

David Zwirner

Jordan Wolfson: I'm Jordan Wolfson, and I'm a friend to myself.

Jeremy O. Harris: I'm Jeremy O. Harris, and I'm a playwright, yeah.

Lucas Zwirner: From David Zwirner, this is *Dialogues*, a podcast about artists and the way they think.

JW: Yeah, but I always felt that transgression led to transformation. Do you know what I mean? An all-hero tale, go to any Jungian story, there is this point where the hero goes through a sort of transgressive situation to come out renewed. And in a way, we're giving that to the viewer.

JOH: Blackness and brownness are refracted in more exciting ways in the visual art world because there's just been more license for us to be like... You see William Pope.L, and you're like, "Oh, this is the abject blackness that I feel."

LZ: I'm Lucas Zwirner, and every episode features a conversation. We're taking artists, writers, philosophers, designers, and musicians and putting them in conversation with each other to explore what it means to make things today.

This episode's pairing: the artist Jordan Wolfson and the playwright Jeremy O. Harris.

Maybe we just start by hearing a little bit how you, Jeremy, and you, Jordan, how you guys first met, or what the context was. How you saw each other's work. I'm sort of curious how that came about.

JOH: Did we meet online before we met IRL?

JW: No. We met... Okay, I know how we met, was that I was with Hari, Hari Nef, and we were literally walking from that restaurant Lucien to the Bowery Hotel. And we passed by a poster for *Daddy*, and she was like, "This is the play I'm in." And this guy Jeremy said he's a fan of your work. I go, "Really?" And then she says, yeah he said that if he was a contemporary artist, he would've wanted to make *Real Violence*. When I heard that, I was so flattered, and then it just stayed with me. I said, "Wow, that's the kindest thing someone could say." And then I was in New York, and I asked Hari, "Could I come and see the play?" And I went with Linda Norden, and the play *Daddy*, and I thought it was so powerful. And I was so amazed by it. And then for some reason, eight days later, I'm in Los Angeles. I meet you at a party.

JOH: At Chris's house.

JW: At Chris's house, and I'm like, "Oh hey." And then somehow I realized it was you, and then you realized it was me, and then we just snuck back into room and just talked.

JOH: We talked and then we started watching the Michael Jackson documentary.

JW: Yeah, we started watching the Michael Jackson documentary.

JOH: Which is real violence, honestly.

LZ: At the party?

JOH: At the party, yeah, before we went to another party.

JW: We were in this very dark room at the party, and there was this one... one of those photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe of the female bodybuilder.

JOH: And there was this sex swing in the room too.

JW: Yeah.

JOH: Yeah.

JW: And we were sitting on the bed. And then, yeah.

LZ: But my question, the first one, is—if that's how, I mean, assuming that's how something that you did indeed say—what was the reason? I mean, when you think about *Real Violence*, what drew you to the piece? What was it about that, that kind of made you say, "Okay, if I were making visual art, this would be the thing I..." Because that was divisive. That piece at the Whitney was complicated for many people but amazing. And I'm curious what...

JOH: Well, I think that it's so funny, because I feel so naked right now. I'm like, "Oh god, I didn't know she told you that."

But yeah, I think that what it is is I'm very into immersing people inside of discomfort, or at least that's a part of something I'm interested in. And I think that what was exciting to me about the whole experience of *Real Violence* is that, as violent as it was, it was so actively articulating itself as a fiction that you're witnessing and engaging with. And yet it confronted you with the inconceivability of some fictions, right? And I liked how, for some people, it's inconceivable that, you would have to witness this fiction, even though it's a fiction that we see in a lot of different forms in a lot of different places. And I don't know. For me, what makes art exciting are things that

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are have so much rigor in them that you have to pick them apart for days and hours. And the rigor is in all these different forms of labor. So I don't know, I got really excited by that.

LZ: What did you think of Jordan act? I mean, that was one of the things that drew me in is to see... you could have done that piece *Real Violence* with an act, with a sort of obviously violent personalities and someone who really presents that way. But of course, Jordan doesn't really present as a sort of bat-wielding killer.

JOH: No, but he does have sociopathy in his eyes, which I'm into.

LZ: And what about you, Jordan, when you talked about... because we talked about the play, and you were talking about different aspects of it that really moved you. And I'm curious to hear a little bit more about that.

JW: So I wanted to go to the play mostly to support Hari. And I was just curious about Jeremy. And I went to the play, and if I may say so myself, if I was a playwright, this is what I would want to be doing. And I thought, "Oh my god, genius." I just thought, "So brilliant." And there was formal broad strokes, texture. It was this use of pop that I really felt like I related to, as like pop as a gesture, pop as an abstraction, pop as a distortion—where you're actually taking something that's made and then you're putting it there and it creates a distortion around it because of its use. By using... the kind of colloquial use within the theater format of a piece of music, for example, Rihanna or George Michael, creates a kind of vacuum of a kind of distortion for me, which had a completely fresh gestalt. And it was just terrific.

And I saw also, in Jeremy's work, someone really dealing with form and composition in terms of chronology, which is something that's very, very close to me as well. So one of the things, if you haven't seen *Daddy*, so basically, there's this whole dream sequence, almost like a nightmare sequence, in the play. And it's kind of like, as Jeremy was talking about *Real Violence*, it's incredibly uncomfortable for potentially like thirty-five minutes—[particularly in that section where the character completely becomes introspective. And in many ways, it's the most unpleasant, incongruous part of the play. But there's no way the play could have worked without it.

And it was almost as if you were driving down a highway. The road was smooth, the road is perfect. But then in order to get where you want to go to the other highway, you have to take this treacherous

dirt road, bumpy path, to get back to the other road. And that's how I felt about it when I saw it, and I just appreciated that so much. I appreciated Jeremy's rigor.

And then when I met him, I was... if you meet Jeremy, you're totally dazzled by this man. He's so wonderful. So I got really, really excited about the whole thing. And I just feel like with everything—all this virtue signaling and politically correct stuff—that I just felt I just wanted to see culture. I want to see the world, and I want it to be uncensored. And I want to be free to comment on it and know that the gallery space, or for you the theater space, is a safe space to express ideas. And they're not actual actions against people blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I just felt with Jeremy, I was like, "Oh my god, a kindred spirit." This is what we're supposed to be doing. We're not supposed to be helping someone make a moral message that reinstates their value fears.

JOH: Yeah, and a value system that is already so codified that it's why would... We don't learn something if it's already codified, right? So why engage with it? There's, I don't want to name many things. But there are a lot of things that I'm just like, "Norman Lear said this better in '67," you know what I mean? Why are we still reifying something that's already there and better and more transgressive? And I think that it's also funny, I love that you talked about pop in myself, because I think what I like a lot about your work is that there's such a sense of play, that there's never a feeling that the person making this is actually a sadist, which I think is something that... or actually someone who's so in love with their own privilege that they're just provoking for provocation's sake.

There seems to be a real joy inside of what's happening, even when it's dark or... even titling *Real Violence Real Violence*, when it's a VR film. There's already an inlaid joke there, right? That you're inviting people to laugh, or inviting people to move differently with this piece. And if you had called it, if you'd named it after the prayer, right? If you had named it after the prayer, then it would have been this sort of deeply dark, I think, a more dark thing. There would have been no play there.

