

A SPACE ON STAGE - The Dinner Party



Nicolas Party, *Still Life with a blue tea pot*, oil on wood board, 2008

CHARACTERS:
HENRY (teapot 1)
MATTHEW (teapot 2)
PETER (sausage)
NADINE (fruit - undefined)
NICOLAS (table)

ACT I
Scene I

Through the windows of a ground floor apartment four characters are arranged around a kitchen table. A bright light shines above the orange cloth covered surface. HENRY is stylish and charming; he sits proud in the back left-hand chair with both elbows weightily leaning on the table. MATTHEW leans back on his chair, his relaxed position causing him to be at a distance to the rest of the group displaying an almost detached manner. PETER is tall, willowy with rather effeminate mannerisms; what he lacks in charm he makes up for in an ignorant stubbornness. He too is leaning forward, so much so he could almost be on top of the table. His chair is the only one positioned at the front of the table. NADINE is young, her face soft and rosy with rouged lips and cheeks; a timeless beauty. She sits to the right, positioned outwardly so that she is almost facing away from the others. A still life sits to the left of the window depicting a bourgeois dining table stacked with fruit and lavish silver kitchenware, a knife protrudes, balanced under the corner of a silver platter, it signals a forthcoming disaster. It's early evening. Light is beginning to fall.

NADINE It must be getting late. How long have we been here now?

HENRY Some years I think. What time is it? *(scanning the room for a clock)*

PETER Who's time are you talking about?

I met with Nicolas Party a month ago now when he was keen to tell me of his belief of history's complete relevance for today. A relevance that is forgotten all too easily. So often it is the trap to remember history generationally, Nicolas asked; how can we make any good sausages this way?

MATTHEW *(now leaning forward, springing to attention)* It's true, we must stand beyond history. Don't you think our understanding of art history is too narrow?

Nicolas' painterly practice and constructed worlds are filled with images and procedures that are easily related to art and art history. Celebrating traditional forms of representation, they are a memory of the past of painting and eternal values.

MATTHEW The structure of art itself should indeed be a recognition of memory and language of cultural forms, it should be an organic map of knowledge without the agency of time. *(raising his left hand)* We should abandon this historiographic tradition of understanding time as merely chronological.

PETER But doesn't this denial of historical praxis then take history as a ruin, a field to be excavated and used as if the choices offered and taken were of no consequence? To dismiss the particularities of history in favour of a generalised mythology, does this not leave us to succumb to sentimentality?

HENRY *(shaking his head)* No, no, no, borrowing and rearranging earlier strategies - thinking about discipline in the contemporary world, it is still a self-conscious and critical gesture.

MATTHEW *(eyes on Peter)* Artistic development follows not simply from the act of return to the sources, but from the way of interpretation of those sources. The time of the work is not crucial; it should not be attached to the time of history in general.

NADINE Precisely, it's a demonstration of historical sources yet providing a new, suitably critical framework. This reconciliation and display of juxtapositions primes us to understand the work metaphorically.

Indeed, Nicolas' practice makes use of established conventions. As with the traditions of still life his work has the characteristics of being a never-ending web of representations, visual triggers and playful games. But the works themselves are not at all the same, their viewing experience is very different. Nicolas creates complex environments that combine disorientation and information as both a formal and communicative strategy. Ranging from fast and immediate large-scale dusty charcoal wall drawings and visually jarring pop aesthetic spray-painted murals, to intimate, precise paintings and works on paper to experimental collaboration with peers, Nicolas fully embraces a hybrid practice, mixing forms freely and ignoring established boundaries.

According to rational systems employed when constructing visual narratives in a still life, Nicolas manipulates and controls the works of others alongside his own within tightly curated environments. This activity sees him

take objects, whether they are painted, drawn, or the work of others, to see how he can use them, or better, how he can frame them to create new meaning. Despite adopting classical aspects of exhibition history, the result is not an exhibition but an installation; a play that offers objects a space on stage.

(night falls)

PETER *(reaching above to turn up the light)* Painting has been giving away throughout history some of the territory it carved for itself five centuries ago, if not before. *(now sitting back into his chair he is witness to the challenging faces surrounding him. He tries to save his argument)* I'm not suggesting that this signals that the discipline has ended. What is happening here is painting in the expanded field. It is installation that will save painting.

NADINE You're missing the point. *(Peter looking a little upset at Nadine's disagreement. He had hoped to impress her)* The role of the artist now is never concrete, it moves in one or more dimensions at the same time, shifting from one form of expression to another, not ever just a painter, a curator or a sculptor, the artist is a *producer of meaning*. Perhaps it would be more fortuitous to move past distinctions all together. The defined disciplines carry with them considerable historical baggage. Isn't it time that we move from these preconceptions and entrenched values.

MATTHEW My thoughts exactly. My plea has always been for an extension of the methodological borders of art, in both material and spacial terms. What we need is an organic meaning of totality. Aesthetics alone is a self-sufficient type of human experience.

(a moment of contemplative silence passes)

HENRY Lets have some supper. *(from the kitchen dresser Henry lifts a cheese board excessively laid with luxury cheese, sliced apple and a bunch of dewy ripe grapes)* Would anyone like a glass of wine? *(without waiting for any replies Henry fills each glass)*

(Peter takes this opportunity to pass a flirtatious smile in Nadine's direction, still conscious of her disagreement)

MATTHEW *(continuing from previous dialogue)* And further, we should not consider the past as a relic but as a living tool that we need to grasp in order to create new narratives. It's true that if we forget the past we are condemned to merely repeat it.

PETER But I'm still concerned, is that we have not a nostalgic pastiche of historical consciousness?

NADINE *(her eyes displaying an irritability of his contrariness)* Well, does nostalgia even exist anymore when we can be fed forever by quick access to an indefinitely recyclable past? Perhaps Matthew can see that his aspiration is indeed a truth; history now presents itself in a fragmentary state, an organic map that holds validity and energy.

(Peter leans across the table to reach the cheese-board; he is clumsy and catches the knife lodged underneath with his right hand causing the contents to be propelled across the kitchen. As he scrambles to save the supper the conversation is interrupted and so lost. When Peter returns to his position they discuss their activities of the past week; this consists of sitting at the kitchen table in the same position for what has now been an age)

Parts of this text are not new ideas, they are thoughts and theories borrowed and appropriated from history to provide a *new, suitably critical framework* for the practice of Nicolas Party.

This text includes the thoughts of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, Gustavo Fares, Liam Gillick, Linda Hutcheon, Immanuel Kant, Rosalind Krauss, Robert Storr, Peter Osborne, George Santayana, and Aby Warburg.