

MAKING-TOWARD-ART'S-(LEGENDARY)-BODY

a cata-conversation between two wanderers

Setting: Somewhere deep in the misty wilds of an open karstic region slightly Westward of the Eastern Mid-Lands.

[*“Sometimes reality can be too complex to be conveyed by the spoken word. Legend remoulds it into a form that can be spread across the world.”* (‘Spoken’ by the computer ‘Alpha-60’ at the beginning of Jean-Luc Godard’s ‘Alphaville’ (1965).)]

> Thank heavens! What a stroke of luck, bumping into you just when I’d given up hope of finding my way off this blighted moor. I’m completely lost and desperate to get back to the city.

> But what on earth are you doing here?

> I was directed here by the Trustees of the Rueby Wouldman Fund. I’ve just received their Lifetime Award for Really Trying Under Really Trying Circumstances. They advised me to make the most of whatever time remains. But I’ve already had enough of this grey shrouded umbral scape to last me several lifetimes. I’m at a loss. There are neither paths, landmarks nor seductive scenery hereabouts.

> Surely the seductive lies in the eyes of the beholder? Take Kiefer for example...

> ... oh, never mind all that aesthetic nonsense! What brought you to this pretty pass?

> Well, by a strange coincidence, I was lucky enough to be awarded, by the very same Trustees, one of the Fund’s Fellowships in Interruptive Wandering. Its only condition is for the recipient to stroll randomly through the region in the hope that...

> ...that what?

> ...that one might, in time, stumble across some clues as to how to make for Art’s Body.

> That’s odd. My acceptance of the Lifetime Award stipulated that I had to scour this marshy desert for the conditions of my continuing failure to get anywhere near that Body. They suggested that if only I could identify the things guaranteeing my perennial falling short then I might be released from failing’s binds into a vitally different relation to Art’s Legendary Body.

> Legendary! Why ‘Legendary’? For me the Body is far from the stuff of legends or myths – it’s utterly real and always close by. I can sense that Body now. It consists of a collection of just those Art gests that, by their very difference from all the other things constituting my everyday life, have harried and seduced me away from the terms of that life and cast me off towards its elsewhere. It’s that other site that I’m trying to make toward now, right here, through my fractured chance perambulations.

> That’s fine, but surely your problem is going to be that, as my endless failure testifies all too clearly, the Body you have gathered so assiduously and lovingly simply never can ‘be’ right here. You yourself spoke of its ‘elsewhere’. That’s why, in spite of all my angst-ridden

efforts, I consistently fail to get within the Body's touching distance. Is it not precisely the 'elsewhere' of the everyday that absolutely cannot be accommodated by the latter? However much you want to draw it onto the plane of your own becoming right here in the course of your pathless meanderings through this forbidding zone, Art's Body is, in its very constitution, the 'other-to' any 'this-here'. You could never induce it to alight, tarry awhile, and then make itself at home here. That's why, in its very absence from here, it has to begin in and as legend and thus go on to lead a definitively legendary life. It can never be part of this or any other *real* scene!

> But surely legends can, maybe have to, begin from and grow out of the very real events that characterise the experiences and feelings making up our everyday lives together. Doesn't that apply to Art's Body too? For it to have any kind of a life it has to mix it with everything else that's right here. It must make its appeals from within the thick of things. After all the very gests we makers assemble in the hope of their absorption by the Body are, in their defining materiality, nowhere else but right here jammed in amongst the rest of the world's uncountable detritus.

> Well of course each of the things you, I, and the others try to make in the hope of their absorption by Art's Legendary Body have to assert that hope by making patent their singularity. After all it is each gest's concrete, and hopefully seductively thoughtful, difference from both all the other gests and the stuff of everyday life that opens onto absorption's possibility. Yet at the same time they have to find a way of escaping from this very real immersion in the everyday world by secreting something that resists...

> ...or, better, refuses...