JW: And the prayer was so weird that I did that. But I really remember trying to record it myself, and trying to do without it. And I was like, "Without it, it's just too dry." But then I had... Basically the idea for the prayer was that it cuts out in the middle. And by cutting out in the middle, the message—the formal message of cutting in the middle—it's like it's not about the prayer, and the prayer is not important.

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That the prayer was a formal device. That was it. And then the thing flips and flips and flips, but it's similar to the structure of *Daddy* that you had to get through something to get somewhere else. And I think a lot of artists aren't willing to take that risk because they don't have enough confidence in their viewer. And I think that's why I feel connected to Jeremy. I hope obviously you feel the same way.

JOH: One hundred percent. It's actually... I'm on this really intense Norman Lear kick right now. Because they did that recent live thing, and then my grandpa died a week after that. And my grandpa's such a Archie Bunker, sort of George Jefferson kind of character, that I was like, "Oh, let me rewatch this show and see what's going on." The rigor of his politic at that time, and the unabashed fearlessness of what he was saying, and how he was saying it, and the fact that it was popular—like the most popular shows on TV—tells me so much about my own feelings that audiences get things.

I'm a consultant on this show called *Euphoria*. And then watching all the critics sort of tiptoe around what their actual opinion is of the show inside of their review: they all giving non-reviews, because, I think, they're waiting to see what the internet's going to say before they either champion it or not. Because they're like... they have the virtue signal. They're like, "Guys, I don't know if kids can take this. It's really scary." While I'm like, "Were you never a teenager? Do you not remember all the dark shit you imagine, and all the dark shit you did, and all the dark shit and you hope to do, you know what I mean?"

And I was thinking, "These kids, they're going to eat us up." And that's not glamorizing it, to say they're going to eat it up. They're just going to be excited that someone's representing part of their psyche in some way, shape, or form. And we're in this moment now where people are afraid to even make tepid steps towards transgression because there's so much fear that some phantom trouble will come following you.

JW: It's so crazy. It's so much fear. Everyone is sort of holding on to the seat and the table at the same time, just like... Yeah, but I always felt that transgression led to transformation. Do you know what I mean? An all-hero tale, right? Go to any Jungian story, there's this point where the hero goes through a sort of transgressive situation to come out renewed. And that's the viewer, but... and in a way, we're giving that to the viewer, in the gallery or in the theater.

JOH: Yeah, and also in music. I feel like we allow so much more transgression in music that I find it...

that even formal transgression that we don't allow in other places, which is why I like to go to pop music a lot. I really love... even thinking about... I saw the Temptations musical the other day, even the "Papa Was a Rolling Stone" being one of their biggest hits, it's insane because that song has like a four-minute intro, just a funk intro no one else had. It was like, "Duh duh duh duh." And it's this weird, somber tale of a deadbeat dad. And that a great song does not generally make, or a great pop song doesn't usually make. And it was the biggest pop song ever. And it was because it felt different. It was new and alive and broke the rules of all the things that people said about songs being three minutes, or songs needing to sound like whatever the Beatles were doing at the time, or et cetera.

And I think about how in... I feel like in the theater, especially in commercial theater, the rules around what makes a play are so set in stone that... even formally that we've forgotten that what makes Shakespeare exciting is that, when he writes a romance, his romance doesn't follow all the rules that Marlowe's romances had to follow, you know what I mean? Because he was an experimentalist. Shakespeare, if you read *Cymbeline*, you're like, "What the fuck is this guy doing?" He's going back to the Greeks and being... and Jupiter comes in, you're like, wait, Jupiter just jumps out and does a *deus ex machina* in the middle of this war story you're telling.

And I'm missing that in the commercial-theater space: this relationship to form and transgression of form that lead us to new epiphanies inside of the work that we're watching and a different emotive journey. Because if I know that in the third act *x*, is going to happen, then why would I... what am I getting out of that? But a lot of people actually prefer that engagement with art...

LZ: To feel safer, and be more predictable.

JW: Yeah, if your body knows it...

LZ: Exactly, then you know what to predict, yeah.

JW: People are really looking with their bodies.

LZ: The question of music, I wanted to hear a little bit more, Jordan. Before we even had this conversation, you sort of said, "I want to talk about the role of music in both of your work." How did you... From the video work early on, what is the relationship to... I mean, how did you become interested in bringing pop music in? What is the sort of interruptive force? I find it very, it can be very erotic in a way. It sort of

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prepares you for a different experience in the thing. It's then also... it cuts out very abruptly in your work. I'm curious why and how you kind of put that in.

JW: I think it's like this idea of... for me, I had this intuition about this idea of a one-to-one import from the world. Because I always feel like being an artist, I'm outside of the world. I'm not like part of mainstream culture. And it was this idea of import from mainstream culture was a kind of abstraction. And then the less you do to it, the more radical you are. The less you change it, the more radical that import becomes, because by changing it, you're adding a kind of form-value to it, right? That's like giving you a permission. But by not changing it, it actually becomes more radical.

And so with, for example, *Raspberry Poser* or *Riverboat song*, this idea of just taking it. And then when you take this thing, and it then sort of reflects over the visual-content qualities of the work, and then it kind of accelerates it and, I don't know, kind of moves it into another frequency in a way. And that was kind of how I was thinking of it. And it's funny that you would think that something so known can be so transporting. And so in *Daddy*, there's the scene, if you haven't seen it, where they do the "Father Figure" song, and it's just a full on. I mean, I'd love you to talk about that.

JOH: I mean, it's so funny because I—you talked about being outside of mainstream culture—I feel so in mainstream culture, so embedded in it. I feel like—and it might be the small difference in age—but growing up with a computer I've always felt in the matrix. And so part of my dramaturgy has always been like, oh, I want a play to feel like the internet, or how I what... how I engage the internet. So there's a private window up with just porn playing, and then there's iTunes on and every all the inputs of my day happened inside of the play. It'll go from a Fred Moten essay I'm reading in my email to that, to that. So it's like these things can all exist in the same place because they all exist right here in my phone.

JW: So do you actually have all those things up at the same time?

JOH: Oh, one hundred percent. I have... I didn't bring my laptop, but I have way too many things on my...

JW: That's so interesting. I only can focus on one thing at a time.

JOH: Oh, wow.

JW: And I can... If there's porn on my computer, I can't... I have to turn it off immediately. Because I need to focus on... I'm just like one thing of focus at a time. Or maybe I'll have Photoshop and After Effects open, but there's never porn up. But also at the same time, I work in a studio, and I have employees, so I mean...

JOH: But also porn is just so really great. I love, just not even erotically watching porn, watching porn for just like, "What's happening in the world? What are people into?" I love looking at the most popular videos in different regions and also when you go to Berlin... literally going to Pornhub in Berlin compared to going to Pornhub in London is so radical.

LZ: What are the differences?

JOH: I mean, there's just a lot... Pornhub in Berlin is a lot more violent than Pornhub in—just naturally and casually violent. There's the uploads are from things like... There's... what's the name of that? There's this weird French brand of gay porn that it's all these Middle Eastern men with huge dicks just finding guys that are just wandering around the city, and then they...

JW: Oh, they have that in straight porn as well. They're like, "Oh, can I help you?"

JOH: Yeah, and then they just beat up these guys...

JW: They beat them up?

JOH: Yes, and then they fuck them.

