sentence. The last line should read as follows: "'Life sure is short though.' *The Pale King*, left in fragments, with no Kierkegaardian affectation necessary, appears next spring."

X-RAY SPECS

was a comic strip by Mike Lacey that appeared in each of the 72 issues of *Monster Fun* published between June 1975 and October 1976, then continued well beyond after the title merged with *Buster*.

Acquired from the mysterious optician I. Squint, Ray's extraordinary specs permit him to selectively see through objects. Each week's strip typically found Ray outfoxing a bully or finding a significant hidden object. The exact properties of the specs are unclear: sometimes Ray sees through an object to what is behind, sometimes to the interior of the object itself. But most curious of all are Ray's occasional experiments, such as sticking mirror plates to the lenses, or wearing the glasses back to front.

As is typical for a strip written for younger readers, none of this has much consequence in Ray's broader environment. In several strips the glasses are stolen by a bully or a grown-up, usually with horrifying results as Ray's reality is revealed: a world populated by skeletons and impossibly complex objects. But always Ray's life returns to normal, his apparently unique perspective continuing in perpetuity.

James Langdon

A WORD ON THE COVER

Dear Philomene,

As you know, I'd like to reproduce that deceptively modest painting of yours—the one whose primary colors combine to spell out their composite and form their own frame—on the cover of this last Dot Dot Dot. I'd also like to find a way of folding in some of your written thoughts around this piece and another, related work. Your writing about how it *sets up the possibility of seeing both the illusion and "disillusion" simultaneously*, for example, started me thinking how the cross-semantics of that "disillusion" are wholly pertinent to this issue.

You go on to write about how *the illusion continues to work on me despite also seeing its undoing, a bit like not being able to help yourself from always laughing at a joke even though you know the punchline already*, which reminds me of a talk Diedrich Diederichsen gave to inaugurate a recent Martin Kippenberger retrospective, "The Problem Perspective." Diedrich's thoughts hung on two ways of considering Kippenberger in terms of broken joke structures. The joke is already a familiar motif in Kippenberger's work, not least in the shaggy dog stories he infamously dragged out at openings and other events. On this occasion, though, Diedrich was referencing a specific painting in the show, in which a single panel of Matt Groening's comic strip "Life in Hell" is repeated across the canvas so one character incessantly tells the other "I hate you" ... "I hate you" ... "I hate you" ...

Diedrich distinguished between two types of broken joke: (1) a joke without a punchline, and (2) a joke whose punchline is repeated over and over again, and proposed that both (at once) are analogous to Kippenberger's work in general, in the sense that each new piece or project served as the starting point for the next, without end or hierarchy. So a painting would lead to a series of paintings which would be collected into a show which would require a poster which would be collected with other posters to be published in a book whose cover would be reproduced as an invitation card which would be deployed in a talk, and so on. All production fed this snowballing momentum, and its perpetuation was paramount—in effect, *was* the work. Neither of Diedrich's un-jokes amount to anything laugh-out-loud funny, of course, but being both trite and true, the act of telling them is loopily consonant with the rest of Kippenberger's redemptive melancholy —with his work's surplus of good humor.

Finally, you note that *while the illusion doesn't physically change, your perception of it does*. Here I can take a first stab at articulating the fundamental point of Dot Dot Dot by substituting "culture" for "illusion"—although, sure, the culture changes too. My point is: doesn't this realization of the gray area between illusion and disillusion amount to perceiving rather than observing; aren't we involved in setting up the conditions for a reading and looking that is active rather than passive? As you rightly conclude, *the illusion only exists when it's seen. It's the viewer who brings it into being (in their eye/mind). And the two-way mirror not only reflects the image but also the viewer in the moment of recognition or figuring out what's going on.*

Insight as the precondition and goal of self-reflexivity, that's what *we*'d like to paint.

