

DO NOT DO THIS EVER AGAIN

-- by Karinne Keithley

-- May 2007, Revised April 2008

part one: more important mail

part two: in which a treatise on ruins

part three: an operetta in (x) scenes

part: inter-part

part four: dim "o"

Do Not Do This Ever Again was developed in the 2006-7 Soho Rep
Writer/Director Lab. The shape of this text reflects the collaborative
input, insight, and inquiry of Maria Goyanes.

assigned parts

A, B, C, D, G, MARIE ANTOINETTE, 3 DEER, ESMÉ, JOHNNY
TRADESCANT [hard "c"], HIS PA

staging notes

don't exist

PART ONE: MORE IMPORTANT MAIL

D

Directions to my house:

1. I was in the navy.
2. I watched you.
3. I left signs in case you forgot.
4. If you're going to Providence, you're going in the wrong direction.
5. How old are you?
6. Follow the singing. Ignore the people with no social graces.
7. Turn left.

B

We make a concrete distinction between concrete places.

We make an abstract distinction between concrete places.

We make a concrete distinction between abstract places.

We make an abstract distinction between abstract places.

We have plenty. We should have plenty.

I remember the conversation and I remember how long I had to try to stop treating myself like this, how long it took. Musically, I remember it. I remember the humping and that disgusting theme song about cheese.

C

Group mobility?

Group inertia?

Group identity?

Group experience?

Hadrian's wall. The Scots fight with sticks and a wall is enough to stop them.

Group delirium?

I have to wait it out, I'm not sure.

A

Any given morning one wakes up and rejoins the world with a secret. A car awaits pickup. It will be taken away to where cars go. Where do cars go?

A comet shoots through the living room, advertising possible worlds. It says to you the word "possibility," it says "possibility." Then you have to read its literature, go through its pamphlets. There are hinges, there are comet doors, like pet doors.

We carry back from our dreams a responsibility to face the hinges we envision, the hinges we slip through in secret. We bury them but they flower. Each flower an insult.

This will all turn out to be wrong.

The city will not thank you when you act in good faith toward petty con men. No one will move to the moon now. Who would, when there are so many good bars to go to?

Grateful licks from the dog anyway.

Cavities are exposed.

Dentists believe you to be patently lying.

Nothing happens in the mind.

C

George, we're in Philadelphia now.

B

There's this place I went to, called Kentucky-Montana. You get there on the train, the train that has the glass domed cars and no commuters, the one that plays movies in the café car. You should bring your own sandwiches if you go on this train. Sandwiches, and also you have to practice neck exercises because it's a pretty long ride. But if you want to, you can go to the special cars where the seats actually swivel so you can look out the window without hurting your neck. The conductors are sort of adventurous and afraid at the same time, and so they take this one path back and forth. But when you go to Kentucky-Montana, the thing about it is that you can only go there once. The train passes through there but it will never pass through there again, you try to retrace the tracks and you can't, because there actually aren't any tracks.

Kentucky-Montana is characterized by several impossibilities, the number one impossibility being that the rivers have no banks.

The next impossibility is that it's Kentucky and Montana, it's the single possible moment of combination of two directions of travel wrapped around and momentarily on top of each other, like the confluence of possible worlds.

It does exist.

But if you end up there, you are in trouble.

The other impossibility is that it's a kind of repair that can't repair anything, because you only get to Kentucky-Montana when things are basically irreparable. But as you're passing through, on that one journey, it's very, very beautiful.

It's very beautiful.

And you will remember what it looks like.

You can't forget it.

C

dickensia

roman pottery

hotel matches

string

mickey mouse watches

the recent "enthusiasm" for mickey mouse watches

lepidopterists

botanical samples

fabergé eggs

first editions and advance copies of books

card sets from luxury trains

anything having to do with the Orient Express

porcelain duck figurines from the 30's

state plates

B

I can see the future.

I mean, I wish I could see the future.

D

What I said was, Do Not Do This Ever Again, with each word capitalized.

It continued to pour and the music we put on repeat for the house animals seemed, I don't know, somehow perfect, so I didn't turn it off. I was a little sore from leaning over, and also a little guilty. So I said, Do Not Do This Ever Again.

If you've ever heard Bette Davis talk then you know that feeling when you just thank the heavens that you are not so mean or so isolated. (As some people.)

The first meditation I thought of was, "It is pathetic to involve other people in the things you have to endure alone." That was number one.

Some others are:

#249. The principle that we all, and it all, belongs.

#82. Impedance is always useful.

#2,348. A trial I failed but learned from.

B

Yes, but you're a terrible gardener.