JW: Oh we don't have that. We don't have that with girls. We don't beat them up.

JOH: Oh, that's... you don't know what you're missing. No I'm just kidding—sorry, dark. Anyway, but no, I think it allows...

JW: Isn't that interesting? Let's go back to that. So what does that mean? In the storyline of that, they say, "We meet you, then we transgress, and then we transform."

JOH: Yes. I think, though, part of it is... there's, I mean I think it also has to do with the fact that there's this deep eroticized fear of the Middle East in all of Europe, mainland Europe. But I think that they've made an object of that fear—an object that they can fuck and an object that can validate that fear but also validates the erotic.

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JW: Do you think that's similar to, in the same way that Mel Brooks made *The Producers*, right? In order to process the Holocaust, he had to make *The Producers*. And in order to process potentially this facet of xenophobia, right, on the victim of xenophobia, that they process it through sexuality as well—and humor.

JOH: One hundred percent.

JW: I think that interesting: that processing through transgressive sexuality or processing through humor are more or less similar.

JOH: I think it's completely... and I think that's the thing I accidentally stumbled into with *Slave Play* and *Daddy*, which is that, for me, it made perfect sense that, my relationship to white America is one that's based in a dom/sub, kink relationship. It has always felt like... there's an eroticized relationship, I think, between... a psychic erotic relationship between the white supremacy and black bodies that it goes unrecognized. It becomes very obvious when you just put it plainly in front of you.

And so and for me, it was like that was always where my brain was because I'm someone who's watching a Rihanna music video and then also has... I'm like, "Oh, what porn is the most popular porn in New York this month?" And then seeing that it's ebony, and I'm like, "Oh, that's interesting."

JW: So you can actually find out within regions what the most popular porn is?

JOH: Yes, it is psychotic.

JW: That's so interesting.

JOH: Yeah, porn actually does a lot of really great... porn and OkCupid do a lot of great...

LZ: Data analytics.

JOH: Yeah, data analytics on people's desire. The fact that on OkCupid, the least attractive, or the least spoken to, men are Asian men, and the least spoken to, or attractive, people are black women is really interesting. We make now have that statistic from OkCupid. Here's how people, and the most talked to women are Asian women, which is crazy. And black men are pretty high too. They're number two or something.

JW: High, too, in not spoken to?

JOH: No, in spoken to.

JW: In to spoken?

JOH: Yeah.

LZ: I was curious, you said Jordan that you focus on one thing, but there's definitely... the internet definitely feels present in your work, right? I mean, when you say you import a pop song directly, there's this... it's on the backdrop of a very interruptive, often kind of pastiche or almost manic, set of images, moving edited very, very carefully, very deliberately. I mean, you must feel like it's filtering in, in some way.

JW: Yeah, but that's also an import. That's like importing witnessing, the import of witnessing, in a way, for me. And I trust that what I witness myself other people are witnessing as well. It's not just me who's bad, it's not just me who's curious. So, I have a lot of trust in that, and it's this idea of importing. With *Riverboat song* or this earlier piece called *Favorite Things*, the idea of importing an internet search and how an internet search can become a portrait of you in your time, for example.

LZ: In the editing though, too? I mean, do you feel like that's witnessing, as it were, the internet as the way people are engaging with it? Do you see that in the edit, cutting process?

JW: The editing is also very compositional in terms of deflecting any kind of potential message in a way—that you deflect a message to create an overall gestalt or attitude, and that attitude can then be presented as a potential gesture. I would never want to use an attitude as a message. But it's like I kind of start butting. I but things up together in a way that doesn't work in the sense that it doesn't work *works*, because it's like you can draw within the line. If I start just drawing within the lines, it's already inside the viewer's body. But if I start drawing out of the lines, you start seeing the beauty of the color out of the lines. And that's what the edit is as well. And the edit... in a way, I try and sort of access a kind of naturalistic indifference even.

JOH: Yeah, I was going to ask about drawing inside and outside the lines and things that are so wrong that they work in a way. Is that what drew you to Lady Gaga at all? Because I love the fact that you sampled *Artpop*, which is like psychotic.

JW: "Applause." "Applause."

JOH: Well, no, but it's from the *Artpop* album, which just like her like...

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JW: Of course. No, but...

JOH: Because I'm a full on Little Monster.

JW: I wanted to... Oh, I'm not.

JOH: Oh, I am.

JW: So I was like... let me try and think back of how I... I thought, yeah, there's... I think in the same way that you potentially saw Rihanna's work, if you take something literally from the present and abstract it, it's also kind of radical, rather than taking something from twenty years ago. That's nostalgic, for example. That's a little easier, whatever you want to say. And so, for me, it's this idea of... I don't know, Jeremy, you chime in if you feel the same way. But I feel like this idea of being able to, okay, it's not... I'm not saying this in a competitive way with anyone else but myself. And I'm not saying it in competitive way with any other artists or creatives, but the idea to see it first.

And what I mean by seeing it first is there's, for example, *Artpop*, and you have the song "Applause." And it's just in the world with us. But can you see it at a remove, while it's still new? In its new, fresh, completely right present state, step to the side and witness it anew. Witness it. And that's what I'm trying to do in the work. And I'm hoping that it carries that frequency as it's kind of fixed in the work. For example, in *Female Figure*, the song "Applause," which actually happens—I think it happens right after the first lines of the piece—and then it's actually followed by Paul Simon's "Graceland."

LZ: I love that.

JW: And then I took this, a "Blurred Lines" remix, and I slowed it down. And then it ends with a clip of Leonard Cohen's "Boogie Street." And in the way... but it's like this macro to micro thing. And it's in the same way that the edit doesn't work, the content doesn't work, that things are deflecting on each other. And then it's potentially creating the space for the viewer to gain a kind of... an access to themselves as new, so the viewer can potentially see the world with me.

JOH: Yeah. No... you just spoke to so many things that... articulated things that I've been impulses of mine forever that it's just like I don't know where the impulse comes from. But it's just like one of the first things I did when I went to drama school early on was I would do certain pop songs as monologues. So the Lady Gaga "Disco Stick," I would. And all my teachers

were always like, "Where is this monologue from?" And I was like, "It's from Lady Gaga, it's a Lady Gaga song." Or it was like, whatever.

But for me, I was always just like... no, the reason this is ubiquitous is because its form is perfect, basically. A lot of great pop songs have perfect form and very perfect structure. And it's like there's something true about it. Even if it's silly or vapid, there's something true about it. And you might miss that trueness when it's like, "I want to kiss you, but I might miss you, babe." You might miss it then. But if someone's like, "I want to kiss you, and if I do, I might miss you, babe." It's complicated. It's stupid. Got my ass kissed by sexy Cupid. I guess he wants to play. I love game. I love game." You know, whatever.

So that was my obsession. And I think seeing someone do that, it's also... it makes me think of why I'm really... I have this deep sadness at sampling has overtaken covering, right? No one, everyone samples, and sampling is exciting. And I think you and I sample a lot in our work, right? In the way that pop musicians do now, but no one does covers anymore, just pure covers. And I think when we do these full-out interpolations inside of our work it's kind of us doing a cover of... In *Daddy* I got to do a George Michael cover. And I think about how all of Aretha Franklin's best songs were all covers, or even in *Anti*, one of the strongest songs is that cover of that Tame Impala song than Rihanna does. And there's something that amazing about having five different versions of the same thing, because they each transform in these new ways and tell you something about that person's interiority, even if they didn't write the thing, or make the thing. And I don't know.

