

Soldier's Recourse: a conversation between Jared Stanley and Chris Martin

Tuesday, April 17, 2012 5:40 PM

Chris,

Let's have an email dialogue about the 2pac Hologram - you ready?

Questions:

1. Do you know Faust Part II, in which Faust makes the image of Helen appear? (This seems to be an instance of the same thing....)
2. Is this an example of Spectacular Time?
3. Is it OK to resurrect somebody in order to make money?
4. Is the hologram not the most beautiful and strange instance of collage you've ever seen, quickly out flarfing flarf?

-Jared

Wednesday, April 18, 2012 8:29 AM

Jared,

This is a conversation I desperately want to have. I've been compulsively viewing Tupac hologram YouTube responses. There's this mix of elation and revulsion I sense everywhere, a kind of virtual sublime dredged up from uncanny valley. SO...

1. Do you know Faust Part II, in which Faust makes the image of Helen appear? (This seems to be an instance of the same thing....)

I don't know this, but totally want to hear more about it. Can you expand? How do you think Helen relates to Tupac? I would love to see a remake of The Iliad with Hologram Tupac as Helen. Or should he be Cassandra, always pres(t)aging doom?

2. Is this an example of Spectacular Time?

Absolutely. I feel so *enthralled* by this commodity. It draws me in with such fascination that I become neutralized, become nobody but what consumes. There's a game I play during the Super Bowl called Got Got. If you're watching the commercials and you become nobody and somebody catches you emptied out, you have to drink. The difference

with Hologram Tupac is that my body actually seems to revolt. I start to get very disturbed from the inside, my guts wrenching and some emotion welling that pushes against the spectacularity. Almost a moral recoil. (Yes, I hear mortal coil here, too.)

3. Is it OK to resurrect somebody in order to make money?

I mean, my immediate answer is fuck no, right? But there is something about Pac's demise, his last years, that make such a venture seem destined, pulled into possibility. I think first there was his shift from a disarmingly sensitive art student in Baltimore to THUG, all caps, tatted 'cross the abs. It seems to me akin to a Juggalo kind of move. Oh, you think I'm a clown, well just wait and see how fucking clown I'm a get. You think I'm a thug just cuz I'm wearing this hoodie and my mom was a Black Panther turned crack addict? Well here's a whole fucking philosophy of THUGLIFE 'bout to rain down, 'bout to rise up out of "The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone." I mean, it's a difficult shift in some ways, how he extinguishes this fun-loving Pac completely; the Pac that toured with Digital Underground and recorded "I Get Around." Suddenly he's THUG and he's in jail and he's signing with Death Row and that's where the money comes in. Toward the end of his life, Pac was locked in a death drive feedback loop of money money money. The way all those posthumous albums came out. I mean, you can genuinely make an argument that his worth as a "rap martyr" to Death Row, or I guess I should say to Suge Knight, was the obvious cause of his murder, not some casino run-in with an arbitrary gangbanger. And that desire for money money money created the kind of posthumous impetus (an attack, a rushing into death) that carries his subjectivity straight into this hologram.

4. Is the hologram not the most beautiful and strange instance of collage you've ever seen, quickly out flarfing flarf?

There's something really upsetting about the beauty of this hologram. I don't know if I'll ever think through it, or should. As for collage, that's a really interesting term to bring in. A collage element that works in juxtaposition with "real" elements, like the Coachella audience, or more pointedly Snoop Dogg. That's another thing that really freaked me out, how Snoop must have felt. This Tupac dancing toward him on the stage, aligning their gestures, punching voices. Man, that's gotta be some deeply freaky shit, even or especially for Snoop. What does it mean for one to entrain himself with a resurrection? Is it just another wafer? Does it circle back to the origin of choreography, where the lawyer asked his dance professor to record their dance so they could remain dancing together after the latter's death? Those are really the circumstances of the coining of choreography. Is it the ultimate Danse Macabre?

Please, please, hit me back with your thoughts. I want to know about Faust II. I want to know your visceral, muscular experience of spectacular thrall. Does a man's last impetus justify perpetual cupidity in his name and with his performed image? I want to know all your thoughts on my questions in number four.