A

I check constantly, but nothing comes. No meditations, no drama. I woke up, you know I'd been asleep on the couch and I woke up and I remembered feeding the giraffe. Do you remember feeding the giraffe? Giving it sticks through the fence? And its eyes, remember its eyes? And how when we came home no one cared? Everyone was like, "oh, a giraffe, that's weird." And no one wanted to know about it so we just had to know about it ourselves without caring that no one cared. No one who wasn't there. And how it was so strange that we had taken this trip and then we had made, like this little island of experience, and it could-- it could keep us company. Not that we wanted it to be a secret, it just became one. Gratitude is sweet company. You are sweet company.

B

"Virtue is the only sweet company."

A

Yeah, I saw that too. On the wall of the train station, right? "Virtue is the only sweet company." I don't believe that.

D

All knowledge is irrevocable.

A

Gratitude is sweet company.

D

The lint screen. The obscene, miraculous lint screen almost destroyed by your negligence. A city at dusk. A lint screen at dusk. A dull brain at dusk. You almost set the house on fire: that was an inspiration. The radio and the bird. The practice which does not pretend to inspiration. The Azerbaijani longing. The dance of Azerbaijani longing:

----- [*the dance of Azerbaijani longing*]-----

C

I'm also a terrible gardener.

B

Well maybe right now is the only good time to transform that.

C

I have a terrible history with plants.

D

Plants depress me.

C

Yes but. You are also a terrible gardener.

B

But maybe right now is the only good time to change that.

D

I have a bad history with plants.

B

Plants depress me too.

C

He was a terrible gardener.

D

I don't know if he was a terrible gardener.

C

Plants depress me too.

D

He was feeling really smart, really beautiful. I was like, just don't let anything interrupt you. Just don't let anything interrupt you, I told him, because he was just feeling so young and beautiful. And I was like, get the space you want. Don't let anything stand between you and the space you want. He was really proud of himself, Carlene. Did you know that? He was *really* proud of himself.

C

This is neither "other" nor "more important." This will never be "more important mail." But it will get through. I will spam you. I am no longer your friend and I will spam you.

A

I give you permission to do whatever you want.

You were asking about the overhaul in Bayonne. It took about 45 days. That's very fast. Unusually fast. Expedited. They gave me the universal sign for choking which, during the war, meant, make it fast. They said to me, "I am not a godless ship," which I understood to mean "employ me."

Later we gave her to the French. There were too many fires. The Germans had been pulling bits and pieces from her during the war and replacing them with inferior-quality parts. She was a beautiful ship, especially after the French got a hold of her. They had to spend a lot of money. They had to spend a lot of money but it was worth it. She came out beautifully.

When they asked me about using her for a hotel in the worlds fair, I understood that they meant a floating hotel. She was broken up instead, at Le Spezzia. That's in Italy.

I feel sick just thinking about it.

B

What I had intuited about equivalencies had led to a catastrophic delay. I had a question for Gregor Mendel. That was useless; he wasn't around. I needed to get off the hill so I did it the simplest possible way. It was really dangerously windy, really windy and I was pissed like against the natural order like who the fuck is maintaining this land? I was like *this hill isn't categorized for life threatening or high risk* you know, *why is it so windy it's a plebe hill for chrissakes*. And then I had this thought, maybe this is fine. I'm trying to learn to embrace what is actually happening. I say to myself, "what is happening is happening, And that's what gives me grounds to believe it." So I was like, wind, hill, fall, and I did.

Something will shine through. I truly believe that.

D

Get your stuff off the seat.

The bag brushes my arm, he moves it. He asks, "are you a smart boy" and the boy of course says yes! and gets up on the seat on his knees looking about with a dawning wonderment. This magnificent carriage.

He looks around. His hair is grey, which I've been meaning to tell you.
He looks at me and says, "I saw Avenue F."

I assume that things are fortuitous rather than disastrous.
If someone asks me for advice, I tell them, be the most free. Try not to
throw your voice.
Study the fossil record. For rhymes, if that's your thing.

Statistics. A statistician. i.e. what is the relationship between population
density and instances of feral cats choking on plastic? Advantages of
driving three miles extra to work that lets out ten minutes earlier?
Don't rule out equivalencies.
Accept that you are making guesses. You are determining the state, a
picture of the state.

C
"Stop!" saith the car. I need to get out. I need to get out of my skin, saith
the car. Crows will be here soon enough. Saith the car. Doritos are gross,
especially cool ranch. Saith the car. There's a parking lot you can use to
walk along the sea wall. Saith the car. Employ me. Saith the car. I am of
good line and good use.

The bay sand sweet fat salt; the road sand salt fat old ladies. The road
researched old ladies and laid itself down. "I lay myself down for you."
Saith the road. "May you always have plenty to eat, after all is said and
done, let it be not so distasteful to you."

I hope it's not the milk.
Saith the car.