JW: It's funny, when I think about all these things, what you're really talking about is form that accesses the body, right? Because we really want to just access. Form accesses the body, and pop accesses the body. And when you make access to the body, you become present, right? And when you become present, you see things new, or you see things... When I meditate, sometimes when I know I have a good meditation is I open my eyes, and I look at my hands, and they don't look familiar to me, the palms of my hands. And when you suddenly get to see the world unfamiliar, through access, and then with through being something unfamiliar, you get access, and then you see things in a way... I can't even put it into words, but it's just like...

JOH: But it's so interesting that you're interested in the body, because your work is also so posthuman, you know what I mean? It's like you have this sort

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of posthumanism that translates throughout. You have this interest in dolls and this interest in tech, in this way that it's so out of the body. So I wonder as someone who also has the same investment in bodies, right? The reason that everyone's always like, "Why write plays?" Because when you write a movie there's no body. The body is filtered through six cameras, or six lenses. And then... and I'm far away from the bodies that watch it. But when I when I do my plays, I'm literally in the audience almost every show, because I get off on bodies moving differently or responding differently with me. And watching the bodies on stage do it differently and change and activate in new ways. Why objects and not body? Why not be a choreographer?

JW: I don't know.

LZ: I mean, I was just thinking that you're the effect on the body of the audience. It's almost like these tools are being developed by you, whether it's colored sculpture or a female figure, to sort of have an intense bodily effect by resisting traditional meaning, which I think is something we've talked about too. Resisting trying to reconstruct a narrative or address something or virtue signal, you end up having a very visceral, immediate effect on the person who's seeing it. I mean, that's sort of what those works feel like.

JW: The thing I always had a problem—not a problem with—but observationally, that I was like, "The gallery is a stage that the viewer gets to walk onto." And I always thought about that. And then when I think about when I was in your play, when I was in *Daddy*, I was like, "Isn't this amazing? That here is this contrived event, completely contrived, fabricated event, we're watching lit. And there's a pool and a house, and we all believe it. We're all in it." I said, "Isn't that fabulous that we can have that part of our human experience, that we can get hacked by narrative, hacked by form." I thought that was... I think that's an amazing part of the human experience is that how this idea of representation—how we are kind of hacked by representation—is really compelling.

JOH: It's wild. I keep... I had this sort of set thing that I was like, "Representation doesn't matter." I loved saying that because I felt it was... I hated people telling me that I had to like something just because there were black people in it. And I was, but that's not... I feel more represented in *I Am Love*, in a weird way. I am Tilda Swinton eating the prawn. But then I saw the Spider-Man movie, and I was literally hacked

by that movie. And I was like, "Representation does matter." But I didn't even know what it meant at the time.

But I think about how, again, it's structure. It's like Annie Baker has this great monologue in *The Antipodes* about... and *The Antipodes* is a play that takes place in a writer's room. It's really phenomenal.

LZ: She's amazing.

JOH: She's amazing. I love Annie Baker. She's my... We all have that one person that people are like, "That's your writer crush, or that's your artist crush?" Yeah, I know it's weird, but I stay at Annie Baker. But she's fucking cool. But anyway, she has this play all around this writer's table. And they are constantly talking about what makes a story and how a story works. And there is a whole part where they talk about... this guy is addicted to writing stories, because it's the earliest form of technical rewiring, and how basically great writers know how to—every time they put pen to paper—how to hit that part, that part, and that part of your brain so that you feel the things.

And I think that is... because I feel like when I'm writing, I know immediately if something works or doesn't work, because I'll get the chill or I'll start to cry, or I'll do it. And if I don't, then I'm like, "Oh, I need to rewrite that scene." And it doesn't matter how many times someone tells me I need to change it because they don't like it or they don't understand it. If I felt it, I know it was real.

JW: Yes. And that's the difference between a professional and amateur, for me, is that we trust the way we see. And when you see my work or when you see Jeremy's work, you're getting a chance to see the way we see. When you see a Luc Tuymans painting or a Wolfgang Tillmans photograph or a Tino Sehgal performance, you get a chance to see the way that artists sees. And you're fucking lucky. And it's beautiful. And it's like when the artists can open that space up and sort of let the world push through them, and then it basically remains as a kind of freeze that then the viewer can then reenter over and over and over again.

LZ: Talking about that and hearing about Annie Baker and Tuymans, I was curious if you guys would talk a little bit about influences. I mean, some of the early reading that you did, that sort of gets you to the place where you are: sort of, I mean, disruptive reading, whatever it is. I'd be very curious to hear about some of those early inspirations, influences.

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JOH: Yeah, I mean, I was really... because I was raised by a single mom who worked a lot, I ended up being sort of a latchkey kid. So I was in this small town in Virginia. And I got to... and my mom had been told at a young age that I was advanced. So basically, any impulse I had, she would just be like, "Well, yeah, I mean, they say that's helped smart kids." And the thing that I used to have to do when I was in trouble was she'd make me read books when I was young. So I became... at certain point, it stopped being a punishment became fun. That's probably I have a weird relationship to a punishment now.

But she would let me go to the movie store and get whatever movie I wanted. So I got really obsessed with the Criterion section inside of the movie store and the Blockbuster, and then also just anything that was international because, again, when you're twelve, watching a Bertolucci film, it's both informative and also porn. You know what I mean? So you, but you couldn't get away with that when your mom, you're like, "Oh no mom, it's *Last Tango in Paris*. It's famous. It's not a pornographic film..."

JW: Can I interrupt and just tell you guys my go-to porn as a kid was *Trading Places*.

JOH: What's *Trading Places*?

JW: The movie with Dan Aykroyd and Eddie Murphy.

JOH: What is it about?

JW: Because-

JOH: I mean, I'm assuming they trade places somehow racially.

JW: They trade places racially, and it's this crazy race story. And I was obsessed with it, and it was my favorite movie when I was a kid. You haven't seen it?

JOH: I've never seen it.

JW: Oh my god.

JOH: Yeah. And that's so funny, because I keep getting asked to write these race-trading movies now.

JW: You have to see it.

JOH: Yeah, everyone is really into that now.

JW: But there is a scene of... Who's that actress who's married to the guy who made *Waiting for Guffman*? Jamie Lee Curtis. So Jamie Lee Curtis is

in it, and she plays a prostitute. And there's this part where she changes in front of Dan Aykroyd. She basically... he's down and out and she brings him to her house and she gets naked and changes in front of him. And that was the most titillating thing for me. And I watched it. I would show it to all my other friends, and it was sacred. Anyhow, I'm gonna like let you...

JOH: No, I'm so into that, because mine was so different. The film that unlocked my erotics was *The Dreamers*, which I think is a lot of people's movie. But Louis Garrel in that movie was the sexiest thing to me. But the thing that turned me on in that movie—that I tell people all the time, and they're like, "Wait, that's so weird," where I was like, "I don't know"—there's a scene where they're talking about Maoism in the movie *La Chinoise*, and there's a huge Mao poster and Louis Garrel is in... it's been raining outside, they've run back in the rain.