Also I watched this the night I first saw the Coachella performance. First of all, this dude's handle is a-mazing. But this bare room behind him and the "loud-ass car" and the classic rant at pop rap and the weird vocal misses, I don't know. It just triggered things in a different direction for me.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddCHXuOPSTU&feature=plcp&context=C4da4580VDviVQa1PpcFPhrpw_Zj5CcVvjYRGBQVmDibFjguHL-B8%3D

I also found this response to his handle:

<http://www.holytaco.com/an-in-depth-analysis-of-youtuber-eatdat pussy445's-screen-name/>

In Other Words,
Chris

Thursday, April 19, 2012 5:57 PM

I just knew you were the dude to talk to...

1. I've attached a link to a semi-decent translation of the scene, but in a nutshell, the Emperor tells Faust, "I want to see Helen" - he thinks Faust can do anything- so Faust creates a kind of 'spirit masque' performance, staged in the great hall, which depicts Helen and Paris kind of woodenly looking at one another - he ends up becoming completely enamored with her, and kind of makes a mess of the whole event - it's an amazing moment, and it seems to me to have a close relationship to the image of a legendary beloved, like Pac, brought back - or as Roky Erickson put it "He's brought back! brought back!"

Here's the link:

<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/FaustIIActIIScenesItoIV.htm>

2. I think enthralled is the word, with its overtones of enslavement - that revolt is something I feel, too - I'm going to go down some theoretical roads, now:

DeBord:

...vulgarized pseudofestivals are parodies of real dialogue and gift-giving; they may incite waves of excessive economic spending, but they lead to nothing but disillusionments, which can be compensated only by the promise of some new disillusion to come. The less use value is present in the time of modern survival, the more highly it is exalted in the spectacle. The reality of time has been replaced by the *publicity* of time.

and Benjamin:

It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the

ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.

I was talking to my students about this yesterday, and one said - "how is this different from watching archival footage of 2pac?", an exciting question, about the ability to transform an image. I said "nope, this ain't a movie" - one in which you can see all the transformations of an ensouled person (as you describe below). I said, "this is necrophilia." Another student apropos of Debord, said he really hoped they'd do the same for Freddie Mercury - "I heard he was a great performer, and I want to see him" - now, this is where it got exciting. I thought maybe it doesn't matter whether it's the real performer or not - it's just a prefab rock show - but that reinforced, to me, how dangerous people can be, when they're still people. And more than anything, this is the issue with Tupac - he was utterly unpredictable, and has now been transformed into "a completely original, exclusive performance only for Coachella and that audience." In other words, Tupac has become a tool of our fascination, and we feel unencumbered to manipulate it. Makaveli.

And Marx, in the 18th Brumaire...

The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.

3. I must begin with a guiding Heraclitan principle: "Nature loves to hide." - A reason for poetry, this obstinate refusal of disclosure...this playful reticence...one of the myriad ways that poetry attempts to make language 'non-human'...and fount of my distrust of the figure of the poet as 'public narcissist'...

Which is all to say, I think of this resurrection as a profound violation - I thought about the chameleonic vitalities and contradictions of Pac you describe, and to have them reduced to a static light borne puppet...we find in the world its new Golem...but this one is a ghost, too...

I think this arc of a human life which you describe is precisely why this is so sad - he becomes a fixed image, and still a deeper and more illusory image because he can't have the potential breaking out or through that might come to the rest of us, if we are real people...would they do this to Kurt Cobain, too?

4. Yes, this is it exactly - the collage happens in space and time, and in our preconceptions about what will happen in the moments before Pac appears - it strikes me, too, that this is a kind of séance in public, a kind of spirit photography, Kirlian aura and all.

Finally, it occurs to me that one is no longer safe in death, to have their epitaph be their final words...

Saturday, April 21, 2012 11:06 AM

Jared,

First of all, let's talk about this whole Helen thing. I'm still hung up on the idea of Tupac as Helen (though moonlighting as Cassandra). If Helen is the face that launched a thousand ships, could Tupac be the bullet-riddled body that launched a thousand beef tracks and sold ten million records? The '94 Times Square recording studio shooting was what really set things off in terms of West Coast (Troy) / East Coast (Greece) beef. Or should that be the other way around, where Greek equals West and Troy equals East? I'm tempted to figure Pac as Achilles, but Biggie Achilles is pretty good too. In this further scenario we've got a mash-up of Homer and Goethe, where Faust is resurrecting Helen for entertainment, but that entertainment spills over into destructive fascination.