A, B, C, D [as a chorus of online shopping carts]
Proceed to me, saith the cart.
And we proceeded.

Because the button was there,
and it was good.
We all said, TIOGA!
We said it and it became us
It became us because we paid for it.
And it was good.
I like that kind was what we said
one by one and with feeling.
Because we were young and beautiful and had good credit.
Then came the questions:
Does Motorola make that one?
Where is the taco bell?
Can I get a wristband that reads, "EMBRACE"?
And we found it was worth asking
for there were bonus points; it was California and we knew each others
cell phone numbers.
"I don't even know it's there."
I was at a dinner with clients, you said to us and we all I all said yes. yes.
It was good when we said yes.
It was California and we were feeling so at home in the homestyle we had
chosen,
and you said, I like that kind and we said, you need to get some.
because love and need.
and motorola.
are each other
yes they are each the other: love and need and motorola.

C

Okay. Should I put it on the other side? You know between the hair and
everything else?

D

I don't have any hair so I don't have a problem. I don't even know it's there. I was at a dinner with clients and they were like, when do you take that off and I was like, what are you talking about?

A, B, C, D

He doesn't even know it's there!

He's like, what are you talking about?

Proceed to us because we can show you:

I have really changed my life!

I know.

I know.

Let us sing:

I'm in business.

I'm in business.

I'm in business.

I'm in business.

I'm in business.

I'm in business.

I'm in business.

I'm in business.

I'm in business.

C

I think your phone just died.

B

I think my phone just died.

D

When the music stops, so will I. When the dog lies down, so will I. When the man turns his back, so will I.

C

When the mail turns up, so will I. When the neighbors give up their decorum, so will I. When the table succumbs to water damage, so will I. When the blanket falls off the couch, so will I.

A

When the thing appears, so will I. When the car passes by, so will I. When you start to count the minutes, so will I. When nine becomes ten, so will I. Isn't that nice? How that happens? It seems crazy. I mean, you seem crazy. You do, you seem crazy.

D

Sun insurance, chair insurance, insurance against eloquence, insurance against speechlessness.

Differentiation insurance, receptivity insurance, rearticulation of agreement insurance.

Whiskey insurance, meeting insurance, isolation insurance, desolation insurance.

A

Success insurance, provisional insurance against success of any kind, romantic ruin insurance, intrusion insurance, relapse insurance.

D

Garden insurance, decibel insurance, confirmation number insurance, Confirmation under pressure insurance, insurance against making decisions under pressure

A

Insurance against several types of loss monetary and also metaphysical .
Career insurance, hedge insurance,
insurance against other languages and against parasites.
Intelligence insurance, national chain insurance, hydration insurance, locality insurance.

D

And to the birds
Professing themselves to be wise,
This naturally created--

B

--an insoluble problem.

C

And to the birds,

D

Professing themselves to be wise,

A

This naturally created an insoluble problem.

SONG

*If they let me in
I will sing in a
thin high voice about heaven
if they let me in
I will sing
I will sing
there is no wrestling
there is no wrestling
there is no wrestling in heaven.*

*If they let me in
I will sing in a
thin high voice about heaven*

*if they let me in
I will sing
I will sing
there is no wrestling
there is no wrestling
there is no wrestling in heaven.*

PART TWO:
IN WHICH A TREATISE ON RUINS

G (*from behind, which means that it is important that the audience be able to move, to resettle comfortably.*)

I fell down a mine. I was living in a city of the future. Everyone was, god, they were busy. So busy. And scheduling-- it was a fucking nightmare, you know. No one could meet up with anyone because everyone was so overcommitted. And everyone stopped loving each other well because they were too busy trying to survive their schedules in the thought that once they had ratcheted up the many notches to the top they'd buy a country house and get a secretary and have a simple life. Like the story about the fisherman. But really, it was a nightmare, beyond unhealthy. So a town council was called and the decision was made to sacrifice. To make a sacrifice. This group of high-powered businessmen who had been reading *Beowulf* in their lunchtime reading group were like, "Schedule is a beast. We think it's a beast—we *know* it's a beast—and the only way you do anything about a beast is to make a sacrifice." So I was chosen because my returns had been very poor that year and I, honestly I hadn't been able to concentrate on the job and so because of my poor performance I was one of the two people chosen. The other was this guy Ed who was like 47 and still trying to get temp jobs. We worked together on one of them at Dot Com Fax early in the boom. It was really sad, I mean I actually gave up my spot to try to get him a permanent job and they were like, if you *ever* want a job, you have a place at Dot Com Fax and I was like I can't, just please take Ed. He needs you. Anyway, it looks like he never got it together because he was the other one. So we were taken to this old mine shaft on the outskirts of town, lowered down, and left with a blinking palm pilot to guide the beast to us.

