

Golden Age Problems - script for final night 28 June

[After Plastique Fantastique performance]

Host:

[standing on stage, gets audience attention]

Do you ever wonder how the world came to be how it is? Why it is how it is?

Do you ever wonder how our solar system came to be? Why it is the way it is?

What about our galaxy? Why does it exist? The universe: what is it!?

All this stuff around us – this matter and energy that we swim in...

What is going on here?

[Ben starts low bed track]

Tonight we welcome you to a history of the world, the story of the solar system, our galaxy, the universe that serves as a realm for all our desires and fates.

This is a history of our dreams of the cosmos. How we look at it and how it looks back at us. Where do we fit into it all?

[Ben cut bed track drone abruptly]

Of course it's a big subject, I know. That's why I'm going to try and tell you that story through some other stories – specifically through some works that other people have made for us here. After all, what's the universe but oneself with other people and all of us surrounded by space and stuff and things and the like!

My central metaphor is going to be a human being's life span. In fact, I think I really should just jettison this entire history of the universe idea. I don't really have a clue about that at all, it just seemed like a good, impressive thing to say at the time. All I really know is my own life, and then I can compare it to the experience of others; people who I speak with and through books and movies where people communicate about living and things... I suppose in a way the whole universe idea came from that... anyhow, I want to start by telling you about this thing over here

[motions to the baby mobile then catches self, corrects self]

But first I want to show you a picture...

[motions towards photograph]

If you were here last week when we opened the show and you hung around long enough, you would've seen me, almost exactly like I am now, telling you about this picture. I'll recap what I told you then:

I related the following facts: This is a photograph of the Royalty Theatre in Newcastle. It's there for interested members of the public to perform theatrical productions. I think that this photograph acts like a fulcrum for so many of the objects and ideas here. Behind its dour and grey facade lives drama and entertainment, laughter and crying, destinies unfolding and redemption awaiting.

Everything that you see here around you... **[sweeps arm around the room]** ... you need to think of them as sketches. They're ideas that are still developing, ideas that are decompressing, as if you're opening a ZIP file and can see the progress, that all of those numbers mean something to

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you, make you think of something, make you feel something. That you're downloading a film you're really looking forward to watching – *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* or a Mike Leigh film or something – and as you are watching the download progress, you're feeling all the things that you would when you watched it, but sped up to 700 kilobytes a second or something like that.

But I won't get into the mathematics of it all and bore you with numbers and ratios. The important thing is that you know there are different intensities of feeling what we see and hear in this space. Some of those feelings are caused by things we already know, some of those causes might be a surprise.

But let's go for a wander together, shall we?

[walks through to giant mobile and stands next to it and poses]

Now, last week I told you some basic facts about this thing dangling here. I admitted that it is a pretty odd thing that we've made. I'm not too certain what half of this stuff is or what it all means. But what I do know is that the idea started with a hanging mobile for a baby's crib. I know that because the people who made this thing told me so. They said that the facts are this: Babies can't focus their eyes properly until after a few months. To help them grow their brains, well intentioned parents dangle all of these objects and things over their newborn children. In fact I hinted that maybe this could be understood as a first iteration of parental ambition for their children. Something that could either grow into a healthy aptitude for positive thinking and achievement, or maybe grow into some twisted dark comedy about pushy parents and their children with frayed nerves.

[turns to mobile and touches an object while looking pensively]

I suppose that the parents think it distracts the kids at the same time as keeping them focused on learning to see and comprehend.

[turns attention back to audience]

I said it last week and I'll say it again: this is one of the first ways that we entertain and train our newborns.

I still have memories of when I was a very young child but not from when I was a baby. I remember sitting on my father's shoulders as he walked me down to a beach near where I grew up. It was warm and sunny with a summer breeze blowing in from the sea. But I know that I must have had the skill of speech by then as I can vaguely remember a childish discussion with him about a nearby dog or something like that. I must have been three or four, but I remember nothing from an earlier time than that. From what I can tell not many people at all can remember anything from the first couple years of life and when I hear anyone say they do, I'm pretty doubtful to tell you the truth. That gets into a realm of hallucinations and fantasies and I think it's more of a case that people want to be able to remember that time because they fear that helplessness of being a newborn and want to remember so as to lock it away forever. A dangerous thing to remember, or at least to say that you remember.