Entertainment becomes a sort of mortal entrainment, where the dead spectacle becomes entrained with the living spectator, thus causing him/us to fall into a dead thrall. I'm really interested in how thrall can leave the viewer without a self to perform, as if the staged performance robs some vital act of performance in the viewer, who becomes woodenly entranced. I don't know, lots of nascent cognition here. Please help in any way you can.

I'm attaching a famous photo of resilient/defiant/recalcitrant Pac after the New York shooting.



Second, "The reality of time has been replaced by the *publicity* of time." Holy shit. I think it would be really interesting for someone, maybe Brandon Brown given his explorations of temporality in the work of Jay-Z, to explore how time dilates or contracts in relation to both money and death. And by that I guess I mean potlatch loads of money and paranoia of impending death *and* especially where these two vectors cross (or do they always cross in rap?) with the potential millions generated by the death of a great artist. Was Tupac "publicizing" his death when he presaged it? Is this his Faustian downfall, knowing that this alchemical mix of death, titrating it from its future imminence, would bring him the wealth he desired? When he asks, "How long will they mourn me?" is Tupac really asking, "How long will they buy me?" Fuck, I just listened to that song again and realized that it

features none other than Nate Dogg, the other dead (though not martyred) Death Row figure rumored to be on holographic deck.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HkmUDOB4GM&feature=related>

And can we talk about temporality when your rap label is called Death Row!!! The simultaneous dilation/contraction of time that comes from death's proximity? I'm losing my shit here. Does death's apprehension drive temporal perception toward the snail (four perception moments a second) or toward the fighting fish (50 perception moments a second) or both at once? Add to this question the underpinning of cinema, which is the reason we know humans experience time at 24 perception moments a second. How many fixed, dead planes flash every second to create the Tupac hologram?

OK, I just did some research and found out it wasn't technically a hologram at all, but a triple video projection on a piece of foiled glass, which means the cinema question stands, but stands (and slides back and forth across the stage) tripled. Triple-beam dreams. The illusion is actually called Pepper's Ghost.

I'm totally neuro-exhausted and my coffee is cold and I need to shower and make salsa for a tamale party on a farm. So can we just start with those two questions/rants/pleas for help this time? I just know I'm going to bore the hell out of people at this party today, extending this Helen/Tupac analogy way too far in the furrows of dead corn.

Do it to me JStan.

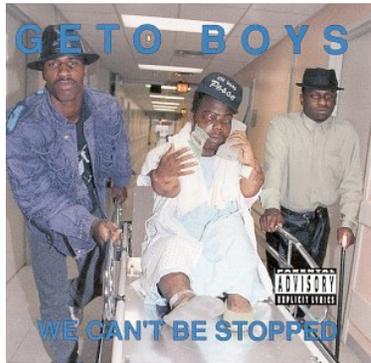
For Now,
Chris

Sunday, April 22, 2012 6:52 PM

OK, I just got hit by a car while riding my bike through a Great Basin Valley, today - I'm fine, though the driver removed his right rearview mirror with my calf - he was going about 50, and the impact pulled my foot from my cycling shoe - two salient details: it was a blue ford GT, and the driver was wearing a T-Shirt that said "Who Needs a Beer" with two fingers pointing toward the wearer's head. I told they guy he had to drive me back to Reno, and there's a novella in the monologue that ensued on the ride home, but it'll have to wait...

1. Your extension of Helen is WILDERING ME BY FORCE - in your reformulation, the character I really need, and the one we increasingly know from The War, is Ajax - who is the scarred, damaged one, driven to madness as a terrible act of revenge? Who lets down their guard? Tupac obviously knew he was gonna die, but his defiance is so strange to me...so rebellious, it is true - it reinforces my hatred of this hologram or whatever - would

they make hologram of his injured self, like that? Also, basically impossible not to see Bushwick Bill in this gesture...that horrific cover of *We Can't Be Stopped*...



But really, I must insist on the Faustian situation, for its super freaky relationship between resurrection, illusion and the overweening technician - none other than James Cameron - it's not just about an entertainment, though - it's the collusion of power and image and naive desires - the Emperor wants Helen, Faust gives him Helen - and it gets even weirder when Faust goes off and marries Helen, in which she's quickly transubstantiated from her Helen-Masque to an Arcadian fiancé - I mean things get to a space-time level of freakiness, and she ends up disappearing again, in a poof of smoke.

The point is, this invocation of the beloved (who else is this lost man to us?) in the service of a trite, faux-indie music festival, is all the more exhausting because it is an entertainment - and Pac's agency, in the scene is eliminated - am I trying too hard to make 2pac a person instead of a thing?