> ...yes, refuses the everyday's efforts to gather them all up in meaning's suffocating mansion. For such fixing disposing work is what the everyday world organises itself around. All the institutions that hold the arts in their grasp seek to bring them back to and within the routines of technical knowledges. Think of all the disciplines that surround and seek to permeate the arts in order better to bring them under their own narrow knowledge-controls. They have to make sense of them, construct consistent histories and narratives, stories if you like, legends even, about them that lock them into codes and disciplinary rhetorics within which they become mere examples of methodic visions having nothing to do with the terms of their gests' emergence. Whereas making-toward-Art wants none of that! The singular differences of its gests offer themselves only as other to the meanings sustaining the everyday world. And that is precisely where the Legendary comes into its own in showing Art's Body as not-here, as a gathering that is otherwise to everything that routinely just 'is' for us.

> So could this half-sense of the Body's Legendary quality be a way of holding two incompatible elements of the Body together in the tension of some sort of permanently volatile relation? For if the gests made for Art are simultaneously both right here and yet somewhere other entirely, then your and my making will constitute and be consumed by the struggle to hold these incompatibles together. It seems that, in this vision, making has to lead a tortuous double-life, being both Actual and Virtual.

> Surely it was ever thus! And never more so than now under the planetary rule of programmed informatics in which every 'actual' can be instantly transposed into and represented as a digitally programmed 'virtual'. Twitter and blog as one will under the illusion of 'being-in-touch', it is exactly 'touch' itself, and the real movement of becoming that touch(ing) and being-touched-by (and thus Art) entails, that is deferred forever by the

process of digitising transformation. Forget the ‘living present’ now! All we’re left with is the techno-representation of everything.

> You’re beginning to sound irredeemably pessimistic – a soul entrapped in the wiles of the Silicon Valley technophobes!

> Well that’s one reason why I was hoping for more from my traversings across this karstic vale. I saw my challenge here as that of excavating responses to my being at least temporarily released from the Really Trying Circumstances of fleshly permeation by the programmed-virtual. But, consistent with my entire past, I have so far failed to turn my exposure to the zone’s emptiness into something for Art.

> Perhaps you are clinging too fast to the angst of failure! You need to empty yourself of such worldly obstacles and allow this deserted region to fill you to the full with its vacuum. Surely that was the hope of the Trustees, and maybe even dear old Rueby herself! Maybe then your affinity for Art’s Body, Legendary or otherwise, will generate something singularly yours from the void the region might just induce in you. As you insist on the defining quality of the Legendary for the vitality of Art’s Body perhaps you could find ways of allowing it to displace all your rhetoric about our subordination to the technomatic world. It’s clearly worn you out. You need to drop all that stuff and start again from somewhere else, maybe from an inviting elsewhere that’s actually right here!

> Mmmmm, certainly it’s the elsewhere I crave and which I take to be Art’s sole offer.

> So what about the Legendary as an opening onto other possibilities for you? If, as I suggested, all who try to make for Art condemn themselves to the impossible task of mixing the immiscibles – the Actual and the Virtual - could this very tension be the stuff of a quirky legend that opens onto making’s way of life?

> You may be onto something. But I’m not sure I can reconcile that double life, that living-making tension, with what I take to be the Legendary source of Legend itself. You see, if we are to be true to the legacy of the word ‘legend’, then we must surely live within and try to make the most of its offer. The consequence would be that to treat Art’s Body, the hoped-for destination of your and my makings, as Legendary would require us to approach it as that which, in the singularity of its emergence and its limit, *has to be read*.

> What on earth are you talking about?

> Our word ‘legend’, and thus all things ‘legendary’, is a direct descendent of the Latin verb ‘*legere*’ whose several meanings, such as ‘to gather’, ‘to collect’, ‘to pick’, ‘to choose’, ‘to catch with the eye’, cohere, one might even say gather themselves, around its root sense – ‘to read’. And in this root it is, as you will easily recognise, very closely affiliated to the ‘law’ (via ‘*lex*’ and all thing ‘legal’), and to the Greek word for ‘word’ itself – ‘*lexis*’.

> Okay okay, but what could all this have to do with our making-toward-Art’s-Body?

> Well, more specifically, ‘legend’ is derived from that strange form of the Latin verb – the gerund. This generates a noun-form of the verb’s infinitive – it’s the little double consonant ‘nd’ tag at the word’s end that marks its work. I see you’re yawning! Sorry if I’m boring you but this is absolutely crucial. You see, this gerund (the word itself being the gerundive deriving from ‘*gerere*’ – ‘to bear’ or ‘carry’) converts the infinitive into a noun referring to either persons or things *that have to undergo the action described by, carried within, the*

verb. There'll be examples already familiar to you, such as 'agenda' - meaning 'those things that have to be done or acted upon'.