[Looks up at the mobile]

Anyhow, apparently we aren't really able to focus our eyes for months after we're born. We're so vulnerable then and everything is a big, noisy and messy blur. It must be so confusing! But these things here are designed to help us to start seeing and understanding the world around us as we peer up helplessly from our little cots. Sometimes I worry that this entire model of experience and cognitive growth remains in us; that even into our old age when our bodies go creaky and our minds lose focus, we are still trying to focus on bigger and bigger objects that are always just

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outside of our perceptive range, just outside of our being able to know. That mesh of the world is like a fog seen coming out through a thick wall of trees.

[sighs heavily and looks intently up into the air into middle space. Looks back down again slowly]

Last week I was a bit nervous about presenting a show that wasn't really happening until this week, right now. I wonder, for those of you who were here, did you sense my panic? God, it was pretty awful but it ended well I think. Well, at least it'll end... Dear God, you can be sure of that. **[smiles]**

[shifts posture as if straightening up, becoming more presenter like]

But anyhow, on the subject of God: I don't believe in him or her or it. In terms of the history of the universe, that concept was short lived, but a blink of an eye. But in terms of the human narrative time scale, it's a fairly persistent idea. Once, I believed in God I suppose. I was told I had to believe in God by my parents – the very same people who no doubt must have hung a mobile above my cradle – so I believed in him. But after a while I decided to stop believing. But that said, the goddamn guilt – the heaven or hell decisions – those were a type of twisted miracle, that whole guilt trip lasted for so long!

But now the guilty feelings gone, no thanks to god, but thanks to... well, thanks to... **[looks a bit confused]** maybe myself? I can't think of one person or moment to thank for that if I'm perfectly honest. I have to say that the moral implications were heavy. Not to say that I thought that a lack of some supreme omniscient power would plunge me into an animalistic, violent rage or something, but that I worried about the concept in itself: was it true? I've stopped believing in God and though I feel no different at core, will I suddenly start remorselessly murdering people for their small change or something? Well, thankfully, that didn't happen. But it made me nervous. Those stories get internalised at a young age and are so very hard to expunge.

But now I've left that part of my life behind...

[wandering over to Risk Assessment Image Kiosk] There's certain words and phrases that I keep repeating as if I can't help myself. One of those words you've heard an awful lot of tonight, I'm afraid. It's not the most positive word. That word I'm saying is: "BUT", as in not a behind, bum or ass, but the but that introduces an idea that contrasts with the idea that came before it.

[host is in front of Risk Assessment Image Kiosk]

But now I want to be a bit more positive. I'll start this whole new stage of our life story by using the word "AND", it's a conjunction like "BUT" yet more fun, playful and I think forward looking and progressive.

[He looks up at Risk Assessment Image Kiosk and waves a hand over it]

This is a mind map of some of the things that have been on my mind recently. Needless to say it's been a difficult past year for me. I'm okay now... really. I suppose that I've been okay throughout the entire time, I've just had to deal with other people's problems affecting my life. It turns out that a friend of mine who I've known from the time I was a newborn has gone completely insane. I suppose that going completely insane is just part of life. And, to be positive about the whole thing, I suppose that I've learnt that important fact – That other people are completely insane.

[looks back up at Risk Assessment Image Kiosk and turns towards the audience with a smile]

And the most fascinating thing that I recently learned about my friend is that they've been completely insane from at least when they were two years old... now that is fascinating! To think

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that when we were growing up together, going to the beach, studying for tests, learning to drink and smoke, that my friend was actually completely insane throughout the entire process. It boggles the mind. They're fully medicated now.