Regards,
Stuart



Front: Philomene Pirecki, *Grey Painting: Text Version 2*, 2008, Oil

different stages of production, different types of production, that could be mailed in, and the conversation could be broadened in that way. The problem with that is you get the feeling that a lot of people would send in wanky videos and arty-facts, you know, and all sorts of shite —bags with orange peel in them ... [2]

Scritti Politti formed in Leeds the same year the Ramones toured the UK, but their musical and political reference points—and marked absence of irony—seemed to come from somewhere else altogether. This wasn't just another post-punk band, more an expanded working unit whose task was to address particular "problems" within specific "contexts." And these problems, as the band's vocalist and de facto spokesperson Green Gartside says, weren't necessarily about the band's nominal "work" (i.e. writing and performing music) at all, but rather the "interface between making music and the rest of your life." In other words, about the way that that work relates to their own position within a broader social context.

The singles Scritti Politti released between 1978–81 are a diverting chapter in British post-punk music,[3] but the implications of Gartside's words reach further, offering an instance of cultural practice that questions rather than adheres to the social role typically associated with a pop group, post-punk or otherwise. This band was founded on a principle of self-organization, and constituted a concerted attempt at gaining control of the processes of production within their specific sphere, an approach that resembles those of the workers' councils that emerged in Russia in 1905, Germany in 1918 or Hungary in the 1950s. These councils were organs of local power which began by assigning a factory's property to its workforce, who then managed it through a democratically-elected union, and committed to pay taxes and a share of the profit to the state. The councils had the right to veto every aspect of their enterprise, determine wages and all foreign transfer contracts, and decide every credit operation.

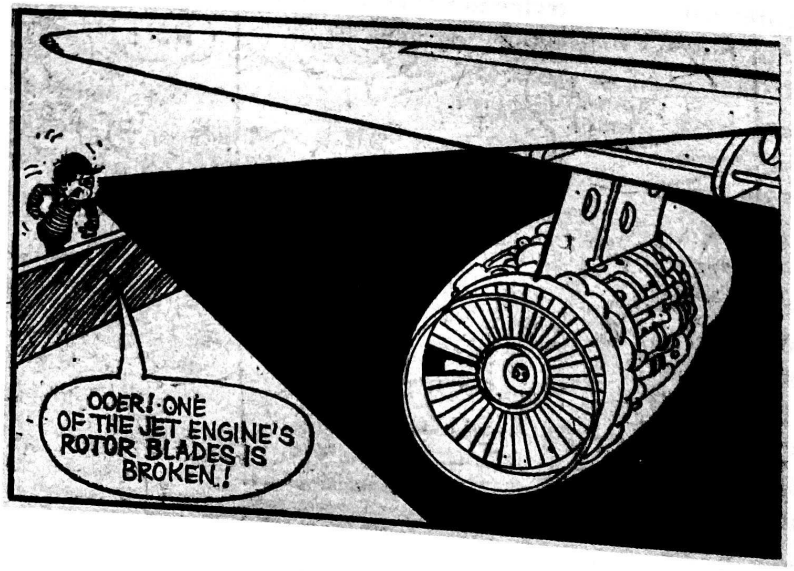
Crucially, all this was to be done within the fra
of responsibility for the wider social welfare o
the enterprise, and because this social contrac
demanded a certain amount of organization, it
disqualified immediate or irreflexive response
situations arising.

Gartside suggests that Scritti Politti's main
goal was to claim complete responsibility for
their work's mediation, to set up an interpreti
framework, and by doing so establish a genera
model for cultural practice. The group were
neither naive nor dogmatic about how their ou
should be read, only convinced that without th
provision whatever work they released would
merely replicate the dominant modes of produ
and so be quickly absorbed by the prevailing
system, as was the case with most, if not all, av
rock music of the time. Scritti Politti's immedi
effect was modest, and their subsequent histor
an unlikely journey first to the center and later
the fringes of popular music production, where
Gartside remains today—significantly perhaps
as a kind of one-man band.

