

A Little History of the Mailer

(for John Goodwin at Guelph goodwater)

A mailer being the 11" x 17" folded, mini-posters (similar to the one you are reading right now) that John sends out for his productions at goodwater. He first asked me to make one in 2007 for the exhibition of my video *Fifty Minutes*. Jim Welling had FedExed him some folded photos as proofs, and since he liked the way they looked, he suggested I make some photographs to size, fold them up and mail them to him. I set up a camera in front of the wide screen TV and shot some frames from *Fifty Minutes*, made fourteen pictures, folded, stamped and addressed them to John at goodwater. He picked one, a close-up of my eyes bleached out by sunlight, and reproduced it exactly as it was with address, folds and cancelled stamps. This was my first piece of mail art, the most fun I'd had in a long time. A few years later talking to Wayne Baerwaldt (who takes notes in a tiny, spiral notebook molded to the shape of his hand, the kind with pages that flip over the top, unpretentious, bought in any North American drugstore) about whether analogue photography is more anal than digital, I thought yes, because analogue always produces an object; digital can remain forever immaterial, digits on a memory stick. Analogue often involves paper, which, according to some psychoanalyst is inherently anal in its production, the grinding and packing of pulp into solid form etc. Printing, and ink smeared on paper recalls behaviors from the anal stage, according to this same shrink I read nearly twenty years ago. Digital is profligate and gratis. It invites sharing and can be given away a million times over; analogue is the precious object now -- a B&W gelatin silver print moves closer and closer to the auratic glow of a Daguerreotype (conversely, I was just told that the price of silver on the world market has dropped because of its diminished use in photographic production). But a folded, stamped and mailed photograph has a special freedom to it, it is a step away from the white-gloves approach to handling photographs. And it has an epistolary attribute, connecting in some small way this folded, mailed object to writing. In her book *Écrire*, Marguerite Duras says: "Writing is the attempt to know what one would write if one were to write." which reminded me of Gary Winogrand's famous comment: "I photograph to see what something will look like photographed." Both statements attest to that curiosity/anxiety/drive to figure an image, capture a thought, like what you are reading now, written at John's suggestion, a short recapitulation, with one or two detours, a brief treatise on the mailer for a mailer.

New York, January 2010

26 September

The artist K recommends Regulin as a laxative, a powdered seaweed that swells up in the bowels, shakes them up, is thus effective mechanically in contrast to the unhealthy chemical effect of other laxatives which just tear through the excrement and leave it hanging on the walls of the bowels.

30 September

All evening he spoke often and – in my opinion – entirely seriously about my constipation and his.... When we had already said good-bye he called to me again from the distance: 'Regulin!'

2 October

I fall asleep soundly, but after an hour I wake up, as though I had laid my head in the wrong hole... I believe this sleeplessness comes only because I write.³

"I've read Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and Michelet's *The Witch*. But I don't have books anymore. I've got rid of them, and of any idea of having them. It's all over. With those two books it was if I'd opened up my own body and mind and were reading an account of my own life in the Middle Ages, in the forests, and in the factories of the nineteenth century. But I couldn't find one man who'd read the Woolf book. We're cut off from one another, as MD says in her novels."¹

"For fifteen years I threw my manuscripts away as soon as the books came out. If I ask myself why, I think it was to wipe out the crime, to make it seem less important in my own eyes. It was so that I could 'pass' better in my own circle; to tone down the indecency of writing, if you were a woman, about forty years ago. [...] It was total destruction. [...] I can remember the days that followed the burnings. Everything became neat and virginal again. The house seemed lighter, the tables were free again – smooth and empty and without a trace."²

My Necropolis

Moyra Davey

February 12 - March 20, 2010
Opening: February 12, 8pm



A GUELPH GOODWATER PROJECT
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Friday and Saturday, 1pm to 5pm, or by appointment

¹Marguerite Duras, *Practicalities*, translated by Linda Coverdale (p.46)
²Ibid (p.54) ³Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1923*

Edition of 1000, folded, with 25 copies reserved for a special signed, numbered edition which includes a folded photograph.