They're both wearing these silk house robes, which is amazing. And they're talking, and at one point, Louis Garrel... they are disagreeing. And Louis Garrel grabs Michael Pitt's throat and then slowly slides over. And he puts one leg over his leg, and his crotch is kind of touching his butt. And I remember that was the thing that I would rewind over and over and over again. Because I thought it was so hot, but it always sucks because Eva Green comes in. And she's like, "Boys, what are you doing?" And I'm like, "God damn it. Why did she come in and ruin that?"

JW: Oh my god, I have a quick... Can we go out of this conversation? I'll tell you crazy fucking story.

JOH: Oh, what is it?

JW: So when I was nineteen or twenty, I hung out... there was this guy, he befriended me, his name was David Greenberger. And he wanted to hook up with me but he also wanted to impress me. And he brought me to this guy named Joe Smith's house. And Joe was this guy who must have been like sixty-five. He was from Georgia, and he lived in this loft around Twentieth Street. And everything was maroon, and it covered all the windows. And it was so weird, and we'd go there and smoke pot. And he was just like, "Wow, we can go there and hang out with this guy." So there were all of these weird things happening, because there was all of these young gay dudes who were somehow messing around with Joe and there was one... Excuse me.

JOH: How old were you at the time?

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JW: I was twenty-one, or no, twenty. And Joe was really cool. And actually Joe lent me money to buy a video camera, and I paid him back. But I'm going to tell you when I paid him back, it's so crazy. But basically there was this one kid that Joe had some relationship with, who started poisoning him with rat poison. And once he started poisoning, so the whole..

JOH: Why? To get money?

JW: To get money from him, and he started poisoning him with rat poison. And then one night, me and Mike Pitt had to take care of him. And I remember Mike Pitt being on the phone and was like, "Joe's dying." It was talking to somebody, like, "What are you doing tonight?" He's like, "I'm at Joe's house. He's dying." And I'm just sitting here, like, "What the fuck is going on?" And I had this super awkward night eating sushi with Mike Pitt. And then I remember stuffing, I'm like, "Joe, I'm paying you back for this camera." And I'm giving him money and putting it in this dying man's pocket. And it had turned out he was... someone was poisoning him, was trying to kill him with rat poison. It was so weird.

JOH: Was this guy in a will? How was he going to get money?

JW: I have no idea. But there was all of these spooky narratives going around.

LZ: It was found out. It became clear what was happening.

JW: Yeah, it was so weird. Anyhow, I sat there with... whenever I hear about Mike Pitt, I just remember this weird traumatizing night with this middle-aged man who was being... he was peeing on himself. Anyhow, later, Joe actually died in, well, it was Bellevue Hospital a couple years ago—maybe ten, twelve years ago. And he became... he lost his apartment and lost everything. He just had all these people around him using him. It was really, really creepy and weird.

JOH: That's really insane.

JW: It was so weird. It was right across from that magic store, Abracadabra.

LZ: Oh, yeah, sure.

JW: Anyhow.

JOH: Well, I'm really interested in this moment when you were this twink running around. Because the thing that always happens whenever I talk about

you, and people are like, "Oh, yeah, it's so weird. I met him. He's not gay, right? He feels gay." And I'm always like, "I don't know."

JW: Well, I actually... I am a little actually gay.

JOH: What is "a little actually gay"?

JW: I mean, I like...

JOH: Because everyone's queer for clout now.

JW: I'm not, I wouldn't say it's queer for clout. I have hooked up with guys. And I had like five good guys. But for the most part, I mostly date women. That's what... I really, really love women in a way that I don't or haven't had access to men at this point. But I'm kind of open, but women...

JOH: But gay adjacent.

JW: Yeah, I would say so. But at the same time, it's that I grew up with a passive father. And I grew up with three sisters. And I grew up really insecure and not good at sports, and not all these things. And I just don't like straight guys that much. Even as a straight guy, I'm just... I feel anxious around you. I feel like, "Well, are we competing like, blah blah blah blah blah." I always just found that I just appreciated my gay friends so much more. I have always had this huge sense of being an outsider. And I think I really related, especially in high school, to my friends who are gay.

JOH: It's so weird, because I have the exact opposite feeling. I get so... I'm living on Fire Island right now for at least two weeks. And I was just like, "Do I hate men?" I had, I mean, I grew up with just my mom and my sister and my grandma. My papa was there, but my papa was very... is my grandfather. He's very, he was like a man of the '50s and '60s. He wasn't forthcoming with any emotions. And I didn't like that part of him. So I actually built up a sort of personality and defiance at that, because I wanted to be more like my mom, who's charismatic and fun.

And so anyway, and when I'm around a big group of gay men, I see so much maleness that I'm just like, "I can't." And I actually now prefer these sort of passive, or not even just the passive. I actually... because I found my voice in straight spaces. I was... There was a club in Chicago called The Underground. And when I was eighteen years old, I heard about it, because I worked at Barney's. And there were all these women who were coming to me like, "We're going to The Underground," which is... it was the hip club.

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And I was like, "I want to go to The Underground." So I got in my best outfit. I showed up, and they didn't ID me because I was tall. And then I start going there, and the the straight dude that ran the club was like, "You are cool. You will have a bottle here anytime you want to come here." So I was like, "Great." So I became a personality there. And then straight men liked me because women liked me, right? Because I could talk to any girl, and so all these straight guys just had me as a honey pot for these girls.

And I learned in a very short amount of time how to hang out with straight dudes, how to talk to straight dudes, and how... it's just these straight dudes with money. It was a thing. And so even now when I think about my manager and the executives that I'm working with in movie sessions I'm like, "Oh, yeah, I've literally never worked on..." My agent's gay, but none of the men who've been like, "I want to do something with you, let's do it right now," have ever been gay. They're all straight.

And I'm like, "Oh my God, this person is like my dad." And it's probably some deep-seated daddy issues for me that I have to work out, but I prefer... I don't have this deep joy being around a bunch of dudes that are trying to fuck dudes. Yeah, because I think that even at that party we went to that night, I was just like, "I would rather sit outside and smoke and talk to Jordan than be inside with all these shirtless men looking at each other like meat."

LZ: There's a competitive... I mean, the competitiveness you're talking about is, of course, is of straight competitiveness that makes you uncomfortable, Jordan. And of course, that same thing, you have a completely different, if you look at... if you're interacting with straight guys, it's completely different. That competitiveness is then off the table, right? So completely different.

JOH: Completely.

JW: Yeah. The funny thing is if I'm into a guy, I'm into other straight guys like me. I'm not into effeminate men. That's not who I'll be crushing on. Yeah, it's so weird. And it's almost like it goes back to that porn you're talking about. It's like that's my trauma. But you know what's interesting? It's just I think we have to touch upon this is that, Jeremy, you're making this art form that's predominantly witnessed by Jewish, monogamous couples over the age of sixty. Can you talk about what that's like?

JOH: It's fucking annoying. I mean, I'm excited by intergenerationality. I'm really interested in being in a conversation with a sixty-year-old about my play,

or an eighty-year-old about my play. One of the best things that was said about my play was said by, about my thesis play recently, was said by my friend's eighty-seven-year-old... he met this woman who was about to fall in the street. And then he was like, "You can't be out like this." She's like, "What are you talking about? I go out every Tuesday night to see a play." And he was like, "Well, someone should be with you. You shouldn't go by yourself." She's like, "Well, my husband died. So do you want to come?" And now they go to see plays together. And she's amazing.