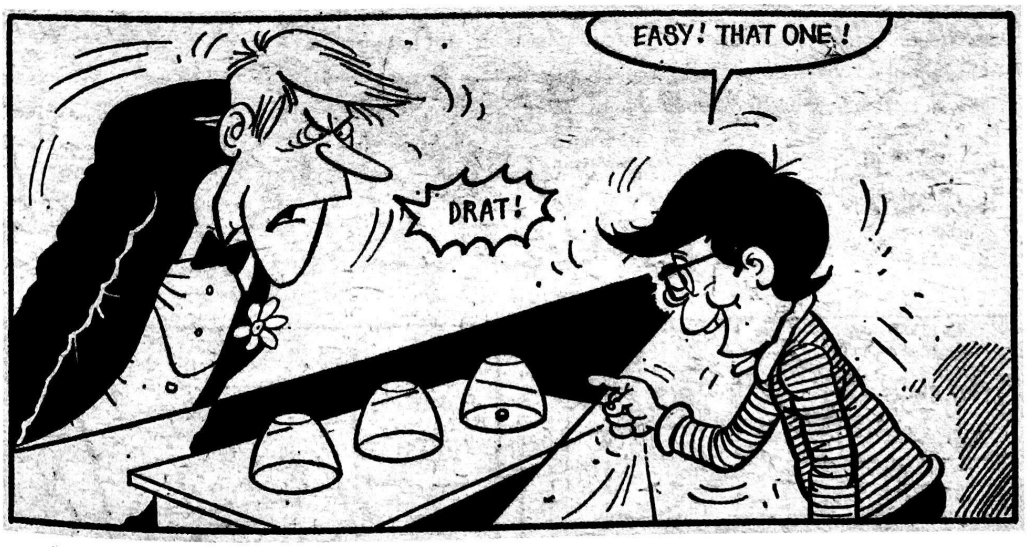
Here I'm less interested in the scale or sustainability of the band's intentions than the fact that this "beat group" quite intentionally s up an alternative model that actually functione in a particular time and place. Then again, Scri Politti's early output still resounds, packing the kind of retrospective punch lacking in most of their contemporaries, and it seems to me that this durability is inextricably bound to their fundamental assertion that, regardless of whether aspiring to become a cult or a moveme controlling the context of cultural production i possible and desirable, if not obligatory.

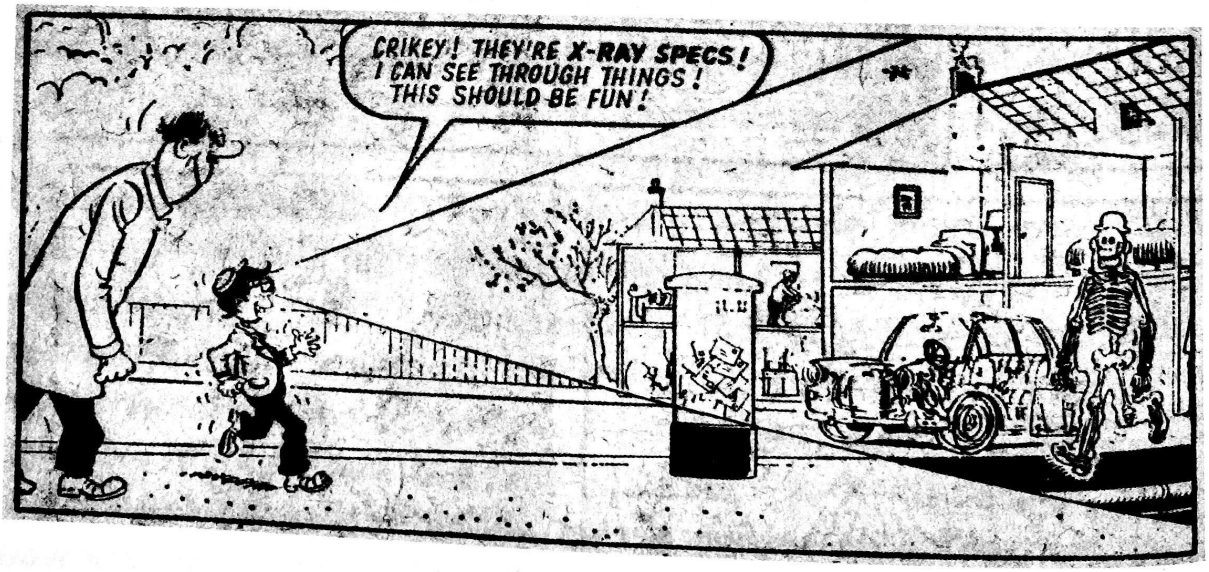
NOTES

1. Robert Christgau, "Avant-Punk: A Cult Explode ...," *Village Voice*, 24 October 1977.
2. "From the Pressing Plants to the Concert Halls We Want Some Control," *After Hours*, June or Jul 1979. (http://www.aggressiveart.org/aof_files/interviews/aof_interview_p1-10.htm).
3. Compiled on *Early* (Rough Trade, 2005).