Ed was eaten alive. It was . . . It was really gruesome.

I have a finger of his still. I didn't know what to do with it and it seemed really callous to leave it behind.

(G is giving an ambulatory lecture.)

It's a funny dynamic, a live sacrifice, because on the one hand it's a thing that is freely given, that is surrendered, and on the other hand it's rarely the person themselves who is doing the free giving. But you are caught in this little loop, like, should I be more stoic about this? Or should I run?

(Something to eat, here, or do, or smoke, or drink. Notes consulted.)

When I returned to the city of the future I found it totally neglected, and strangely quiet, as if the volume on the entire city had been turned down. People were demoralized. Demoralized to the point of mumbling. Here I was, the cast out, the reject, coming back, with a tan, I even brought gifts. I was ready to return. I was like the return-of-the-repressed you know, but I had a good attitude. I was prepared to be forgiving.

I'd walk around the city and no one would look at me. Maybe they didn't recognize me? Maybe they couldn't even see me? I toyed with the theory that the entire town had been afflicted with some kind of dust-based glaucoma. I said to myself, they can't actually see you, G. It's not that they don't want to, it's just that they can't. At that point I started to make a lot of noise.

I went into this storefront one day. It had been an art gallery before, I remember having to go to a reception there with someone I knew from my job writing employee identification numbers on invoices at Volt Technology. One of the other temps was showing work or something, or her friend maybe, I don't know. It was conceptual stuff. I remember thinking the graphs were pretty. But I saw this storefront again and the window had these very small flickering lights, very little, like a shrine or

something. And I yelled, "ED?" "HEY, ED!" "WHY ARE THOSE LIGHTS ON?" And I think I kicked something, a can or something.

There was a roll of sod in display area with a holographic projection of wildflowers. If you looked very closely the flowers actually were made out of money. Mouldy money. Money with mould and moss and um, what do you call them, barnacles. In all different colors. But tiny. You had to look closely to see the money underneath it. It was this mouldy mossy barnacled muticolored money. And the whole apparatus was kind of softly singing. It made sound. And the little lights, the blinking lights.

(G. brings up a slide detailing this window, perhaps with tech specs for the holograms. Takes the slide out and continues.)

Past the flowers were stacks and stacks of appointment books. Weekly schedules, monthly schedules, birthday books, the kinds of short form diaries you record the weather in. Calendars. And every page was empty.

In the next room there were cell phones and pdas and blackberries. And the room after that was all iphones. One of them was beeping, I remember it being soft, it was like a little sound effect beep, to tell you that you were advancing, that something was advancing. And it was playing a slide show on repeat, and I picked it up and held it and watched it. The album was called, "Simon's Holiday." And there on the screen was Simon and this very plain looking but happy girl, in Hawaii.

(G sings while moving somewhere else, or attending to himself or the space somehow.)

*my patience is equipped
with vapor fangs
from northeast pennsylvania*

my patience is equipped

*with vapor fangs
from northeast pennsylvania*

*my patience is equipped
with vapor fangs
from northeast pennsylvania*

It's not that no skinny legged man will ever jump out at me from behind the bushes, or that I won't ever see the devil. I'm sure I'll see the devil. It's just that nothing reveals itself.

(Something small to smoke or eat or fix. Then G sings again)

try me

(A bodily fit here, coughing, sneezing, wheezing, something that comes up. G then resumes the lecture with slide illustrations for each of the following beast-types.)

Beast Conventions.

There is the convention of the pariah king. The one who suffers for so long his life loses happiness. The one who gets punished, turned into a beast, and just says, fuck it. I don't want to go back. I don't even want to be a human again. I like being a beast. And I'm going wreck havoc. And he does. And can only be countered by the mythological king, the kind that comes along only once per, you know, once per collective memory. And only that king can kill the pariah king that's become a beast. And a lot of people, weaker people, get caught up in the slaughter while those two are battling to the death.

Then there's the convention of the fool who has so much ambition that he sells himself somehow, make a mistake, gets caught in a trap. And that's enchantment and so it's the sweet, good, inevitably young woman

who redeems him. And he doesn't become a true beast. And whoever set the trap isn't mortally strong, either. Which means this beast convention isn't terrifying, or at best it's a fake terror. Because that story is really about management and about moderation, which is the opposite of terror. But management is a false solution. Because nobody really comes back intact from those kinds of traps. So the story is phony. The world is made too radically small and neat, and providing.

