

**Field Nocturne 34**  
**A Bard's High View**

“Your bard’s highview, avis on valley! I would like to hear you burble to us in strict conclave, purpurando, and without too much italiote interfairance, what you know in petto about our sovereign beingstalk, Tonans Tomazeus, O dite!”<sup>1</sup>

Let us continue from the end of the previous essay. Animals hear, see, taste touch and sniff. They are not robots, but neither do they name these activities. What I was doing in the end of the previous essay was discussing the activities we name as these five sense without, so to speak, letting us think in terms of the usual names. Are we looking for a dog’s eye view? In a certain sense, yes. Bear with me: I would have you fantasize with me towards a position or a poosition which would enable us to sort out the cultural warps of both phenomenology and animal psychology, and the next essay turns to the possibility of lifting the author of *Desire and Distance* into the ethos of a culture of “Desire Undistanced”, the title of that 35<sup>th</sup> Field Nocturne. This, of course, is the major difficulty that lurked within our enterprise from the beginning, and I have twisted around it as best I could. We are back, I should say, in the problem posed in Field Nocturne 5, “First Exercises in Visual Self-Appropriation”, where the position was the focus and the strategy was eye-exercises, and then back further to the task set in Cantower 9 of a life-climb to “Position, Poosition, Protopossession”. That being said, it should be obvious to you that we are way out of the zone both of elementary reflection and of haute vulgarization. And we are not in the mood of *Scientific American*, which really fails to enter either zone.

Granted all this mess, let us get back to our dog: the dog as a solution to a

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<sup>1</sup>James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 504.

problem of **self-preservation** in some odd sense of that word.<sup>2</sup> We use the word *alive*, and we hold on to that name as we putter forward in a fantasy that is a lift towards the serious science of animal psychology. The mood I would have you cultivate is the mood that lifted me forward into the *Cantowers*, caught in the title of *Cantower 2*:

“Sunflowers, Speak to us of Growing.” But now think in a reverse way: we are, rather, to imagine that we are inventing the sunflower of the dog. Nor is it just a matter of imagination: there is a massive amount of work being done precisely in that direction. Think, for a start, about the thingies running round in Jurassic Park. Now let us re-read a piece of the end of the previous essay.

“The technology has to coordinate loose aggregates of a spread of different inputs. Inputs of differing characteristics are best coordinated from the surface inwards, so patterned surface variations are a way to go. Am I talking here about robots playing soccer, or rabbits running from dogs? Keep the two in tandem as best you can. So, you need e.g. a sound-response system and a light-response system, conveniently located: bilateral is good, but quadrilateral is a possibility. Furthermore, the response system cannot just be surface, since the effective response must be somehow integral: the robot or the organism need to perform integrally.. Surface reception has to be, to some convenient extent, centralized.”

We are interested now, not in film realism, but in the invention of the dog, or something vaguely like a dog: thus, for example, having four earth-points of locomotive balance. Our interest lifts us into the problem of the first sentence of that paragraph: coordinating loose aggregates. One can do quite well in robotics without bringing in loose aggregates, which pull in discomfiting degrees of freedom. Still, as inventors we suspect we need them.

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<sup>2</sup>In chapter one of *The Shaping of the Foundations* I used the word *autonomic* to designate activities beyond the *synnomic* activities of physics and chemistry. It is worth noting in passing here that there is a growing literature on what is called *autopoiesis*. The empirical work associated with it is a push in the right direction, but there is a muddled superstructure regarding cognition that needs to be sifted out.