Anyhow, that's a personal tangent and I don't want to completely hijack the script to tell you too much about myself. I only wanted to demonstrate just how personal this segment is to me to show how much it can mean to someone.

[regains a more host-like posture]

We here at Auto Italia South East in the North got together and constructed this image kiosk last week. We'd been speaking about it quite a bit as a way of assessing some of the material that we were wondering about, the ideas that were feeding into the show. And in the end, we decided that it would be a great idea to collectively create this wall of ideas.

All at the same time we collectively noticed that cop shows and the like often have characters who are obsessive criminals or cops, chasing their prey. They always need a mind map. I also see these as mood boards. The mood being one of neurotic obsessiveness! But, anyhow, this piece is a repository for all of the ideas and dynamics that have gone into previous works made with Auto Italia, less artefacts and more fragments of feelings and research, thoughts and discussions and the like. If you recognise some of the fragments then that's great, it's like some photo album filled with nice memories hopefully. If not, then I don't really know what to say. It could be that it's a bit alienating? I'm not too sure, but I hope that this preamble has helped a bit.

For a while we called it "Crazy Wall" but I think, especially in light of what I just told you about my friend, that could be derogatory. So we renamed it "Risk Assessment Kiosk" – "RAK" for short. We might have to rename it again. But as I told those of you who joined us last week, the entire show is in a constant state of reassessment and renaming.

[shifts attention from wall, looking through it]

And now let me draw your attention to another image. What is it that we see when we look through the transparent plastic walls of our "Risk Assessment Kiosk"? Why, it's a poster of a pig snout hovering above a beautiful golden field, much like an object that our blurry baby eyes might have seen dangled before us by our proud and ambitious parents.

It's a recreation of a fragment that is related to a film that was made as part of a larger performance project. That might sound a bit confusing but bear with me. This isn't just a recreation of some ordinary pig snout. It is a what the artist has called a "paranormal pig snout" If you were with us last week, you might remember that I asked whether this was fact or fiction? Well, what the artist says about this is intriguing. To paraphrase: "Yeah, tuning into animals!

That's a big, big part, because there's a lot of stuff about animals **[looks askance]** says the artist about her film... **[hand signals double quotes]** "because I was in that headspace, every time I worked or edited anything to do with the pig scene, I had this thing on my wall that would squeak. I had a paranormal pig... It was squeaking, paranormally... Now, it's completely quiet, but when I was working, it made really loud squeaking sounds. My friends thought I was crazy because every time they came, it was quiet, but I've recorded it. And then later some friends came, and actually heard it too... that's what I mean by tuning into this unconscious, so I was in that zone for some time..."

[regains posture]

The Zone. That's where we are, on the stage and in the frame, feeling the zone and its emanations.

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[walks towards the back of the space where the time tunnel video is]

And now I want to end with something that in a way echoes the photograph of the theatre that we started with. It's a video that I found online years ago compiling numerous sequences of time and warp speed space travel. When I said that you might be able to feel all the things that you would when you watched a film or TV or read a book, but that it could be sped up to 700 kilobytes a second or some increased intensity and speed. In my mind this video here is superimposed over the first picture of a theatre, that they are the same thing, travelling towards the same place, or at least exist in the same zone as one another. They may not look it, but in my mind they exist together. Maybe all these things could be cross dissolved together, everything seen unfolding at once, compressing and decompressing, fluctuating and shimmering.

I know that all of this talk is getting pretty abstract. But now we've come to an end, the edge of one zone and ready to step into another. That's even more abstract and I think that maybe all this talking I'm doing isn't really working anymore and just isn't good enough to describe what I'm trying to get at. I think that we need to try something else, another form of inducing space travel.

[cue music: picks up autoharp, song performance]

[When song ends, host keeps strumming chord on autoharp, this allows Benedict to fade in drone as signal of the start of his set]

I'd like to thank you for joining us this week. To finish off let's cross dissolve this song into another and use it to enter another zone...

[Benedict set]