Then there's the convention that's a gardener's convention. That what is beastly is actually grown, and cultivated, and is you, is part of you. And so you bear responsibility for this beastly thing you've made. And you can't just apologize; you can't just say, "I give up, I'm sorry, I'm going home." The beast trails always after you. And maybe you'll throw other people in its pathway as you try to escape. Or maybe you'll throw yourself in its pathway, as if that was remotely heroic, as if your own destruction would somehow neutralize this thing you've made, defuse it, as if it was just a movie bomb with color coded wires.

(The sound of fake enchantment. A model railbridge sign, "TRENTON MAKES THE WORLD TAKES" flashes on and off.)

The only way you do anything about a beast is to sacrifice. To make a sacrifice.

(G needs some water, perhaps.)

In the back of my old Tiger Temps date book, after the more practical appendices like *choosing a tie in corporate environments* and *tips for a filling and fulfilling lunch hour*, there's a section called *wisdom to live by* and in this section, it says, "You are enough to feed yourself but you are not enough to satisfy." I remember I was reading this calendar because it was the only book I had with me after I got away from the mineshaft, so I read it a lot. "You are enough to feed yourself but you are not enough to satisfy." On the following page I remember someone—I don't think it was my

employment officer—I think someone else had hand-written, "a barbed heart is a sacred heart." I don't know who wrote that. I don't know that person.

(Something happens with the ventilation. It's getting colder?)

I watched. Ed. I watched. It was. It was really gruesome. It was extremely disturbing. As I'm sure you would imagine. To watch each bite and think, that's my arm. That's my arm and that's my finger. And that's my brain. And those are my eyes. And will it be enough, and for how long?

(G zips up his parka. It's snowing.)

B *(from elsewhere)*

Lean out the window.

What do you see?

Ruins, right? Ruins. You see order, you see utility, and you see utility, old utility, met with weather. Right? Ruins. Ruins can be expressed as utility by weather.

I have been trying to describe the way these windows look.

I keep thinking of the word, "digital," by which I think I mean modular?

Squares, all opaque, randomly white, blue, grey. Patterns.

I like the patterns.

You too?

Henry?

Grandma is here.

You'll be alright.

Henry?

I don't know.

She's getting coffee.

(The first slide of a slide show flickers on with the following captions)

—ruins = utility x weather

—of a barbed heart is a sacred heart

—text

G

I expect the recurrence of hope will be actually devastating.

(The slide show proper begins of the photo album, "Simon's holiday." As this slide show plays, whatever is needed for the operetta is set up in whatever space has been designated for the operetta. The setting, whether made explicit in the scenery or not, is coastal Maine, just after New Year's Day. If desired, much of the text can be projected as it is sung. Some parts may be silent, allowing the assembled audience the opportunity to take a break from listening, and to read instead.)

PART THREE: An OPERETTA in (x) SCENES

featuring MARIE ANTOINETTE, 3 DEER, ESMÉ the cat
all in the State of Maine

scene x:

MARIE ANTOINETTE

Marie Antoinette in Maine:

and when I looked out the window I saw there was nothing there
and when I looked underneath I saw there was nothing there
I was in Maine, unfortunately, fortunately? and not dead.
and the deer sang:

DEER

*careful what you wish for
it could move something out of place
that you don't wish to lose
you don't wish to lose*

MARIE ANTOINETTE

so I saw there was nothing inside of me
but I saw that nothing becomes something by seeing things
and I was now for good? for good? seeing Maine?
and this was pretty weird

DEER

*careful what you wish for
it could move something out of place
that you don't wish to lose
you don't wish to lose*

MARIE ANTOINETTE

and I knew, had I been in France there would have been an executioner

I looked out the window and I saw: no, I am not in France
I was not in France
and I saw there was only one thing to do

DEER

wait when you are told to
find out what you wish you knew
what you wouldn't choose
find out what you wish you knew
what you wouldn't choose

MARIE ANOINETTE

let the dogs destroy the cats
if they can
I doubt they can
those are not feeble cats

scene xx

MARIE ANTOINETTE

I forgot my revelation quickly

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

and put the dog in the habitat swiftly

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

everything is arranged

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

and I will think of something to do for dinner

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

I'm not as completely susceptible as I once was

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

it was a terrible hangover

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

it was hard work to get through it

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

I have to teach

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

I teach verbs of being

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

I made a wish

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

the wish destroyed me

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

so I decided to wear better underwear

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

and I made my living will

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

and I had very little to give

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

I found I had very little to give

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

and when I looked underneath I understood

DEER

good

MARIE ANTOINETTE

play me something

play me a record

play me something good

scene xxx

the deer put on a record

MARIE ANTOINETTE does a dance

scene xxxx

ESMÉ

Perhaps it turns out you don't have the gift. Or that your gift is fragile.

Ask yourself and be honest. If you find it, treat it well.

DEER

All those weeks of thinking lead to something

ESMÉ

Something really big and really simple, like "I am a cat without an imperative." Or "nothing stands between me and the coffee."