JW: And they met just on the street?

JOH: They met on the street. Because he's such a gentleman, and he's Catholic, and so he was like, "A lady fell," and went and helped her. Anyway, she came to see my thesis play, and she was like, "It was fabulous. It was this, it was that." She had the best things to say about my thesis play than anyone else. But working in the theater, the thing that sucks is that I want... Theater is run by people who are all so of that ilk, or generation. Baby boomers run the theater—not just in the audiences, but behind the scenes. And like every other industry, I think the baby boomers are trying to actively kill us by just not being like, "Okay, maybe let some new ideas come in."

So I think that, for me, I see it, but I also like obstacles. And so I think that the whole reason I started writing plays with a sort of fury was because all of my friends were like, "Plays don't make sense. Why would you want to do a play? It's all for old Jewish people. It's all for this type of person." And I was just like, "Well, no, plays can be for you. Have you seen this? Have you seen that?" They're like, "No, never heard of it." I was like, "I want to make plays that my friends will fucking come see and like, and we'll make theater cool again." Not to be Trumpian about it.

And, I don't know. I mean, it's a thing that I think other people feel more displacement for in the audience than I do. I think other people who are peers have had really violent responses to having to sit in a room with the plays I've been writing, specifically, and see a sea of white hair around them—white hair that's also connected to white faces. And they're laughing at that. That's a weird thing to be laughing at. I'm laughing at this, and this is a thing that they should be laughing at. But they're not. What is going on? They have this... I mean, I get off on that disruption because, again, something's happening to bodies, right?

But I think that I'm starting to get really interested in ways to fuck with that moving forward. So when

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Slave Play goes on Broadway, one of the things we're trying to do is we want to have one night where we get someone to buy out the entire theater and have a night where it's just black audience members. We have a fully black night because I've also only ever been to one play that was all black, and it was a Tyler Perry play.

LZ: What are the demographics when you put it, when *Slave Play* was up? I mean, did you see, how was audience—very mixed?

JOH: Oh, what. The thing that's funny is that people who are unaccustomed to going to the theater, were like, "This is really white." When people who would come to the theater, like Tony Kushner, was like, "This is the most diverse audience I've seen in a long time."

And it was just we worked really, really hard on getting people under thirty and black and brown people into the audience. And so much of that... I was literally buying tickets and just giving them to people, to my own play. I was like, "I want to see you here." I'd give people tickets on Twitter. I'd give people tickets on Instagram, anyway to get them there. If anyone's showed a pique of an interest and the show was already sold out, I buy my own house seat and give them tickets.

Or I got friends to buy tickets for people. I did this thing called rich friends. And my friend Maxwell ended up buying thirty seats during previews, because he's like, "Thirty seats is basically the price of a coat." And then I went to a fancy dinner where I was supposed to shuck and jive for some donors. And I was just like, "Hey guys, also reparations are important. And so my friend over there is thirty. He just bought thirty tickets for the show. And if he can do it, I'm sure all you guys can." And then they were all like, "Yeah, let's do it." So we had this rich friends programs, so a bunch of seats were bought throughout the run that we gave out for free.

LZ: Oh, that's amazing.

JOH: And it got so many people in, but I think that, demographic-wise, there's still a lot of work to do. Because it never... it won't look like an art opening. Art openings... I don't know what the community did in 2005 to rehab everything, but you guys made art cool. And maybe it was St. Vincent playing at MoMA or something. But I think people just started showing up.

LZ: Well, what do you think about your audience, Jordan?

JW: Well, I'll tell you. So my audience, I think, is... I'll tell you, the audience that purchases my work are probably the same people who go see your play. For example, or a Jason.

LZ: But your work in particular draws in a lot of nonbuying audience members to see it, right? Because it's very experiential. You feel when you go see the work that you have a diverse audience? I mean, I'm sort of, I wouldn't... my gut would tell me actually weirdly not that it's still predominantly white, your audience. But I'm curious if you feel it's mixed.

JW: I feel it depends on where it is. I think predominantly, unfortunately, the art audience in New York is predominantly white. But if you go somewhere like Amsterdam, for example, or you go into a city in Europe, and you do a show at a city museum or a state museum, potentially you will have a more mixed audience. But it does seem...

JOH: That's so wild. In Amsterdam, you'll have a more mixed audience than in New York?

JW: In also Amsterdam and Stockholm, potentially. And these are places where there is also a lot of refugees living.

LZ: And the museum serves a different purpose, potentially, you know what I mean? It's fulfilling a different role. It's not, yeah...

JW: And I remember when I was installing in Moderna Museet a couple months ago in Stockholm. And I was taking a little coffee break. I saw this school group, and it was led by this Swedish white teacher. I think there was two white kids and every other kid was beautiful, was Asian, or they were Asian, or they were Middle Eastern, or they were black. And it was beautiful. I was like, "This is how the world should be..."

LZ: Yeah.

JW: "This is how the world should be. And these are the kids who should be here. This is the way they should be led in."

LZ: I was going to ask one thing about looking at... You seem to have a real visual-art references, right? You're talking about the art world. Obviously, there's a play in which Mapplethorpe appears, Baldwin, that you've written. And I've seen you at the gallery... I mean, it seems. And you're here with an artist, I mean, in what way, has the visual-art world played a role for you? Is it a space for freer imagining? I mean, what...

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JOH: Yeah, I mean, I think it's a grass is greener thing. Even just then I was like, "The art world is so diverse, right?" You guys were like, "No." I was like, "Oh, cool." But I think that I've always had this sort of... I've been attracted to both music and visual art in a very deep way, because those are the things you can access in Virginia. You don't need to go to a great museum to see all the great works of art, you can literally just look in a book. And I think that because I had an interest in things that made me feel crazy—anything that made me feel like, "What the fuck!"—I could only find in the art world, or in the... and also in choreography.

It became a place where I would be like, "Okay, cool, I know"... because I love theater, but no one... this is a problem with the audience. This is one of the reasons I want to fix the audience, right, and the people who make decisions. Because in the last decade, right, there have been four, I think four, *All My Sons* revivals on Broadway, which is... We all love Miller. Miller's great. Do we need four of them? And yet people that I really loved, I could never... I had to engage with their work like a museum, like a piece in the museum. So it was... Adrienne Kennedy doesn't get produced. Adrienne is my everything. If someone could do fucking *A Movie Star Only Stars in Black and White* [*A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*] on Broadway, that would be the thing that would drive me to a revival, right?

So I think that.... but yet I didn't have access to the tangible things about her work: how it felt, how it smelled. But I could watch a video of, I could watch a Adrian Piper video or look at a Lorna Simpson print and have that same sort of textured feeling that I should be feeling. So it became really easy for me to make that reference.

Because also there was something that I realized: that in the theater world, and if I could... because it's also my safety net in the theater world, too, is to be articulate about art. Because having an articulation in art forms or spaces that they don't made it easier for me to say why I didn't want to be in the August Wilson play, right? Because I knew that I wanted to do experimental theater and maybe work downtown.

