



To write is to presume correspondence: you to me, me to you. You make work knowing that I, your viewer, will understand. You make work out of what I have come to think of as my knowledge, my identifications, my movies, my poems, my history, my culture. You even choose my favourite font for your texts. Bembo. Bembo! Who chooses Bembo? I thought it was only me. Now, you and me.

Memory is always a reconstruction. I hit the remote.

What was I watching? Is it a remake? I recognise the sequence. I think I've been here before. The corner comes up fast; I couldn't figure out when or how, but I knew I recognised it. I'm pretty sure I saw what I think I saw out of the corner of my eye, a long time ago. I recognised the swing of a coat as its wearer turned away. And was gone. *Footsteps who on the stone*. Grace Jones. Or film noir. Or surrealists at play. Or is it Douglas Gordon? *Strange. Few seen that face before*. The eye I saw reminded me of someone close to me, and of still yet other eyes: lashes wet and tipped with droplets of black, the theatre of mascara transferring meaning to those perfectly staged orbs, those glistening glass tears beneath the eyes, my eyes — or were they his? — like a perfect reproduction of Man Ray's photograph, only dark, so dark, chemicals all filled in, solarised, poorly fixed and exposed to too much light. We both need the dark. Our eyes are pale and sensitive, their shade of blue, light grey like a northern sea. A different seascape, more black and white than grey, the film of Beckett lives in us both, his cinematic eye our landscape: *esse est percipi*. That makes three sets of eyes. Or are there more? The sunlight makes us squint.

I blinked, my tears were gone, and before I knew it, I was in a spatial metaphor, fractured, fragmented, an imaginary building, a psychic space, a house of film screens and slow-moving forms, projected light and flickering transience, memories. How did I get here? His shadow just escaped me, if that is what it was. The penumbra makes it difficult to see. Sometimes I can't make things out. Sometimes shadows surprise you and belong to someone else. Or everyone else. Who can say? A guard kindly steers me from the void. When trauma is collective, how do we establish ownership? How much do we share?

I turn another corner. The dark is thick; I put my hands out to feel the way. There he is again. I feel him stalking me, bearing down, reaching in and grabbing what I thought was only mine. I like my solitude and now my reveries look like homages to him, as if he owned them, had the copyright, was the first to think of them. If I speak of *Psycho*, the

conversation turns to Douglas Gordon. And then I realise how very crowded it was, where once I'd thought I had been alone. There were taxidermied birds and bad motels and a peephole, large enough for all of us to look, from the couch in the lounge room or the shared parental bed, each lit solely by the too late TV. We were all there, behind the curtain, circling drains and bathrooms with Hitchcock and Janet Leigh and the dead mother we shared, the one glimpsed at the window on the set. We watched what we shouldn't have watched and we saw what we shouldn't have seen: We are that sweet forbidden fruit, our expulsion from innocence in the dark and at a distance, Glaswegian and Sydney-sider, and everyone else between, with *Psycho* in our psyches and Hollywood on our minds. How many of us are there out there?

Forgive me reader: In another correspondence I got really annoyed, for there we both were again — this time in the sewers of post-war Vienna and in crowded auditoria in *our* favourite film, *The Bird Man*. We too are split between intellect and commerce, between philosophy and mass, and again awake too late and lit only by the TV. In our childhoods it was always on. Everywhere its flickering light penetrated our soft and absorbent bodies. We listened to the zither playing a happy tune over the top of paperless women and disembodied men and the sweet stench of darkened tunnels, again the drains and sewers, death always imminent, and the loss, the ineluctable loss of the man, the loved object, the unknowable. A simple domestic act — the opening of a window, the casting of a beam of light — such an act can give rise to the moon of his face, to Orson Wells. And where were we? In the dark under the covers, cuddling up to whom? We are neither the third man, nor the fourth nor fifth. We are Joseph Cotton in the end, driven past desire in a car owned by someone else. I can never be him. I will never have her. I will never have him. And he? Who knows what he wants?

The disembodied man returns to me in the 30-second interval it takes to tell a tale about a man's decapitation and his ebbing consciousness: It's funny, his opening eyes, cognizant, replying silently to the call of his name. Disenumbered at last, it's the man's final feat, the fleeting success of the mind-body split that's haunted our waning enlightenment for so long. I read the text in a better German than the *amgangsprache* an earlier self of mine had learned in Berlin. I too am split. Once upon a time, I thought I saw him on the *Hauptstrasse*, but it couldn't have been him. Our times in the old capital were two decades apart.

But I'm sure I heard his footfall echoing on the cobblestones, along with those who followed Grace Jones home from the *Jungle* when the sun was nearly up. I heard his approach from behind, coming up fast, when the bullet holes in Kreuzberg were finally to be filled, no more evidence to remain, as the last generations from World War II ended their waiting-in-shock at the bus stop, *warten erwarteten*, and closed their startled eyes forever.