DEER

good

ESMÉ

A man walks by me, just as I am thinking this. I see something rattling under his cart. Oh, let him look for himself. Two red cans of folgers.

DEER

good

ESMÉ

I promise you coffee, and all it entails. Love me. You might find I'm tougher than I seem. We still have our original spaces inside of us.

DEER

Have you noticed that this city looks onto water from every side?

Entire islands are for the dogs?

ESMÉ

No, Marie: you are not in France. Forget the big words. What you'll find is that you feel better and better.

DEER

And it is not cheap

And it is not dark

And it is not France

ESMÉ

Sometimes I really feel awesome.

DEER

good

ESMÉ

They speak in code. They love stress. Let them lose their heads.

DEER

la la la la la la la la la la la la

la la la la la la la la la la la la

la la la la la la la la la la la la

la la la la la la la la la la la la

ESMÉ

That's how the revelation comes. Everything we can become.

scene xxxxx:

The deer dance *The Dance after Quitting*. It is a good dance, short, and very tidy.

End of operetta; some of the scenery is removed

PART: INTER-PART

SONG

*he knew he should fail everything else
he knew he should fail the simplicity of that
he knew he should fail everything else
he knew he should fail the simplicity of that*

*but this theory had its dark corners too
he had meant nothing at all by that
but this theory had its dark corners too
he had meant nothing at all by that*

*it was the only favor he ever asked.
it was the only favor he ever asked.
concealing all he could conceal with that
he talked as if it wasn't real like that
concealing all he could conceal by that
he spoke as if it wasn't real: oh that*

*he knew he should fail the simplicity of that
he knew he should fail the simplicity of that
he had meant nothing at all in fact
he had meant nothing at all in fact*

PART FOUR: DIM "O"

[written so the process of writing can be seen- on the wall, or on an overhead projector:]

almost to imagine
the calamity of blindness

[it is erased, or defaced, and then written again:]

almost to imagine
the calamity of blindness

[moving pictures: blueprint plans for a large house]

C

up the stairs through the entry which opens onto a room a huge
room on the wall a mirror on the mirror a scratch by the scratch a
reflection: dim o

behind you a wall wallpaper a repeating pattern a field and its inverse
in the light from large windows the wallpaper glows through the
windows a horse in the yard hacking the light is golden the grounds
rows receding into distance far hills through the window a fountain
turned off to conserve water a bird, upset, waits for the water beyond
the bird, beyond the horse, a road the dim sound of road you turn
back towards the wall towards the wallpaper from the next room
through the door blue light a television from the television you hear
this:

JOHNNY TRADESCANT [B]

Courage!

HIS PA [G]

Wrong, Son!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Courage!

HIS PA

Wrong, Son!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Pa:

HIS PA

Yes, son!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

It is a wrong perspective!

HIS PA

Yes, son!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

And it is a calamity!

HIS PA

No, son

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

It is--

HIS PA

Yes, son?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

It has been pretty hard on me.

HIS PA

Yes, son.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Pa?

HIS PA

Yes, son?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

You certainly outlived all the fruit trees!

HIS PA

Not so, son.

C

the ground floor is filled with light

circle the house the perimeter windows room leading to room and
things in each room things like any other room behind you a lamp
on the lampshade, patterns like leaves patterns under the lamp:
papers coins a camera a kitchen thin high windows from which light
cuts sharply down to reveal unwanted cats other troubles: dim o a
radio is playing music is a solution a solution is sweet company
from the radio you hear this:

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Also garden plants such as phlox and asters!

HIS PA

No, son!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

which grow into other things, this is the nature of these American plants
I've brought—ardulously—home
to our home which is

HIS PA

Johnny Tradescant and his Pa in South Lambeth

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

It's very old and you've heard of it
married Jane. died 1634
married Ester son John, died at 19
and the sadness of outliving is a hard sadness

HIS PA

Johnny Tradescant and his Pa in South Lambeth
It's very old and you've heard of it

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Pa!

HIS PA

Yes son!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

I'll put on music.

HIS PA

Good son.

A

from the radio, Shostakovich light from high windows falls on
kitchen things surfaces and storages and knives past the cupboards a
doorframe, a door and on into the house the dining room is
windowless but light from the kitchen comes through on the table:
glasses, silverware, a tablecloth beyond the table an archway through
which another room returns to the entrance the front door the
staircase a dog appears follow the dog up the stairs dim o

C

the second floor a door a guest room someone could sleep here maybe if they came to stay for a while it has its own bathtub and a guest could privately for example do a pregnancy test or lie in bed convulsing in a nice bathrobe and wonder am I having a heart attack or just a heart event? and watch the light change through the single window dimmer on the nightstand a photograph of a landscape in which a dog waits and a horse hacks and the wet happy bird is in the fountain because it is on it, meaning the fountain and everything everything else is on in the photograph there is no need for conservation there's nothing to be saved it's a photograph of the future I mean it's a photograph of the past next to the photograph a radio from the radio you hear this:

HIS PA

Johnny Tradescant!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Yes Pa?