> You mean like 'propaganda' - 'those things that must be propagated, sown as seeds in our minds'?

> Just so! And think of others such as 'addendum', 'dividend', 'horrend(ous)', 'South Muskham Prebend'...

> ...and 'pudenda' - 'those things of which one must be ashamed'...

> Exactly! You've got the hang of it. And don't forget those lovely names 'Amanda' - 'she who must be loved', and 'Miranda' - 'she who must be admired and exalted'!

> It's almost as if this gerund is carrying a sense of necessity or obligation.

> Well, I'd go further and suggest that the compulsion you are pointing to refers us back to something deeper that drives...

> ...a driving *force* maybe...

> ...definitely - some *inner* force whose effects are felt where language, primarily in the form of speech, but borne also in the written word, converts the corporeal's pressures and urgings into something like sense. The words emerge as a kind of transliteration of inchoate forces that move within us, but then have their effects on the outside through the traces of force they manage to infuse in the words.

> So legend and the legendary might be imbued with this force of an action of gathering-collecting that comes forth as, perhaps even defines, the emergence of language as deposited in and through sounds, traces, spoor, marks, notes, graphisms, all demanding, in their multiple ways, to be read.

> And, if so, could it be that legend is bringing us face to face, eye to eye, ear to eye and *vice versa*, with languaging itself as just this originating demand that we cannot brook? So the word(s) offered as legend thus separate and deliver languaging from the body. Simultaneously they preserve traces of the latter's continuing visceral forces that are themselves aside from and in advance of all willing, all reason-grounded choosing. Perhaps it is just such words, such legendary gerundives, that remind us that all languaging bears traces of inner forces which remain, at the same time, way beyond everything we gather as 'culture' and thus beyond 'us', we who are undoubtedly, and despite all our technical-calculative knowing ways, still, fundamentally, pleistocenians.

> So, if Art's Body is, as you suggested, Legendary...

> ...but always over-there, 'away-from-here' as Kafka reminded us...

> ...it is because it has to be read?

> Do we not, as makers, produce this Body as unavoidably over-there, even though for you its inspiration is the driving force to make-toward-Art that you feel right here? Is it not the gathering up-ahead for which we yearn but can never grasp? And do we not, precisely in the course of the uncertainties and doubts that dog our making, experience it as a Beyond toward which we hope our gests (*gerere* again...!) are being sent on their way while never knowing

if they will have arrived, will have been absorbed by the Legend that we have ourselves constructed as a kind of distant model that seems to summon us, nay drive us, toward itself?

> Hence your perennial sense of failure!

> That's right. Every maker's unique and idiosyncratic gathering of a shifting ensemble of gests and events, together constituting a Legendary Body-Beyond, is the goad to their own making. We goad ourselves to go on and on without ever knowing whether the gests we send forth in response to the Legendary Body that we ourselves have assembled, will ever be absorbed by that seemingly proximate yet absolutely unreachable Body.

> Perhaps that is why we makers immediately lose interest in the gests once we have abandoned them to their external fate. For us the making is all. For that is precisely when we rivet ourselves to Art's Body, the Body endlessly constituted and re-constituted in making's course, and set forth both over-there and right-here as a still real hope and possibility. The problem each time is how to maintain the goad in that state of readiness and intimate forcing that might just allow the next gest, as a new beginning, to get under way.

> Yes, and because each of us sets up the Body according to the unique mesh between our desire to be with(in) Art's Body and our all too real circumstances...

> ...your Really Trying Circumstances...

> ...just so, then Art's Body in its distant entirety can only be an utterly plastic, labile, and finally unboundaryable amalgamation of all makers' projections. Such a Body-Beyond-bodies could only be the inherently unstable and fragile stuff of legend.

> It sounds as if it's both there and not there.

> Is it not the untouchable, but still necessarily readable, manifestation of the simultaneity of the Actual and the Virtual that you yourself proposed, though here the Virtual has nothing whatsoever to do with the digitising of everything?

> Certainly, in order to get under way, making-for-Art needs to have a committed sense of what Art, if it is to be seen as desired destination for its making-trajectory, might 'be' as a gathering that, as you have suggested, lacks all identity! Making begins to appear as a forced choice that arises in response to a demanding call that it cannot refuse.