'failure' – behind which a terrible indulgence lurks (that of a disingenuous intelligence claiming to know *what constitutes failure and what does not, while denouncing the authority implied in the experience and position of 'knowing' or certainty all the same). And finally, ultimately, the impossibility of saying, and hence also knowing,* yes *or* no *(as opposed to yes* and *no) – the undermining of all possibility of antagonism or contradiction upon which the practice of paradox (if not critique!) ultimately rests. For the mighty logical figure of paradox speaks of a love of truth – and, symmetrically, of a love of lies as that which positively requires unveiling, revealing. [The art of such revelations could be called, literally, apocalyptic.] These things really exist: some things are true, some are not; some art is good, some is not; some writing is great, some is not. Confusion, erring and doubt, when canonized as 'method', are nothing but fancy ruses – sorry excuses for not having to make up one's mind or take one side (rather than 'an' other), for not having to choose, for not having to* judge *– fear of the assumption of a position of* critique, *in short.*




CRIKEY! THEY'RE X-RAY SPECS!
I CAN SEE THROUGH THINGS!
THIS SHOULD BE FUN!

Jesuit, a converted Jew who sings the praise of the Spanish inquisition) over the guileless soul of Hans Castorp, the novel's bland "hero"; "Eastern" vice versus "Western" virtue; Prussian ("northern") pragmatism versus something akin to Catholic ("southern") indulgence; and, most importantly and persistently, "up here" versus "down there," lowlandish stuffiness versus icy mountain air. Indeed, as soon as Hans Castorp arrives in the Berghof Sanatorium in Davos—the present-day site of the World Economic Forum's yearly summit, ironically enough—to visit his ailing cousin Joachim Ziemssen, a young man of terrifically humorless military earnestness, it immediately becomes clear to him that the Berghof's (admittedly mild) geographical elevation makes for a very different philosophical atmosphere, one that quickly reveals itself to be almost entirely irreconcilable with the quintessentially "horizontal" virtues of his own solid but stodgy middle-class upbringing.

Here are some samples of the many conversations throughout the book that touch upon this remarkable high/low dichotomy.

"Three weeks are nothing at all, to us up here. (...) You with your 'going home in three weeks.' That's the class of ideas you have down below. (...) They make pretty free with a human being's idea of time, up here." (Joachim, to Hans, upon the latter's arrival in Davos-Dorf.)

"Sometimes I think being ill and dying aren't serious at all, just a sort of loafing about and wasting time; life is only serious down below. You will get to understand that after a while, but not until you have spent some time up here." (Joachim)

"No, I don't think you, for instance, as *homo humanus*, would feel very comfortable down there (...). It is a cruel atmosphere down there, cruel and ruthless. When you lie here and look at it, from a distance, it makes you shudder." (Hans, talking to his self-appointed guardian Ludovico Settembrini.)

"Irony, forsooth! Guard yourself, Engineer, from the sort of irony that thrives up here; guard yourself altogether from taking on their mental attitude! Where irony is not a



▶ Thomas Mann is one writer who will definitely not be remembered for the effort put into masking the deeply autobiographical nature of much, if not most, of his writing: like Mann himself, and like the eponymous family whose demise he chronicled in his first major novel, *Buddenbrooks*, Hans Castorp hails from the northern Hanseatic town of Lübeck, a traditional bulwark of mercantile reason; the "Catholic" or "southern" taste for passionate living and thinking which Castorp encounters in some of the sanatorium's most memorable characters (and which he is thereafter tempted to cultivate in his own soul) is a thinly veiled homage to the temperamental flipside of both Mann's own ancestry (the "nervous" disposition of his Brazilian-born, Roman Catholic mother) and that of his wife Katia (born into an assimilated Jewish family in Munich); furthermore, the idea of setting what would initially have been only a short story in a swanky alpine health resort first came to Mann when he visited his wife in Davos during her own prescribed stay there in May 1912. Exactly like Hans Castorp, who assures the sanatorium's presiding doctors that he is in perfect health and only visiting a convalescent family member, Mann started feeling feverish shortly after arriving, caught a cold—at 5,200 feet, the Berghof is more than double the height of the peaks depicted in Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Mist*—and was eventually told by a similarly insistent physician that he had "a moist spot in his lung."