HIS PA

Did you climb the bad cypress?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Yes, Pa.

HIS PA

And was there anything to see up there?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

No, Pa.

HIS PA

Johnny Tradescant!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Yes, pa?

HIS PA

"Patience and fortitude."

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Perhaps, Pa.

HIS PA

Think of it like this:

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Yes, Pa?

HIS PA

The sap on your pants is a trophy.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Pa?

HIS PA

Yes son?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

About the tree.

HIS PA

Yes, son?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

I mixed the soils for its future acclimation.

HIS PA

Good, son. Son?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Yes Pa?

HIS PA

May we all acclimate to our futures

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Humbly spoken, pa.

A

the hallway holds its own yellow dim a bend in the corridor opens
onto rows of closed doors until a room at the end of the hall

on the far wall pleated curtains cover a tiny window and in their fold,
old dust and air trapped in a different decade undisturbed air lying
on a dresser a figurine a bust of a sailor from Bellingham it's pipe
broken so many places could be paradise

C

weave your way now, through small rooms each containing its own
dimness, and occasionally a tiny window barely an opening and the
light gained by these windows trails alongside pushes further into the
interior of the house in the dim light of a communicating room a
telephone pick it up

from the receiver you hear this:

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

Married Rebecca died 1649

son Paul married Elizabeth died 1653

Married Nora 1654 son John died 1656
some glands and organs preserved in vinegar on the conservatory shelves
in South Lambeth, alongside Carpathian butterfly specimens
Cousin Reed gone across the ocean
and come arduously home
married Virginia daughter Prudence died 1661
her last words,

D [off]
"the conscientious man is a kind of degenerate"

HIS PA
I always found Virginia somewhat feral.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT
She spit, then died.
Soon after the estate gone to wilderness
by all reliable accounts it remains so.

HIS PA
As it does, son. It remains a wilderness.

A
rooms open in the almost dark onto another staircase up the stairs
through the escalating dim the dog alongside followed by this small
push of light to a landing which opens onto a large room an
expanse

C
on the far wall, almost obscured pleated curtains on the near wall a
mirror next to the mirror a lightswitch it doesn't work but there is
some light some natural light left

sudden intrusion of sound beeps and starts from an intercom system
beeps and starts and obliterates the quiet and the glowing dull thank
you canopy dim o through the intercom, voices:

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

like a piece of clothing laid aside in a room not yet come upon

HIS PA

a complex idea.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

and one sounder than it seems

HIS PA

copied right, and fully powered, fully bright.

C

in the dim light you see a table a small table and stationary on the
table for writing letters letters that celebrate the love between humans
and aliens you could write anything anything at all along the wall
a lightswitch click nothing happens maybe electricity has been
replaced a faint glow asserts itself a radio turns on from the radio
you hear this:

HIS PA

I have in my possession a catalog of terrible mutations in flies, for
instance, *antennapodia*: a condition in which legs grow where the eyes
should be.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

One of several terrible mutations I read about in school, Pa.

HIS PA

May I suggest that you defer the point of inflection.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

"at every instance it both rises skywards and risks falling upon us."

HIS PA

May I also suggest that you answer the phone.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

I did. I answered it. Every last one of them.

HIS PA

Courage, son. Answer the phone and find new sustenance.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

It is a wrong perspective.

HIS PA

I know, son.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

All this for the mastery of a single blossoming plant?

HIS PA

Salisburies, fritillaries and mulberries.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

We have to consider what is inside of it and what is out.

HIS PA

I suggest you begin this immediately.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

PA!

HIS PA

Yes son?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

IT IS A WRONG PERSPECTIVE!

HIS PA

I know, son.

C

forward into the dimness and find your hand on curtains pleated
curtains and as your hand reaches into the fold of the curtains a
sudden violent flood "the broad daylight of our ordinary memory"
like a light in the back of your eyes and you remember everything you
remember Lionel Ritchie you remember the moon walk you remember
Green Cloud you remember the electric parade and the Betsy Ross
mouse and the neighbor's evil cat Soda and you drop to the floor you
just fall to the floor you fall to the floor

A

and from the floor parting some fold in space or in the cloth and you find
a way under the curtains to the next chamber the next room

it is a room with no windows filled with a glowing dull that isn't
made of natural light but of something else dim o and in frequencies
of ghost radios these voices:

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

I've gone across the ocean three times, Pa.