> But arriving at this 'point' of no-refusal may be a long slow arduous process consisting of multiple detours, abandonings, returns, and the never-ending interplay of doubt and conviction. In all this effort it is some form of reading that, by what it catches and gathers with the eye and body (*gerere*), searches out and makes just about legible making's emergent trajectory. Reading as an activity names the core process through which this Body is slowly gathered, while undergoing never-ending modification right through to making's end, its last gest. In this way all makers remain neophytes and apprentices, for the destination of their trajectories remains, in its fundamental mutability, necessarily unknowable. As an inveterate failure I could be nothing other than just such a minor apprentice. And no matter which of the arts become the opening, the voiding of everyday life, into which making leaps, it cannot even recognise the possibility of such an opening unless it has passed through an immensely complex gathering process – reading-as-legending – that assembles a possible desirable Body as destination.

> So what you propose as this ‘reading’, setting up the Body, entails an active making felt-sense of Art through an endless choosing-rejecting process. My emergent vision of Art becomes a process of continuous selection that aligns the things that have moved me to distraction while continuing to confound all my sense-making activities. It is this residue of inexplicables that becomes the Body’s core.

> Exactly. In this distracting movement you will return obsessively to the gests whose inexplicable strangeness has already withdrawn you from the commonsense of everyday life. Such gests begin to shape the armature around which you slowly read into becoming your distinctive assemblage of the Body. I’m glad you referred to this as a ‘selection’ process, because, in making-for-Art, the selecting does not follow some purposive rational choice-making scheme. Quite aside from conventional models of subjectivity, makers are as much chosen by the things as choosers of them. Selection for Art, under the weight and force of vague but very real feelings of affinity, attachment and obsessively compulsive fascination, confounds our conventions of choosing. And of course the word ‘selection’ draws us back under legend’s spell, for it is one of the ‘-lects’ that derive directly, like legend, from *‘legere’*, and thus from reading.

> So that, collecting, selecting, electing, neglecting, lecturing (with its lectern-reliance...), are all tied together by and hover around a gathering-reading that assembles something like a ‘world’ for us?

> Reading, as this corporeally forced selecting-gathering-aligning that, in its construction (caught up with all the body’s organs as a synaesthetic gathering of the body as an ensemble that is ‘all eyes’) of path-lines through any experienceable ‘terrain’, effects all our relating: it is how we make relations. It is how we attach ourselves to others and things. In this way we legend ourselves, emerging as legendary becomings for whom Art’s Body is one distant possibility.

> And if one adds to all the ‘-lects’ the various prefixes that we find so useful in everyday life, like ‘re-’ and ‘de-’, then the field of ‘-lect’s’ reference...

> ...indeed of all relating...

> ...expands dizzyingly...

> ...way beyond the bounds of any *dia-lectics!*

> So, achieving the void that I proposed as a possible response to your troubles with failure, may come up against the ceaseless passage through-and-away of all the matters that select one aside from any active willing...

> ...just as your Interruptive Wandering has to reconcile itself to, take on, and find, ways of relating selectively, always selectively, to those never-ending little interruptions some of whose traces refuse to leave you alone...

> ...even here, then, in this seemingly empty ‘scape, we’re both condemned to relating without end...

> ...to a legending some of whose collectable traces may just be gatherable in the name of Art...

> ... always provided they’ve moved us to distraction...

> ...and, withdrawing us from the moilings of everyday life, have interrupted...

> ...sorry to interrupt you, but that reminds me of the urgency that brought me to this receding zone. I need to get wandering blankly. Perhaps our pathless ways will cross again.

> Perhaps. In the dark of our exchanges here I may delay my return to the city. For I'm now beginning to suspect that it is the Body I sent on ahead of and way beyond me over there, which is the most really trying thing in the world!

> Could it be then that you have weighed down your making with your self-constituted and disastrous legend of failure? Maybe, from here on, your sallying forth could try making-for-Art's-Legendary-Body through unravelling and then casting off the thread of this legendary failure. You could start by getting up off that logue, and re-collecting...

> ...idiolecting...

> ...yourself elsewhere by putting one leg in front of...

> ...my other leg...

END

Michael Phillipson

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