2. The calyx of death's bounty...

So, I think it is fundamentally different to think and write your own death - the only control one has over it (as I learned getting hit by that car) - than it is to have your image, ghost-like, invoked for \$\$\$\$. I just can't get over the fact that Snoop responds to the Pacogram when it talks to him. My disgust is about the context, the scene - if this had been a séance, some invocation of a lost person for the purposes of earthly healing, than the context of Snoop's speaking would be completely different - it would have a meaning, a resonance, some kind of fulfillment.

But here, in this case, death is so trivialized in this utterly masculine display that the display becomes intolerant of Death, who grins and grins with the grin forged by a plastic surgeon, the defiance - for it shows the utter hollowness of such defiance - it is nothing, a sung nothingness, but a nothing anyway.

Two other things to add: Is golem too strong a word for this thing? Probably so, but one thing comes to mind: the Golem is made of mud, and the Hebrew word for truth is emblazoned upon its forehead. To "kill" it, you erase one letter, and the word becomes

"death" - perhaps on the road, 2Pac's tattoo will say "Hug-Life" when they want to retire the hologram, or rent it out for kids' parties.

The other thing is this nascent Right to Oblivion that is emerging in European Law - it basically suggests that you have the right to have compromising pictures of yourself expunged from the internet etc. etc. - that you have a right to erase an earlier incarnation of yourself.

It seems to me that this closely maps onto this situation - your Death Row contract might read "I want to stay dead."

But, I don't think apprehension of death is the only motivator of a thing. I don't know.

Though money is the motivator of this thing...

I am not a materialist, though. I am an animist, so this thing is profoundly sick to me - it has no soul, which is why I think of the Golem - while, in my universe, even retired fighter jets have some ensoulment, cankered though it is - and if the hologram had one, it would be an expression of some other element of its manufacture - Short Circuit, anyone?

This shit makes one feel so out of tune, so, exposed, I guess - I don't know anything about people, and take no small comfort in the fact that rocks and animals do not speak our language. This hologram is another instance of just not understanding why anyone would do such a thing - this again is my interest in Faust - his motives are so manifestly other from my own, and the fact that they are figured in art gives me the smallest glimpse into understanding how thoroughly strange humans are, their strangenesses exposed in the family we make of language - I must aspire to be a "scientist of the strange" as A. Joron puts it, though that path is a path of grief.

The Human World = grief

The Mineral World = permanence

The Animal World = ensoulment by other means

The Plant World = alliances shot through with risk

Their motivations...not even K. Burke helps me with this...

OK, child of the stubblefield, find the light-borne way in the short thicket.

Thursday, April 26, 2012 1:31 PM

Jared,

Holy bicycles! I love the film now reeling in my head of you jumping in the GT and telling Needs a Beer what's what, but then something else occurring where you guys bond over Dio and then you solve his damaged love life. A drunk and disoriented undergrad stopped

by our house at 3am the other night and I gave him directions, but what he really wanted was romantic advice, so I gave him that too. Not a novella, but still a kind of amazing human interaction bred from accident.

But now, blowing all that back into the recesses is the picture of Bushwick Bill.

Oaughhhw. That picture is just so magnetic. The looks on the faces of Scarface and Willie D. That fucking CELL PHONE. The damaged soldier whose only recourse is publicity. Here's the wikipedia description:

The album cover is a graphic picture of member [Bushwick Bill](#) in the hospital. Bill had shot himself in the eye after his girlfriend refused to shoot him during an altercation.^[3] The other two Geto Boys members and the group's management team yanked Bill out of the hospital room in order to take the picture, removing Bill's eyepatch and IV in the process. Bill has expressed regret over the album cover, saying "Its still hurts me to look at that cover because that was a personal thing I went through... I still feel the pain from the fact I've got a bullet in my brain... I think it was pretty wrong to do it, even though I went along with the program at first."^[1]

I still feel pain from the fact
I've got a bullet in my brain.

And what about Pac, then? He's still got a bullet "I" on hologram? There's this essay Charles Bernstein wrote years ago, relating Creeley's one functional eye to his notion of selfhood, of I-ness. Bushwick shoots his eye out and Pac turns his I into a bullet. Not to mention that the I in THUGLIFE stands for infant. This man whose revolutionary mother decayed into a crack addict while he was a boy. Wounded soldiers with no recourse but publicity.

