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“Perception Has Got to Have a Body!”

Madeline Gins

If the thinking field of the deafblind person were absolutely dissimilar to that of his or her fellows, s/he would have no means of imagining what they think.

A network for retaining possible alignments might come about with the writing of this.

The key term would be *to cleave*, taken simultaneously as “to adhere” and “to [be] cut apart.” In order for something to be able to be thought of, or for an object to be perceived, something (some event) will need to be adhered to, no matter how briefly; and coupled with this, for the sake of other thoughts or perceptions to come, so that there can exist the characteristic condition of receptivity, there will have to be a cutting apart from this to which there had been the need to adhere.

Within gravity, within inertia, within the cell, the synapse, the ambiguity, biological or otherwise, I hunt (and so must s/he) for, among other specificities, *that which cleaves within the cleft*, so that we might, for example, yes, learn to live to be our own posterity!

On the subject of the voice, all these questions were put to me at once: “Where does it feel as though your voice is coming from? As this is arising in you does this feel as though it were coming not from one place but many? And what in the world would be the qualitative feel of this to you ... would you try to say?”

Voice is a ball that only collects into the being of one in the course of something’s being said — a ball made up of nothing but its own rolling out. Or voice is a precipitate. Or is this a chain of precipitates of ... the whole of my movement? I make it out to be a participate that is practically a “photographic” report of mindbody. Voice comes — from head to foot — out the fingers of the right hand, with a lot of talk hanging around the wrist and a light march of it down through the whole length of the middle of the forearm; but lately I have tried to connect this to that pitifully under-used apparatus, my voice box.

For me, to force some sound out into the regular voice-world is a sorry affair. Where to aim? I have but the remotest idea of where to aim, I have no means of checking up on myself in this. Still this remains one dimension I’d like to be able to pull out of myself.

How do I move? I can move only by eating up or dissolving where I am. I (anyone) pull in with a bright gulp what is to come next. When walking forward, I also snake along three parallel, horizontal planes. I cast standpoints and send out runners or tendrils of what I call *forming spacetime*. Following this, projective circumferencings happen with me at every level, and *on all or any scale*. All with quirks of their own. Everywhere proceeds as its own tame whirlwind as *then but spreaded blind perception*

quirks continually sudden. All these squirmings and divings add up to what spacetime is. What is spacetime?

With the bending and exploding of frameworks, forms of self-preservation suggest themselves. Some shapes hold things apart. I, the maker of these shapes, am subjected to, and must act in accordance with, proddings from near and far as to what to name them. Then a shape takes for and as itself, shivers and sits to be as open as a mouth in roaring laughter. Sometimes hidden down far along within this lengthening of a designated volume, I glimpse a small pile of nearly twigs; no hand can reach this.

What if seeing and its basis could be separated? Most people would think that not possible. For them, nothing could be more counterintuitive. I'm reminded of that chart made up of but a single dot that was even so identified as "two or three dots [that were] unable to be separated." Might there be an underlying basis for seeing, and, if so, would this be detachable from the actual seeing of things? What I understand (and work with) as the basis of seeing consists of mindbody in its apportioning of itself and the rest of the world out into a thoroughly proprioceptive-kinaesthetic (and tactile) graphicality.

It is the nature of the thinking field to move and instigate behavior using points of position and of supposition. Here is a world of complete tentativity.

I myself am supporting evidence for the ultimate separability of seeing and its basis. This yields, submerged and compact, an accommodating layer, one come out of extension, stretched over itself. This — from one discrete end of it out to the other — serves both as the primary instance of distance and the means by which all other distances will then be measured, envisaged.

I can keep a dot marked "head" apart from that marked "foot." It is out across upon the "living canvas" that these stay separate. Knowing these discretenesses and their locales to be the stretched-out bases (blank receiving areas) for seeing ... something's taking place upon these bit by bit ... I sometimes wish for the construction of a great new visual organ whose interior would be a spherical handball court with a mark-leaving ball that, bouncing everywhere I'd need it to, would turn any spot it touched into something I'd be seeing. The ball *cleaves* to the wall, then bouncing back off it is *cleaved* apart from it (the wall) only then to be made to head for yet a new spot for *cleaving*. The ball in this image is hardly a ball at all, or one only provisionally, always more of an amassing than a mass. If *cleaving* could amass in place — and I can think it can — why, it would be just the "ball" for this.

What is *cleaving* or what is it to *cleave*? What may be thought to be sandwiched between the two senses of "to *cleave*" (to join and to be separated) is the "material" of thought itself, conventionally held to be "transparent" or "transparency itself." A medium that is perceiving texture may be said to be formed within and between the occurrent juxtaposings of the two contradictory actions of to *cleave*. This medium is the sum of the actions composing it; the result of all *cleaving* that, as it takes place, has formed and is forming whatever is in the offing. The habit of referring to this medium as "transparent" causes it to be erroneously thought of, even if only ever so slightly, as an object rather than as the set of actions which it is. After all, there exists the expectation, indeed slight, that whatever is transparent will at least have to it, if nothing else, a front and a back; but, just as when it comes to the ocean, which is also hardly merely an object, we find no readily locatable front or back, there is neither simply a front nor simply a back to the perceiving texture or the medium that constitutes thought. If the ocean as a whole cannot be spoken of as being transparent neither should the perceiving

process be. “Action constituting itself as ‘see-through’” might be a better way to refer to the characteristic “transparency” of thought. Although people may guess that it is by means of *cleaving* that they think and perceive, they cannot directly perceive this to be so. Even so, I’m told, the process, carried out in the see-through mode, manages to bring about a world that has to it various degrees of opacity. Some opaque objects will be shiny.

The forms I harken to are schemas of what might be there (and will be again) and of what has happened to me. They are pictures of schemas of pictures. I break my head against the images that don’t form every time.