But let us slip past that aspect of the size of the problem to envisage the conveniently-centralized set (might it be a loose aggregate at some levels, yet a hierarchy or a heterarchy as we move to the centre or centres?). Part of that - loosely, perhaps - centralization is the densified, compactified, light-reception structures.<sup>3</sup>

Densified, compactified? I am thinking here of what I might generally call an *infolding of matter*. You may, indeed, quite spontaneously jump to imagine the helices of Crick and Watson, or the antics of DNA and RNA in Cells. Yes, that is a way to go: that is a way of inventing the dog. Somehow we need to get stuff closer. That is pretty evident when we think of responses-controls to spatially-distributed (no to speak of time-distributed over billions of light-years!) sources of light. Perhaps nano-technology and quantum-twists may help? Now, there's a couple of suggestive ideas, as we put forward with invention-possibilities. Of course, it is well to humbly remember that those nano-moves and quantum leaps were there 13 billion years ago. Maybe we have a quite long journey of understanding and technical twisting to do - or turning, as in the new 27 kilometer accelerator - before we get a response system that will wag at one end and mouth-water at the other at the complex and correlated reception of patterned light from a steak.

We return now to the point made at the end of the previous essay: I have not mentioned seeing in the text, and I mention it now so that you advert to our dodging of our own common sense. We have, with my nudging, been thinking of sets of receptors. We have been imagining an invention of them: not then by a cloning of a Dolly but, as it were, by working from the ground up. And suppose that working does get to the required complexity, a complexity of infolding? Then we are somehow bringing matter closer to itself - a terrible pun would have me say, bringing matter to a head! - in our

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<sup>3</sup>This introduces the topic of the enormously complex structures and substructures of seeing, within the neuro-heterarchy. Contemporary neurodynamics considers the brain as a modular distributed system, a complex non-linear hierarchy for which W.S.McCulloch invented the name *heterarchy* in "A heterarchy of values determined by the topology of nervous nets", *Bulletin of Mathematics and Biophysics*,(1945) 7, 89-93.

effort to invent a matter-structure that is self-preservative.

Now there is one obvious property that is needed for this self-preservativeness, this self-protectiveness. The integral structure must have escape patterns to handle destructive over-loading: patterns of physico-chemical acts that feedback and that generate locomotive responses.

We, the community of inventors can push on here, with our densifications and complexifications, getting closer to our dream but also getting matter closer to itself, in closer forms of its sub-structures. So, amazingly, after decades or millennia - independent of Dolly-processes - we find a complexity of closeness that we can talk of as receptive discomfort. A thumb-tack in a car tire and in a dog's foot in a deflating reality in both cases, but the dog is discomforted in a way that the car is not. At a certain complexity of densified formed aggregates, matter reaches a strange presence to itself that we have come to name *consciousness*.

Does this, to some extent, take the mystery out of *consciousness* for you? I would hope so. It is not that it takes the wonder out of the name: rather it helps locate it as an X, an unknown. What is consciousness? It is that which is understood when the layered infoldings of physical and chemical and botanical activities are understood as coming to that peculiar infolding, patterning, that brings energy into a closeness that is subtler than plant irritability.

But it does take the myth out of consciousness. Consciousness in the animal is a great non-understood invention for self-preservation: a revealing to the animal of local discomfort or incompatibility. "Time to scamper away?": that is an anthropomorphic way of putting it. For one thing, there are words in the putting of it, whereas the animal just scampers, and if there is noise-making it is not word-noise, but a species thing of animal signaling.

We may get to that question of noise-making and word-making in a later *Field Nocturne*, but we need here a final pause in relation to the substructure that we call seeing or vision. It is a substructure within the organism: is it an organ? "By these

insights the parts become known as organs.”<sup>4</sup> What are these insights? They are insights named right through **Neuroscience**, and further insights of the scientific community about the amazingly complex heterarchic brain-patterns<sup>5</sup> that “make up” vision and seeing. Finishing the sentence begun thus “ ... the parts become known as organs” describes heuristically the communal activities of generations of scientists that are to properly explain the complex sub-structures that we began describing as hearing, seeing, etc. But the final pause gets its focus in the question, Has this musing, or the long musing to which it points, liberated you further from mythic thinking about seeing the world, in particular lifting to a new level the meaning of *Field Nocturne 5*, “First Exercises in Visual Self-Appropriation”? Are you, there fore, a little further on the road to “the bard’s highview”, the perspective of a **comeabout** person?

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<sup>4</sup>A quotation from **study**: *Insight* 464[489].

<sup>5</sup>See note 3 above.