And so when I was in drama school, and people were like, okay, Jeremy, here's your Cory monologue from *Fences*. And I knew that that wasn't the kind of work I want to do. I would just be like, "Okay, cool. I'm going to do this, but I'm going to do this like I saw Ralph Lemon do this one dance. So I'm going to be twirling the entire time I'm doing." And they were like, "What? This is realism." And I'm like, "This is my realism."

And then my defense would always be like, "You don't know art." And so I don't know... I think that it was a safety blanket for me, because also I wasn't doing the assignment. But it also was where I was able to see myself, because also blackness and brownness are refracted and more represented, I think, in more exciting ways, in the visual-art world because there's just been more license for us to be like... You see William Pope.L and you're like, "This is the abject blackness that I feel." It's not a sort of beautified blackness that I don't feel connected to, or sort of respectable blackness that I don't feel connected to.

JW: What's interesting about that: it's like you're piggybacking on art, because it provides you with a kind of agency and a kind of freedom. And for me, I feel that way about my friends who are writing fiction. Because there was always this sense where it was like—with an artist—where it's like, "If you do this, this, and this, you're basically telling us you are this, this, and this." and I'm like, "No, I'm trying to approach this as a kind of author of fiction." And of course, there's parts of me in here. How could there not be? But this isn't me.

LZ: But I feel you also have looked at strategies in other art forms. I mean, for example, the theater. I mean, I think when I look at your work, even if it's not conscious, right? There's a real sense of audience-performer dynamics. There's an awareness of what it means to be looked at as an audience member, right? I mean, you're real interest in the visual, and then...

JW: Yeah. Really, honestly, it's really just... it's really about tight observation of myself. I really just... it's been a really actually a small world for me. And I've just been observing how just being conscious and mindful of my experience of witnessing how to reaccess that witnessing.

JOH: But that really cool thing you said about... how does that interact with the thing you said about a gallery being like a stage the audience is on? I thought that was so beautiful. So how does that interact with that? And what does that stage mean to you, then, if it's less... if it's more about... Does that make sense?

JW: Yeah, it's like this idea... it's like this idea of the hack of suspension of disbelief, potentially.

LZ: That the gallery is less good at it, or because you have said the stage is...

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JW: No, it's just a different. And it's almost like when I think about it, I have this rule about no tricks. No tricks, no illusions. You see it. It's just like... I just have this thing... I remember looking at the Rodin sculptures outside of the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena. And it's like you see them and then you walk around them to a certain point, and then you get access to your body looking at them.

Or, for example, the best example of any sculpture viewing is Michelangelo's *David*, where more or less ninety percent of all the angles you look at it is kind of A-plus body experience. And actually, you can find a couple angles that aren't great. And I did. And it's really interesting. And it's really interesting, this idea of access, right? Because people are actually... All of these things—all the content and all this and all that and all the flashing lights and whatever—it all just comes down to how do you get into that state of body and, through the state of body, open to a state of presence where one witnesses presence with a kind of indifference.

And when I say "indifference," I'm not talking about a hostile indifference. If anything, I'm talking about an indifference that is observational. But, it's like, even through the act of love, we witness indifference. We witness indifference for like, if you love someone so much, you for a moment, in your intensity of your love for them, you see them. And so it's this idea of seeing, and this idea of witnessing, and witnessing through love, and witnessing love. And love is a portal to witness. And potentially, transgression is a portal to witness. And then one could argue and describe the different qualities and differences of these.

LZ: I mean, it's interesting. It's also a bit of like... it's almost like a suspension of wanting in the moment, you know what I mean? When you talk about that calm, observational quality, but you get there through explicit exploration of desiring, of being manipulated, of being interesting—whatever it is that forces you to step back and actually, for a moment, not want a message, not wanting meaning, but somehow feel, like you said, embodied, or in the moment.

JOH: I love this sort of meditative relationship to not just making but, as you're saying, witnessing. So I think that, that is the sort of drug that happens in great theater, you know what I mean? You're able to go to the space of pure and just witness. I feel like this, it is something like, "Okay, guys, we get to witness." But, no, it's really stunning. And it made

me think about all the types of things that I don't like. And I think, where does rage in viewing, or witnessing, come into play for you?

Because like, I always think about things that are productively bad and not productively bad. It's like, I have this whole thing about white nonsense and how there's productive white nonsense and unproductive white nonsense. Productive white nonsense is like Bruce Nauman, because I'll be thinking about the nonsense of his sense making for years. But then some unproductive white nonsense would maybe be like, oh, god, I can't say their...

JW: Say it. It's fine.

JOH: Like a lesser Duplass Brothers film, right? I feel like...

JW: What is that, I don't know.

JOH: They're like mumblecore. For me it would be... that, for me, is unproductive white nonsense, because it's just like, "Oh, you had some cameras in Austin, and you made some things." And I don't know why I need to be in awe of this nonsense. It's not a movie. I mean, it's not like Alex Ross Perry, who I think has productive white nonsense. It's like this whole thing. It's about like... I have this whole thing about how black people have to make sense of themselves consistently in representational media. It's like, we are denied the chance for nonsense outside of music and in visual arts, right? But even now, I think that the demands on young black artists to be perfect... the kids who are getting really popular right out of grad school in the art program are the ones who make the most sense of blackness a lot of the times.

And even... I mean, *Daddy* made less sense of blackness for people than *Slave Play* did. *Slave Play* told you what sense you needed to make of a black body in relation to white body. Even with the ambiguity of it's ending, there still was a sense of like, "Oh, I know what Jeremy said, or I think I know where Jeremy stands in the black-white debate." And so I'm... and the reason why someone like Adrienne Kennedy doesn't get produced is she doesn't have enough nonsense. But I think that when I'm sitting inside of something, I get this rage—this rage that is usually linked to it being productive for me. Because it's so bad, I'm mad that I'll have to think about all the ways it's bad for a while.

LZ: I mean you talked about really wanting to resist all virtue signaling in some way. And that even when you look at other people writing and working

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today, telling stories, there's this attempt to revisit or reconstruct or correct for—and that you are really not interested in correcting at all.

JOH: No, I mean, because I think that, well, first of all, so many have already tried and failed. So it's like, "Why do this?" And I think that what we've seen that has worked a lot in cultural production is people who produce things that don't dictate. Being didactic doesn't actually help.

LZ: Never works.

JOH: Yeah, it doesn't. So and I think that all you can be true to is sort of the complicated mess, because I think a complicated mess is something you stay with. So if you give someone a tangled knot, and you're like, "Can you undo this for me?" they'll be working on it for longer than if you give them a rope and ask them to tie a knot.

LZ: Or tell them how to undo it.

JOH: Exactly. So I like people being able to... Because also the thing I hate about the theater that tells you exactly what it is that you see it, you get up, you clap, you might have felt something, and then when you walk out you're like, "So what are we eating?" And I was just... and maybe it's because I'm kind of a narcissist, and I'm just like, "I want someone to sit and think about me for two days." That's for me, I think. An important thing is I want you to be thinking about this play, thinking about these ideas, sitting with it. So maybe you won't make that like microaggression the next time, or maybe you will listen to your boyfriend differently, or maybe you will look at your son like a human, or maybe you will—you know what I mean? And I think that's... And also I think the dualism comes from... I've genuinely become astrological determinist, and I am a Gemini, I'm just saying. And I'm a rising Gemini. I'm a sun Gemini in this Taurus moon. So I think... and Gemini is all over my chart.