But you're right, Pac is nothing if not the beloved. Growing up in Colorado, no one listened to Biggie or Wu-Tang. It was all NWA and Pac. And peoples loved Pac. He spoke to them/us. He was raw and war-like, but he also wrote Dear Mamma and Brenda's Got a Baby. People needed Pac. And perhaps it's that need, like the need for Helen, that generated the force possible to create such a travesty. Like Pet Cemetery. You only do something that fucked up if you're driven by desperate need. Or that Buffy episode where Dawn tries to resurrect their mother, only she turns back at the last possible second, knowing that it would be an abomination. But you're partially commenting on the fact that Hologram Pac isn't abominable enough. It should be wounded, damaged, convulsive, decayed, demonic. Like need over nature equals abomination. And don't think I haven't been thinking of Cameron and Avatar here. The destroyed soldier given a brand new, light-pulsing, impervious body.

Mary and I are shortly bound for the Twin Cities on a jaunt, so I'm sending you this, even though it's only half a response, just in case you feel like following up this line of inquiry over the weekend. Either way, I'll get to the Golem, etc. Monday or Tuesday. Thanks again for this, both as a manner of thinking together and as untangling/retangling of such a twisted apparition.

In Other Words,
Chris

Tuesday, May 1, 2012 6:06 PM

Alright, back from MN, which was a blast. Amanda killed it and then free ice cream was served at the Soap Factory. That really happened. Now for response part II.

I also found myself thinking about Snoop's position in all this. I mean, how does that *feel*, to perform in tandem with the ghost of a person you knew intimately. Does the context actually make it easier for him? Does his original experience of rapping beside Pac for money in front of strangers, which necessitates its own form of compartmentalization, make it easier for him to negate the "reality" of this new situation or let it's irreality blend seamlessly with what's already unreal? He must feel some disgust, right? Some deep disloyalty? Like, ontological disloyalty?

It reminds me of Houdini and his mother. Thanks to Jess Mynes, I read this amazing book on/by Houdini. It had a rad green cover. Much of its content related to Houdini's fixation with Spiritualism and his earnest desire to contact his dead mother. Apparently, he often spent his non-performing hours debunking fake mediums. He wanted so badly for one of them to be real that he hopped from séance to séance, under the cover of disguise, uncovering all the tricks and deception and secretly hoping to find the real deal, which he never did. Snoop doesn't seem like he's acting from a place of desperation and Afeni Shakur's wholly positive comments about the Pacgram indicate something similarly permissive. It's like Houdini in reverse, but with total complicity. Why aren't people protecting the real Pac's legacy? Why this radical unfaithfulness? Please, PLEASE, let HUGHLIFE never surface. UGGHLIFE. Such dissolution of the spirit, such dispiriting, backward alchemy!

All these questions are likely not lighting the way, but they're all I got right now. Hit me up once more and we'll call it a conversation. Congrats on the commute's commuted sentence! Watch out for fast cars and spiritual abomination!

In Other Words,
Chris

Tuesday, May 1, 2012 6:06 PM

Yeah, ontological disloyalty - the only genuine emotion that coulda come out of this whole situation. I feel it - last weekend we were going through a dead friends' record collection. His Guy Clark Records, his Johnny "Guitar" Watson records, his Richard Pryor things.

I wonder why memory is so bad - why not just remember Pac? Man, I was bummin' real hard on the idea of this hologram last time we talked, but something happened in the last few weeks - maybe we all got embalmed and signed a user agreement saying "no bad days"

Don't you just feel like a praying cowboy window decal?

I for one am all confused, all over again by this mess of ideas - deep in the middle of Don Byrd right now, I come across this: "Theory is ruled by the law of noncontradiction; poetics is ruled by the law of non-self-exploitation. In theory, self-reference runs in a vicious circle; it is destructive and self-destructive, death-seeking. In poetics, self-reference is the mechanism of a sustainable cycle of life."

If we are to make some theory of memory out of this hologram, something consistent, we might have to assume that memorializing, and the emotion of feeling the passing of something, were inherently a negative feeling, or at least something to avoid, as long as the coal-firing will allow it. But if we are to try and understand our sense of this resurrection in terms of our own longing for rest in all the viscous speed of non-living, then that longing itself is the only thing left.

I had some free gelato pops at the Tour of California bike race yesterday. Why resist death, when there are salted caramel gelato pops?

Jared