To be transitive is to have a carry-over onto something else. Thinking, I find, works as a field that is all transitive. So thought commands a body all spread out in transitivity.

“The best way to draw a line is to do it with your eyes closed!”

“I now declare myself to be carrying that over into this.”

“Perception has got to have a body!” I cried.

[Excerpted from John Varley, *The Persistence of Vision* (Dial Press, 1978). Reprinted courtesy of the author.]

The Persistence of Vision

John Varley

Afterwards, we all trooped outside, except the cleanup crew, and took a shower beneath a set of faucets that gave out very cold water... then we went into the dome.

It was warm inside, warm and dark. Light entered from the passage to the dining room, but it wasn't enough to blot out the stars from the lattice of triangular panes overhead. It was almost like being out in the open.

Pink quickly pointed out the positional etiquette within the dome. It wasn't hard to follow, but I still tended to keep my arms and legs pulled in close so I wouldn't trip someone by sprawling into a walk space.

My misconceptions got me again. There was no sound but the soft whisper of flesh against flesh, so I thought I was in the middle of an orgy. I had been at them before, in other communes, and they looked pretty much like this. I quickly saw that I was wrong, and only later found out I had been right. In a sense.

What threw my evaluations out of whack was the simple fact that group conversation among these people had to look like an orgy. The much subtler observation that I made later was that with a hundred naked bodies sliding, rubbing, kissing, caressing, all at the same time, what was the point in making a distinction? There was no distinction.

I have to say that I use the noun "orgy" only to get across a general idea of many people in close contact. I don't like the word, it is too ripe with connotations. But I had these connotations myself at the time, so I was relieved to see it that it was not an orgy. The ones I had been to had been tedious and impersonal, and I hoped for better from these people.

Many wormed their way through the crush to get to me and meet me. Never more than one at a time; they were constantly aware of what was going on and were waiting their turn to talk to me. Naturally, I didn't know it then. Pink sat with me to interpret the hard thoughts. I eventually used her words less and less, getting into the spirit of tactile seeing and understanding. No one felt they really knew me until they had touched every part of my body, so there were hands on me all the time. I timidly did the same.

What with all the touching, I quickly got an erection, which embarrassed me quite a bit. I was berating myself for being unable to keep sexual responses out of it, for not being able to operate on the same intellectual plane I thought they were on, when I realized with some shock that the couple next to me was making love. They had been doing it for the last ten minutes, actually, and it had seemed such a natural part of what was happening that I had known it and not known it at the same time.

No sooner had I realized it than I suddenly wondered if I was right. Were they? It was very slow and the light was bad. But her legs were up, and he was on top of her, that much I was sure of. It was foolish of me, but I really had to know. I had to find out what the hell I was in. How could I give the proper social responses if I didn't know the situation?

They were making love, in the sense that he was penetrating her. They were also deeply involved with each other. Their hands fluttered like butterflies all over each other, filled with meanings I couldn't see or feel. But they were being touched by and touching many other people around them. They were talking to all these people, even if the message was as simple as a pat on the forehead or arm.

Pink noticed where my attention was. She was sort of wound around me, without really doing anything I would have thought of as provocative. I just couldn't decide. It seemed so innocent, and yet it wasn't.

“That's (--) and (--),” she said, the parentheses indicating a series of hand motions against my palm. I never learned a sound word as a name for any of them but Pink, and I can't reproduce the bodytalk names they had. Pink reached over, touched the woman with her foot, and did some complicated business with her toes. The woman smiled and grabbed Pink's foot, her fingers moving.

“(--) would like to talk with you later,” Pink told me. “Right after she's through talking to (--). You met her earlier, remember? She says she likes your hands.”

Now this is going to sound crazy, I know. It sounded pretty crazy to me when I thought of it. It dawned on me with a sort of revelation that her word for talk and mine were miles apart. She could read words or emotions in every twitch of my muscles, like a lie detector. Sound, to her, was only a minor part of communication. It was something she used to speak to outsiders. Pink talked with her whole being.

I didn't have the half of it, even then, but it was enough to turn my head entirely around in relation to these people. They talked with their bodies. It wasn't all hands, as I'd thought. Any part of the body in contact with any other was communication, sometimes a very simple and basic sort, think of McLuhan's light bulb as the basic medium of information — perhaps saying no more than “I am here.” But talk was talk, and if conversation evolved to the point where you needed to talk to another with your genitals, it was still a part of the conversation. What I wanted to know was what were they saying? I knew, even at that dim moment of realization, that it was much more than I could grasp. Sure, you're saying. You know about talking to your lover with your body as you make love. That's not such a new idea. Of course it isn't, but think how wonderful that talk is even when you're not primarily tactile-oriented. Can you carry the thought from there, or are you doomed to be an earthworm thinking about sunsets?

While this was happening to me, there was a woman getting acquainted with my body. Her hands were on me, in my lap when I felt myself ejaculating. It was a big surprise to me, but to no one else. I had been telling everyone around me for many minutes, through signs they could feel with their hands, that it was going to happen. Instantly, hands were all over my body. I could almost understand them as they spelled tender

thoughts to me. I got the gist, anyway, if not the words. I was terribly embarrassed for only a moment, then it passed away in the face of the easy acceptance. It was very intense. For a long time I couldn't get my breath.

The woman who had been the cause of it touched my lips with her fingers. She moved them slowly, but meaningfully I was sure. Then she melted back into the group. "What did she say?" I asked Pink.

She smiled at me. "You know, of course. If you'd only cut loose from your verbalizing. But generally, she meant 'How nice for you.' It also translates as 'How nice for me.' And 'me,' in this sense, means all of us. The organism." I knew I had to stay and learn to speak.