HIS PA

Good, son.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

And brought ardulously home--

HIS PA

Yes son?

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

All the American trees I could hull.

HIS PA

Good, son.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

I planted the bad cypress in South Lambeth.

HIS PA

Good Son.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

For the purpose of scaling it and looking around. Which I have done.

HIS PA

Yes, son.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

And I say to you that every human mind is a marvel.

HIS PA

How many botanical names attest to this fact!

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

And also every human mind is an estuary.

HIS PA

So it is, son.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

And moves itself forward and back

HIS PA

So it does, son.

JOHNNY TRADESCANT

And this fact calls for an garden plot of its own.

C

it is a room with no windows

you walk to the center in the incredible dimness

you put your hand through it. through this light through

thick space

of livers and hardboiled eggs

and mediocre cooking and

I don't know, shrimp,

things you don't like,

a crowd, an image of yourself in a gymnasium

60 years from now

and all the junk

pansies

ferns

ant infestations

living creatures

multitudes of slide projectors

roman pottery

cheap cotton
unwanted cats
glue sticks
underwear
cable lines
transparencies
and the claustrophobic sadness of all the time to come

as if it almost didn't happen.
as if there's nothing there at all.

SONG

*What if the future is just like this?
What if the future is just like this?
Would you say no to your opposite?
Shoot the sparrow, let the dogs free.*

*Please tell the bankers they're just like me
Please tell the bankers they're just like me
Would they be fooled by obscenity?
Shoot the sparrow, let the dogs go free.*

*Would you redeem my obscurity?
I will disprove teleology.
Could you say no to my industry?
Industry is opportunity
Shoot the sparrow, let the dogs go free;
Shoot the sparrow, let the dogs go free.*

D

A little girl, her name is Aoife, it's an Irish name, tells the story of a plane crash at sea: decapitations by rollies, strangulations by drop-down oxygen masks. She's the only survivor; she takes the enormous slide out onto the water. Blinking lights illuminate the pathway. She's in the **water;** everyone else from the plane is dead. She floats. She gets picked up by a rescue team of Danish volunteers. It's a small operation from a small village. The kind one is named Elke and she has a family. Aoife stays with this family for seven years. They call her Iffla, or Iffliche, in the diminutive. Blinking lights illuminate the pathway. One day in the city she sees a row of lights, it's at the movies, she's at the movies. She stays at the movies. She stays there until the end of the day. They're showing "Brief Encounter" dubbed in Danish. She watches it three times. She can't go home again. She doesn't. The tickets seller lives up stairs in the next door apartment building. She is named Marion. The building is named "The Andalusia". They go upstairs. They eat bread and sausage. They drink tea. Marion invites Aoife to stay. One day Marion has a stroke. It's mild, but it still takes some time to recover. Aoife takes care of her, and sells the tickets at the movies. A man shows up one day. He's wearing a yellow hat. He has marks around his neck. He has a watch that blinks. She won't sell him a ticket. She doesn't want him to go inside. She wants him to stay right there, in front of her. She wants to look at him. She stalls for time. He leaves, she follows. They sit together. They stay together. Many years later they are drinking weak tea together in a cafe in some German town. He says to her, "I always expected you would be able to get pot. Why didn't you ever get pot? I wanted to smoke pot with you." He leaves. She doesn't follow. She stays in the café. The waitress gives her a cigarette. At the end of the day, Aoife goes for a walk along the canal with the waitress. Her name is Lana. That weekend Aoife goes with Lana to her parents' house. It's a cold house. There's only one heated room with a coal stove. They spend a few days there taking care of the dogs and the horses. Then Lana has to work again. Aoife says, "I'll stay." Lana's parents don't object. So she stays. She takes care of the horses. She does the laundry. She walks around a lot. One day she has a

vision. It's a visitation. She's visited by a saint, or something like a saint. There are so many blinking lights and flowering plants everywhere. The plants make her inconceivably sad. When she wakes up, she throws up violently and decides to leave. She kisses Lana's parents on each cheek. They all cry a little and drink a toast. Aoife walks away to another town. On the way she sleeps by an apple tree. She's joined by a stray dog, she calls her Laslo-Kovacs, or no-something she'd name a boat, if she had a boat, "My Serenity," or "Soledad." Six months later she's in Berlin. She gets a job in a shabby second hand book shop. She knits sweater-vests and sells them to the regulars. One day someone comes in that she has seen before. Where has she seen him before? He is from the airplane. They were sitting next to each other. On the airplane. "Don't be fooled," he says. "I'm a ghost." She looks at him. She nods. She says, "of course." A little too softly. He leaves. She feels fine. Fine.

A

As if it almost didn't happen. As if there's nothing there at all.

D

You are the friend I have now.

end of play