

## This Is and Is Not a Pipe

*The error of our eye directs our mind.*— William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, Act V, scene ii, line 112.

There is a moment in Shakespeare's re-telling of the Trojan War that is about an entirely different kind of war. Troilus' beloved, Cressida, has just been handed over to the Greeks in exchange for the release of a Trojan hostage. The lovers pledge truth, exchange tokens and part. But sooner than he imagined, Troilus is made to watch, secretly, the spectacle of Cressida making what looks like a tryst with her Greek seducer in the enemy camps. She lets this man have, as a pledge, the sleeve that Troilus had given her as a parting gift. Troilus' horror expresses itself as a contradiction: *This is and is not Cressid*.

The war here is between the eye and the heart - what the eye is made to look at and what the heart refuses to accept as true. And because we, in the theatre, are looking at an actor playing a man looking at an actor playing a woman being false, the language of vision gets entangled with the language of treachery and betrayal in a labyrinth of lies. This confusion, at once painful and thrilling, becomes the stuff of Shakespeare's art. The woman that Troilus is looking at is, and is not, Cressida because she does not seem to be the woman that he knows through his love. She is somebody else because she seems to be making love to somebody else. The woman that we, the audience, are looking at is Cressida because we have willingly entered the make-believe of theatre. But we also know that she is an actor and therefore cannot be Cressida. Yet we respond to the truth of Troilus' horror, of Cressida's changefulness. So, the mystery of vision, the slipperiness of belief and the tragicomedy of love become inseparable.

Seeing and believing share the same root – Latin *videre* (to see) – in the words, *vision* and *evidence*. Knowledge and faith are nervously joined to the evidence of the senses, especially the sense of sight, which stands in, as it were, for the other senses. Hence, the importance of 'witnessing' history, a miracle, a sacrament, or a crime. I see it, therefore it is real, and to be real is also to be true. Science, religion, law, art and love: each has to deal with this problem in its own way – the problem of trust, the problem of betrayal. So, the eye's relationship with the mind keeps swinging between certainty and doubt, comfort and despair.

Photography is the most treacherous of truth-tellers, and music the least so. A photograph is always yoked to something out there, a reality that is independent of the apparatus and medium that capture it. A piece of music is made out of air and feelings; it promises no objectivity. Yet, when we take unthinking comfort in photography's documenting of the real, we tend to forget its more sinister relationship with the unreal. The reassuringly objective could become the treacherously subjective in photographs, and this is the pleasure as well as the menace of photography, whose archives could be as full of fiction as of truth.

My favourite portrait of myself is a photograph that makes me look inscrutable and profound, as if taken exactly when I was seeing into the life of things. But all that I was doing then was trying to hold myself still at the tilt in which the photographer wanted my head in relation to the rest of my body. I remember my mind being quite blank during those precarious and uncomfortable moments. So, that portrait is at once perfectly fake and

perfectly true, making a face that was never there, but a face that is now part of the person I have become.