Splendiferous isolation: art *as* a magic mountain range, in short—the only thing today that we can really *go to* still—to be *away*.

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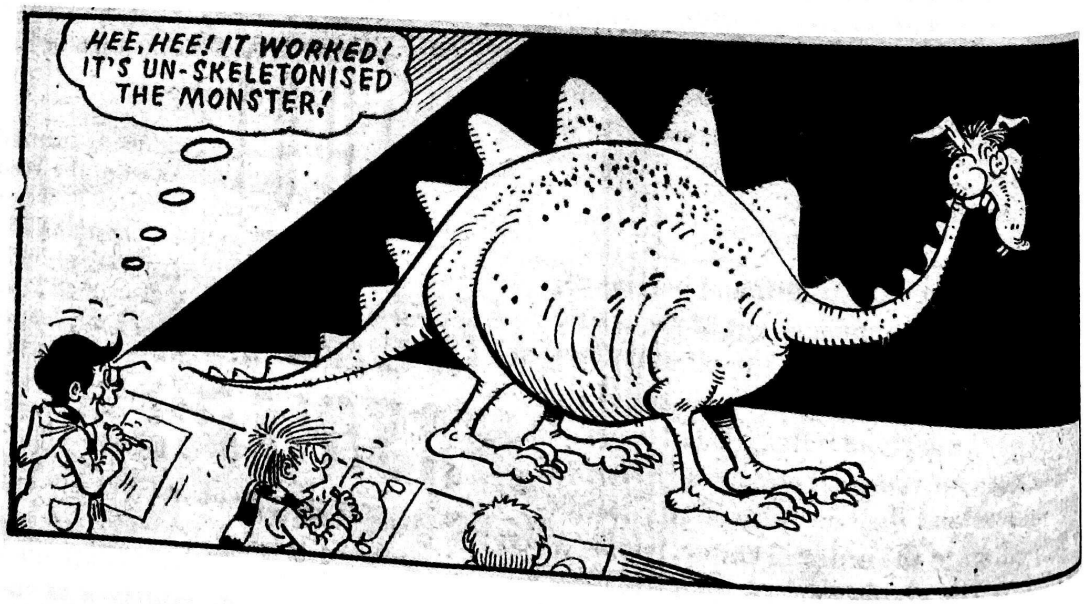
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final analysis, no political system can truly resort to a founding legitimation *within* itself (but always has to appeal to an "outside" force) appears to correspond with the contemporaneous revolution in mathematical logic instituted by the great Kurt Gödel and named the "incompleteness theorem"—which famously stated that: 1. "any adequate axiomatizable theory is incomplete;" and 2."in any consistent axiomatizable theory (...) the consistency of the system is not provable *in* the system." [My italics, DR]

Unlike many of his peers, Gödel was a convinced theist (in the Spinozist mold), and said to have been a lover of abstract art.



devices are broken. My point is that the place is cluttered. Which brings me to:

(13) *The matter of opportunistic parasites.* All of the clutter has apparently led to a sense, in Park Slope, that the local postal station is a free-for-all. Private interests (the organizers of a leukemia & lymphoma marathon, the organizers of an HIV/AIDS bicycle ride, the organizers of the New York Methodist Hospital's Bereavement Workshop) have now taken to posting their own signs and display kits around the postal station. These may be benevolent causes, but their signs only add to the clutter, and distract from the Postal Service's own, frantic efforts to communicate with its customers.

(14) *Typos.* I found one. On the sign about how to cash a money order, at the end of the list of acceptable forms of photo identification, there is a dangling bullet point.

Can nothing be done to improve this situation, Postmaster Potter? I do not doubt that, right here in Park Slope, there are design consultants who would volunteer their time to giving the place a new look. Yes—volunteer! Because if there is one thing we can all agree upon, as citizens and Americans, it is that Mail = Business Growth.

