

# THREE SYNCHRONICITIES – DIFFERENT VOICES



Synchronicity – meaningful coincidence, where things align or connect without there being any proximate or apparent cause.

A critical technique to open space for different voices – [Link].

## One

In a recent online lecture for Stanford Dan-el Padilla Peralta, a Classics professor at Princeton, told of a conference he was attending in Florida on the subject of Roman slavery (Langford conference on Roman slavery March 2019 Florida State University Tallahassee). He noticed that the restaurant venue for the conference dinner had once been the home of the owner of a slave plantation.

An exhibition at the airport about black intellectuals seemed incongruous, even as it highlighted a history that had been made marginal.

Both experiences made him further reflect on the cultural politics of Classical Studies, the complicity of the discipline in colonialism.

He talked of how self-contained and isolated Classical Studies is as a disciplinary field, even though it deals with such wide-ranging matters regarding continuing interest in the social and cultural history of Greece and Rome. He mentioned that in a sample of 34 journal articles he studied 90% of citation was within a narrow subdiscipline. There is little apparatus, in theory and method, for making interdisciplinary connection. There is little attention to the ways Classical Antiquity is constantly reconstructed in relation to contemporary cultural agendas such as colonial chauvinism and racism; instead, studies of the *reception* of Classical Antiquity are just that and no more, presuming the primacy of the past over how it is handled and received.

He talked of the haunting of the house of Classics, and the possibility of spectral return of those who some would wish to forget.

And as a means of raising such ghosts Dan-el presented another synchronicity, a kind of objective correlative, the words of what might be called a sympathetic avatar, the poem *Areíto Por Todos* by César Sánchez Beras, about displacement and return – [Link].

## Two

Mike Pearson and I are recording a conversation about his performance work (it will appear in a new podcast series *Thinking through things* – [Link]). This week we talked about his production in 2012 of *Coriolanus* for National Theatre Wales/Royal Shakespeare Company [Link].

The performance was staged in an aircraft hangar near Cardiff Wales. Audience mingled with performers. The presence of performers was mediated, repeated, projected through video cameras, mics, screens, headphones as the action moved around the building.

Hybridity. Shakespeare/Brecht. Rome/Cardiff. Shakespeare's London/20th century military aircraft hangar/republican Rome.



Constantly reconfigured, remediated performance (microphones, public address systems, video screens, headphones). Body politic, bodies gathered in assembly. Republic/Res Publica. Wales colonized. United Kingdom? Freedom and agency? The gathering then and now. Voice – whose voice?

A spatiotemporal assemblage. Place/event – site specifics.

Theatre/archaeology – the re-articulation of fragments of the past as real time event – [Link].

### Three

Grant Parker recently shared with me a talk of his – *Reading Vergil from the South*.

## Reading Vergil from the south



Faith XLVII, 'una salus victis nullam sperare salutem'  
'The vanquished have one chance, to hope for nothing.'  
Corner of Fox and Rissik Streets, Johannesburg (2015)

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It is a powerful series of juxtapositions of photographs and artworks in and from South Africa (Paul Weinberg, David Goldblatt, Nandipha Mntambo, Marco Cianfanelli, Faith XLVII) with passages from Vergil. The frictions generate remarkable energies of insight and manifestation – witnessing.

Here is what Grant says:

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said proposed the practice of 'contrapuntal' reading of texts, 'with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts' (1993: 51). My own variant of this

concept will be to juxtapose five Vergilian passages with South African visual artworks. The aim of this comparative venture is to solicit perspectives that make sense of the country's histories via ancient texts from afar. The links thereby suggested are intended to merge horizons of expectations on the part of readers and viewers. In a Latin literature context, the principle is in keeping with Martindale's exposition of hermeneutics in *Redeeming the Text* (1993), which draws on the approach developed by Gadamer and Jauss. In each case I seek to connect Vergil with Southern African soil and the present time.

Topics – displacement, land, trauma, hybridity, pathos.

Hauntology – afterlives. I am here broadening the notion of specter by adding juxtapositions that involve no borrowing yet, on my interpretation, ask to be considered in the same light.



Being removed, Mogopa, South Africa, 1984 © Paul Weinberg

At nos hinc alii sitiētis ibimus Afros,  
pars Scythiam et rapidum cretae ueniemus Oaxen  
et penitus toto diuisos orbe Britannos.  
en umquam patrios longo post tempore finis  
pauperis et tuguri congestum caespite culmen  
post aliquot, mea regna, uidens mirabor aristas?  
impius haec tam culta noualia miles habebit,  
barbarus has segetes.

Vergil, *Eclogues* 1.64-71

And us? Some will go north into drought-stricken Africa,  
others, south, west, or east across the border . . .  
Many years from now, will I ever see my ancestors' land again?  
See again my simple, grass-roofed hut?  
See my little mielie patch, my kingdom?  
No: a settler – some foreigner, some ex-soldier –  
will seize my grazing lands and work my mielie field.

tr. Richard Whitaker