JW: I'm a Libra and you're a Gemini?

JOH: I know. It's a love affair.

JW: We're so bonded! It's a love affair.

JOH: I was going to mention that you are a Libra, but I was like, "I don't know how he feels about being a Libra." But yeah.

JW: I'm a special Libra, actually. I'm an October 9th Libra, and I had my chart read. And they're like you, for whatever reason, you're rising—I don't know

all the names of it. But they were like, you are not indecisive. And I was like, "You're right. I'm generally not indecisive."

JOH: Wow. That's amazing.

LZ: So last, maybe last, kind of bigger question is, What is each of you working on next? I mean, you mentioned Broadway, maybe you just say one or two things about that. What's happening? How did it happen?

JOH: It's really crazy. So one of my play is going to Broadway, which is really crazy. There were whispers of it in December. There was the thing: big producer saw it and was like, "I'm going to help you go to Broadway." Then that fell through, and some things didn't happen. And I was like, "Oh, that was"... And it was so weird, it's like being... I was really obsessed with it. And I kind of got sad, because literally it was all of my Christmas break was everyone's like, "Okay, we're almost here with the theater. We got this much money, we got this." And I was like, "Oh my God, I'm going to Broadway while I'm in grad school. This is insane." And then the minute I didn't get it, I was like, "What?" And then because it's all about real estate.

And then I woke up two days later, I was like, "Jeremy, you literally wrote this play to be at Abrams." I literally wrote this way to be in a tiny place. I was going to self-produce. It's like, "You never want to go to Broadway. You don't like the plays on Broadway. Why would you go to Broadway? That's psychotic." And then...

LZ: And then of course, it happened once you had that...

JOH: Yeah. I got a call two weeks later, like, "The Shuberts love you." And I was like, "Great." So that's going, and it's really, really exciting, because I think the only reason to go to Broadway is to try to do something differently. And I think because we know that the play is already going to be a thing that's emotionally taxing, potentially, because it was last time, when all of the black Twitter got confused by what the play was about. I'm just like, "Let's do it in a way that I can feel proud of, whether this works or doesn't work." So almost the entire cast is coming back. We gave an offer to everyone. And there's some scheduling conflicts, which make that more difficult, which is sad. And then...

JW: Wait, can I interrupt you just for a second. How does black Twitter react to it? Have they actually seen it, or they're speculative?

David Zwirner

JOH: A lot of people didn't see it, and someone leaked. So basically, *The New York Times* doesn't really... *The New York Times* comes to take a photograph of your play for the thing. And you can't really ad director them. I now know the things I should have said in that first, or to the theater, to make it clear to *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* posted pictures that I would have never in my life put as the lead picture of *Slave Play* as one of their lead pictures in a profile of me. And then someone who really was not happy about the play leaked it to *Media Take Out*, because the picture was of our lead actresses with her tongue out. And she was twerking in a slave garment, and a white man was behind her.

And the actress was Teyonah, and she's phenomenal. But Teyonah has a really big following in the black community. So *Media Take Out*, which is like the *Perez Hilton* of the black community, was like, "You all see..." Actually, the headline was really funny. I actually cracked up when I read the headline. They were like, "Yo, there's this new play on Broadway, and they got a little slave girl twerking for daddy, or twerking for masser. What are we going to do about this?"

And then I became a big thing, and a lot of people were super homophobic. It was just like everyone kept saying it was on Broadway when we were in previews off Broadway. So that was another really confusing thing.

And then there's a petition. And there's this woman who saw the play. She was like, "It was disgusting." She totally misrepresented what happens in the play, as well, which made me say to her online, "You're lying." And then she posted a picture of her ticket. I was like, "Well, I guess she's not lying. But she also is lying about what happens."

So the petition got twelve thousand signatures. And so anyway, it was a lot. I got death threats. My actors were really scared. So I was just like, "If we're going to go to Broadway, let's do it in a way that I think is obtainable. Let's try to make tickets cheaper. Let's try to do cool parties. We're going to try to have a party, a bimonthly party.

LZ: When does it happen? When is it actually going?

JOH: October we open. September we start previews, I think.

LZ: Okay. Very cool.

JOH: It's really a thing.

LZ: That's amazing. And Jordan, we know you're cooking something up.

JW: Yeah. I'm working on the third animatronic piece.

JOH: Oh, shit. Does it have a name yet?

JW: Kind of does have a name. I'm thinking of this... I don't want to say it here. I'll tell you guys when we're off mic. But yeah, it's actually officially kicked off on June 21st, officially. And yeah, that's what I'm doing. And that will... that's what I'm doing for the next year and a half.

LZ: Wow, top secrecy.

JW: Top secrecy.

LZ: No leak.

JW: No leaking.

JOH: You guys just actually leaked the title: "Top Secrecy."

JW: Actually, I will gush and leak off microphone. But the... yeah, it's the third animatronic. I'm really excited.

LZ: I can say I've seen some things about it, and it's amazing.

JW: Did I send you the film I made about it?

JOH: You might have. You sent me a lot of things. I've watched like two of them.

JW: Okay. I'll send it to you today. But yeah, and then I've got this body of work about JFK Jr that I've been doing for a year, and I'm continuing that. I'm actually making this really large hologram sculpture with... about JFK Jr.

JOH: What is it about JFK Jr? I'm sorry.

JW: It's, for me... it's a way of... it's kind of the only way I think I'm trying to look through JFK Jr. It's like looking at that corner in the room to talk about the corner just above my ear. So it's kind of like, "How do I talk about the world without talking about the world, in a way?"

LZ: On that note: the world talking about the world, talking about the world without talking about the world.

David Zwirner

JW: I just want to say I'm so grateful that we got to sit here. I'm like, "I adore you, and I am your fan. I support your work."

JOH: I'm such a fan. It's actually crazy, because it's also so validating. Thank you for inviting me, too, because I love art people. It's like you guys have better brains.

JW: There's nothing, for me, there's nothing better. All the success, for me, is just about knowing other creative people. That's where I feel so much I'm so grateful to be where I am. Because I get to get access to people like Jeremy, I'm so excited...

LZ: And spend time with them.

JOH: I have a real question for you, because I'm thinking about doing something differently soon. I think I want to write a novel. And I was wondering what... You seem to have a brain that jumps around a lot, too, but you've stayed pretty in the art lane. What other space of creation might you go to, if you were to go?

JW: I had Hollywood. Hollywood knocked and invited me. They've come around, but I really asked myself why I would do it. And I think for a while I was just like, "Oh, I'm in LA, and I just want to feel important in Los Angeles." And I was like, "That's not a good reason to work in this field." I'm just really interested in sculpture and art. And it's like I just accept that it's a small field. I'm like... Yeah, but it's just I'm really obsessed with art. And I surrender to it. It's just whatever. It's like I'm taking out ambition. I'm just inserting intention, and that's where it's leading me.

JOH: I love that. That's really right.

LZ: Alright, guys, thank you so much. That was amazing. Thank you.

JW: Thank you, Lucas.

LZ: *Dialogues* is produced by David Zwirner. You can find out more about the artists on this series by going to davidzwirner.com/dialogues. And if you liked what you heard, please rate and review us on Apple podcasts or wherever you listen. It really does help other people discover the show. I'm Lucas Zwirner. Thanks so much for listening. And I hope you join us again next time.