Respectfully Yours,
Rudolph Delson

NOTES
1. See footnote 2.
2. I applaud that you distinguish between "ensure" and "insure."



world "went color." TV involved the emission of multiple channels of moving color from a single device. The distribution of visual information was quickly changing, becoming ever more immaterial, and this change became more rapid still with the arrival of digital imaging, personal computers and, of course, the Internet.

By now it is widely understood that the mainstream technologies of print and film, along with their respective infrastructures, are in danger of being supplanted by the new systems of production and distribution afforded by digital technology. And yet there is a marked absence of commentary about the fact that this involves a major shift from subtractive/CMYK to additive/RGB as the dominant color system.

Just as subtractive color is founded on the principle of selective removal, by limiting which wavelengths reach the eye, subtractive media (i.e. those based on subtractive color) presuppose an analogous *editorial* process. The cost of 35mm film stock, for instance, necessitates tightly scripted scenes and carefully planned shots, while the conventional limitations and properties of a book effectively restricts channels, and usefully focuses its content. Both these examples of subtractive technologies require standardization and foster quality control, while the corresponding glut of possibility and very lack of restrictions are often cited as defining qualities of additive/RGB technologies such as the Internet. In the same way that subtractive color matches the structural logic of a steady, localized craft tradition and its subsequent industrialization, so the speed, efficiency, and weightlessness of additive color describes the structural logic of the information economy.

And so, as an entire color system is on the ane and another takes its place at the speed f light, it might be worth considering that in quick online thesaurus check, the key to ditive color, "emittance," results in synonyms ch as "shine" and "glimmer," but also "vent," ush, "and "vomit" ...




HEY, RAY— LOOK OUT!
CRIKEY! HE'S HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THAT BRICK WALL!


BUT BECAUSE HE'S WEARING HIS SPECS—RAY LOOKS RIGHT THROUGH THE WALL, AND SO...
YEEEOW!

etc.

Harold Pinter was 75-years old when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2005. Too sick to attend the award ceremony, he began a recorded acceptance speech by quoting his younger self:

> In 1958 I wrote the following:
>
> There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false.

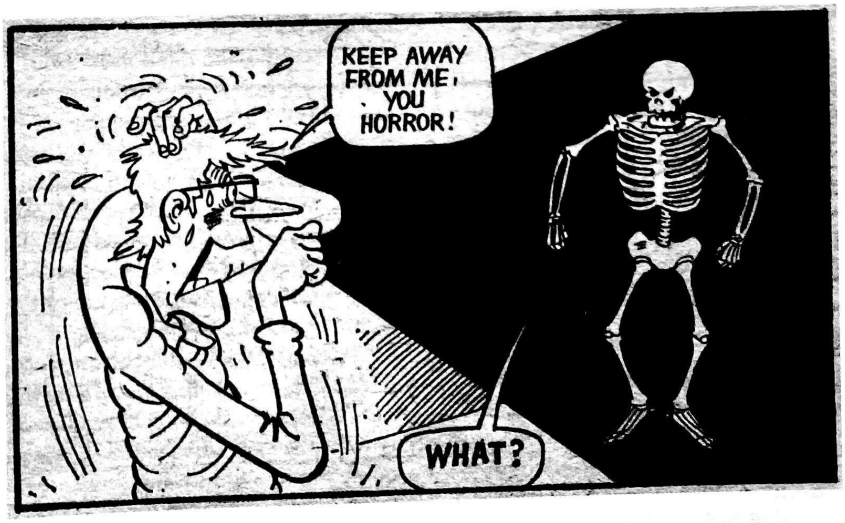
Then the older Pinter continues, qualifying his younger point of view:

> I believe that these assertions still make sense and do still apply to the exploration of reality through art. So as a writer I stand by them but as a citizen I cannot. As a citizen I must ask: What is true? What is false?

For Pinter, then, there are two kinds of truth: ambiguous and unambiguous. The first designation pertains to art, and the second, to politics.

Pinter, like Wittgenstein, proceeds from a confession and arrives at an assessment of the writer: "A writer's life is a highly vulnerable, almost naked activity ... You find no shelter, no protection—unless you lie—in which case of course you have constructed your own protection and, it could be argued, become a politician." A writer who does not lie, Pinter and Wittgenstein agree, is one who risks something his self. For Pinter, this is a political risk e risk of not being a politician.