This time I approached him in a darkened tunnel in a more recent Germany. He won't remember this but I do: 'You don't know me but I know you', like in the Laurie Anderson track. I am not on his *List of Names*. It was 1997 in Münster and he was installing his hysterics. Their shadows danced the walls. I used to wear a zippered green-flocked bomber jacket with 'Hysteric' written down each sleeve in that large squared off font they use in American college football. His hysteria — and here my recollection gets vague — was European, the grainy film tinged blue, maybe something he'd said he'd found in the archives of an old hospital. My hysteria was more specifically post-Freudian via an American sensibility that pared class and gender and rudeness in a proud-to-be kind of way: *Of course I'm hysterical, injuvite has made me this way*. His hysterics were elegant, circumspect. The image said it all. I had lots to say. I was excited and I wanted him to speak. He never did. I wasn't sure he could — only the work did, on that day in the tunnel, as he installed his piece. That afternoon, as the *Stalpar Projekte* unfolded, I heard bagpipes playing among the trees across the manufactured lake. My friend Ken Gonzales-Day and I named it our favourite found object. *Object trouvé*: who is to say, then, where meaning lies?

Music connects us. My Scottish roots love bagpipes but my heart swells at Lully and Bach and Mozart and Abrahamson and Arditri and at the playing of music by both virtuosi and the amateurs, who are my only child and my only partner. Douglas Gordon is married to song, with a soprano and a child his family. We share this opening up to music. He and I are not alone: There is a symphony of a thousand and an audience to listen. He has said that music only exists when it reaches the ear, but he is wrong; audiated in the mind, all is held in that breath, that sniff, that intake of air that is simultaneous to the look between performers immediately prior to the voice's escape, to the bow on the string, the fingers on keyboard. And then as the sound comes into being it begins to vibrate, and it is the vibration that is felt first, in the chest, in the heart, the instrument against the body. This 'moment before' is the haptic that initiates sound

and which connects us most profoundly in those chapels that are the best of Gordon's work.

I peer into a mirror: me. I can read and write backwards very well. I like the third space that is then implied, the space between me and you — the one that loosens our different subject positions. Douglas Gordon shares that space. In my cracked glass, my broken reading of pointed shards and reversed letters, my thoughts flit from the beautiful Large Glass to the violence of broken lives, from the embrace of the aleatory to the menace of hysteria, from the eschewing of value and perfection to the slashing of wrists — earthly dualities, indeed, to be seen through a glass darkly.

We are always recording and watching, and our watch is hallucinogenic: the collectivity itself distorts the object. The images reproduce wantonly in the mind's eye and the reproduction produces a hall of mirrors. There we are back in the neo-noir of Gordon's oeuvre, the 'doubling' in his work multiplying. Is this our collectivity? Gordon has said that the best public artwork ever was in Glasgow during the 1988 Cup final: the local unions had distributed 'red cards' to raise during the scheduled appearance of Margaret Thatcher: the entire audience made a sea of red: *Thatcher, you're out! For the worst kinds of abuse!* Gordon is right about this *objet trouvé*: beautiful, liberatory, a collective wildcard and great story that in the retelling he makes his own.

Movies are best watched in the dark. A spectrum of stained glass may illuminate the nave of a church but leave transept and aisle to the gloom. Caves and mad houses each have their partial light, bright holes and portals in the distance. The work of Douglas Gordon is full of the gloom that comes from such places. Yet how we understand the work is different. Imagine a structure that is multi-faceted, refracting light, however dimly, at many angles, a kaleidoscope of images, references, experiences, fantasies; pictures in making the quotidian and the historic, shifting from the minutiae of ordinary life to the grand programs of 20th-century modernity, the poetics of the 19th, the filmic of the 20th, the abstracted spaces of sound and silence, hearing, touch. The experience of Douglas Gordon's oeuvre has such a structure. Each work adds to the tally of motifs in common, mirrors them, piles them on: *working without its reflection*. These images reverberate dreamlike, slowed and staged: the child's gesture, the popular song, the movie that traumatised generations, the ordinary life, the poems we learned by heart, the big themes, flight and falling, a tender kiss, stigmata,

clouds like Joshua Reynolds', a chocolate, a chair, a blur, a face, a crack, an abstraction, the out-of-focus shot of a young child wearing first floaties in the pool: *pretty much everything*. If popular culture was what Siegfried Kracauer has called the surface manifestations of culture, Gordon adds in the second degree: pictures of the surface manifestations, pictures as surface manifestations, photographs of photographs of popular culture and of selves and selfies, pictures of pictures of pictures — in short, to coin a collective noun, an *exhaustion* of proliferating images that is our mediated experience of life in the developed world.

