

Poetic Reciprocities

S. Reason 26.05.21¹

*Perhaps the most influential rhetorical incorporation of perspectival reciprocity was recovered by Tânia Stolze Lima (1999) from the Tupinamba of eastern Brazil: when a peccary looks at a peccary, it sees a human being, but when it looks at a human being, it sees another peccary.*²

We must accomodate the strangeness of the world. It will not do, to preemptively domesticate, assimilate, and categorize according to the schemas of the known.

It will not do, this terror of the tendrils of the real. The alien must be brought within, and accomodated, with all the philoxenia of Menelaus, so patient after Paris. Such acts of courage Keats called negative capability, in contrast with a walled-off ego.

For it's foreigners, and foreign winds, which bring the news. And it's the news to which we must adapt ourselves, and come into accord, or else be swept away by Nature's currents.

(Part of you can survive this day. Part of you cannot.)

It is the alien-eye view which returns us to a wilder vision, freed from neotenous re-cognizing. The Formalists' *Ostranenie*; Brecht's *Verfremdung*—even Hegel's *Entäußerung*, since all alterity springs from common ancestry, river-riven rivals, bosom foes for brothers, Shem & Shaun as Cain & Abel.

(Complexification: a two-step dance. Integritys differentiated; differences integrated.)

Much of what was new, in 20th C literature, was addressed either explicitly to alien minds; or claimed to be the received transmission of such minds. "Language is a virus from outer space... Language is a pursuer of covert aims."

Modernism was a product of perspectivalism, and "primitive" import. The Long 19th Century, which we still inhabit, is defined by the West's titrated exposure to a thousand forms of Otherness.

The English Romantics, identifying with the birds, climbed great peaks to view the world from avian vantage. They came to see themselves as birds—as creatures caught in currents, riding those currents—and brought about a quasi-daoist conversion of consciousness. They wandered,

¹ Informed in conversation with Christian Bök at Uncle Lou, NYC 26.5.16.

² R. Wagner, "The reciprocity of perspectives," 2018.

windblown by forces which had traveled over oceans to reach & greet them—from Aeolean kingdoms, carrying scents of the summery south across the channel.

*(And should the chosen guide Be nothing better than a wandering cloud, I cannot miss my way.)*³

Man has always taken Animal as challenge and chance; as rival subjectivity and alternate intelligence; as a source of critique and a resource of examples. Too often their alien forms have been assimilated into our schemas and schemes—Christianity purchasing its “world-brother” at the cost of homocentrism. “The wolf, the snake, the hog, not wanting in me.”⁴ Was it negative capability which the Sioux practiced when they clad themselves in wolf hides, and watched the wolf, and channeled the wolf, stalking bison? Was it negative capability which the Tolai of Papua New Guinea call *pire wuo*, and the anthropologist Wagner translated as a reciprocity of perspectives?

To secure a more holistic conception of world, there must be an exchange of viewpoints; not just the peccary, viewed from the eyes of a man, but man, viewed from the eyes of a peccary, in a radical theory of mind. The world must be allowed and welcomed in, in all its strangeness; and its presence will present a critique. Poets at their best are edge-dwellers, making themselves permeable to weak spots in the Field.

The originary image of the English Romantic tradition—Blake’s universe in a grain of sand—is a scalar reciprocity today taught to children as *Horton Hears a Who*. The Earth might be mere atom in a vast & unfathomable macro. Advances in lenscraft were crucial. A drop of water, considered through Hooke’s magnifying glass, was made Cumbria’s Windermere.

Reciprocities came to define the Age of Wonder, in which Romantic minds were reared. Herschel, who discovered Uranus—that “new planet,” which swam inside of all mankind’s ken—believed the Moon inhabited. Peering through his scope (as Byron did) it was possible to look at the Moon and see Earth—and to imagine a man on the Moon, looking at Earth, and seeing the Moon.

Meanwhile imperial Britain spann’d, & connected by network,⁵ all the world by way of rail, trade route, and telegraph. A New World had been discovered—indeed, many new worlds; and each reshaped the European imagination. Melville’s polytheism—a postmodern precursor—came out of *Typee*’s peep at Polynesia. Colonized cultures, economically and militarily dominated, won their wending way within memetic mainstreams—even against the obstructing & assimilatory forces of Orientalism. The mere existence of alternate cosmologies comprised an implicit critique of Anglo & Anglican concepts. The indigenous Iroquois—as much as the alien Greeks of Homer’s

³ Wordsworth, *Prelude*, 1805.

⁴ Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” 1856.

⁵ Whitman, “Passage to India,” 1871.

demesne—inspired America’s mass remodel of Western Civ. Buddhist and Hindu concepts—including emptiness & non-grasping—circulated among the Boston Brahmins a century before California zen.

(Periphery and capital, caught, in incessant co-creation.)

Even time was developing reciprocities, as archival technologies accelerated across Europe. Musical composers of the late Enlightenment were reared on 16th C sheet music: it was impossible not to develop a reciprocal conception of their own work as viewed and received by future generations.

(Without such reciprocities, an avant-garde is unthinkable.)

The “armchair traveler” was a commonplace of the 19th century, able to vicariously visit new worlds through travelogue. The armchair traveler remains a commonplace of our Long 19th C, albeit in photographic forms. Similarly, one might (then or now) be a time-traveler among the “realms of gold.”⁶ Writing, etched in stone, could travel through time, the mineral weathered but the chiseled relief robust and readable.

(OZYMANDIAS!)

Beatniks, to their credit, took note—and imagined themselves primitives “of a future culture unknown.” Hutton’s 18th C discovery of deep time allowed Kerouac to contrast his own seaward, sea-slipping solipsism with the solidity of the billion-year-old rocks, atop of which he meditated. Ginsberg, in a refractory period, was visited by a time-traveling, interdimensional Blake; a decade later, “Howl” transcribed America’s Satanic mills to Biblical terminology, recording hypermodernity in Hebraic register, so strangeness became familiar & all familiars strange.

To be silent upon a peak in Darien: an explorer, as Keats imagined Cortez; and not conquistadors, like the actual Balboa. The first thought is not the best thought, and knee-jerk response is no true apprehension. It is a slow remodeling of mind, we must be after, towards our contact with the real.

⁶ Keats, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” 1816.