Per Pinter's assessment, writers navigate the ambiguity of language to approach truth indirectly, whereas politicians exploit the same ambiguity to obscure truth. The job of citizens is to define political truth unambiguously. As Korzybski observed, the consequences for failing to do so are imminent and mortal. But Pinter throws a curve ball in his final address to the writer, by conflating the categories of truth: "When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror—for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us." When the mirror is destroyed, something other than a shifting reflection is seen. This something else is the truth. It has agency. It stares. But which kind of truth is this? If truth for the artist is forever elusive, what does the writer then find, staring, on the other side of a smashed mirror?



> on the Being of beings, or to the essence of life or death. It requires, then, what we call, to save time and space rather than just to make up a word, hauntology.[13]

As much as they present new ways of thinking about the political domain, Derrida's notions of conjuration and hauntology, tempered by Steyerl's observations, offer an understanding of contemporary media and the construction of the public sphere that can help us to understand the persistence of the Paul Is Dead rumors. Even if one discounts the veracity of the "evidence" raised in the initial moment of media anxiety—backmasking on Beatles albums, hidden messages in cover art, evidence of plastic surgery, the wearing of false noses, etc.—one still finds McCartney always already doubled, mirrored, and self-haunted, in plain sight and in the most public of ways. Which is just to say that this "undead" sate, "neither living nor dead, present nor absent," is a condition of mediation as such, a rupture in the public/private divide made possible by common household objects: newspapers, records and magazines, the radio, the phonograph, the television, and the personal computer. It is *this* Paul McCartney, finally, who reaches across to us from the other side. After all, perhaps the central problem of the specter or ghost has always been a question of communication: how do you speak with the dead?

NOTES

1. Although the story itself is a matter of contemporary folklore, see especially R. Gary Patterson, *The Walrus Was Paul: The Great Beatle Death Clues* (New York: Fireside, 1998).
2. John Neary and Dorothy Bacon, "The Magical McCartney Mystery," *LIFE* magazine, November 7, 1969, pp. 103–106.
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4. "The Magical McCartney Mystery," p. 105.
5. Ian Svenonius, "R.P.M. The Movement to 'Reconsider Paul McCartney,'" *Index* 25, 2000.
6. Ian Peel, *The Unknown Paul McCartney: McCartney and the Avant-Garde* (London: Reynolds & Hearn, 2000). Geoff Emerick, *Here There and Everywhere: My Life Recording the Music of the Beatles* (New York: Gotham, 2007).
7. The telephone interview is posted online at: http://nevergetoutoftheboat.blogspot.com, and a number of versions are available elsewhere online.
8. The reading of the Echo myth offered here follows from the discussion in Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo* (London: Methuen, 1986).
9. Matt Hurwitz, "Thrillington," *Good Day Sunshine Magazine* #78, 1995. http://mcbeatle.de/macca/a/thrillington_gds.html
10. See http://www.jeffcummins.com/musicjc_gallery.php.
11. Hito Steyerl, "A Thing Like You and Me," in *Hito Steyerl* (Oslo: Henie Onstad Art Centre, 2010), pp. 60–71.
12. See especially, Mark Fisher, "Unhomesickness." k-punk, September 21, 2005. http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/006414.html.
13. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 62–63.

The author would like to thank Alex Klein, Mike Metzger, Jesse Pearson, Jon Pestoni, Ian Svenonius, Danny van den Dungen, and Wendy Yao for their invaluable assistance.



20. in which DOT DOT DOT tries—finally—to be as direct as possible about what it's come to stand for and what it thinks it's gonna do about it.

Summer 2010

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A NOTE ON THE TYPE
by Dexter Sinister

13
IT IS ONLY WHEN ONE MANAGES TO SOMEHOW GAIN A GREAT HEIGHT ...
by Dexter Sinister (and others)

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Throughout
X-RAY SPECS
compiled by James Langdon

plus

THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE
Chapter 32
by Will Holder

and

MITIM KAPPA
by Radim Peško, used to set the following

FINAL WORDS
by Stuart Bailey



Back: Frances Stark, *Arrangement for my Better Half* (detail), Collage on color proof, 2010, 23.5 × 23 cm