

The Critical Gaze

Rupert M Loydell

1. COMPREHENSION

'The future has been over for a while.'
- Eugenio Montale

I've been finding it ever so difficult.
Fragmentary signals, isolated gestures,
cries and whispers all resist attempts
to unravel meaning. Back I go, pushing
and dragging phrases into patterns
which are then tested to destruction.

Making use of the found and discarded
is an important part of autobiography;
solitude not solidarity is the normal,
syntax is no longer in the driving seat,
no-one is named and names do not seem
to be attached to anyone in particular.

I find it difficult to escape repetition.
Theologians stress order and principle,
while philosophers maintain either that
life obeys some rules or that it does not.
But you're wondering what became of
comprehension, aren't you? Ghosts

soon begin speaking, explaining things.
Understand motivation and purpose
are only diversions, truth and desire
fall between reality and imagination.
Those who invent a recognisable past
legitimise only certain ways of seeing.

2. THE CRITICAL GAZE

'You cannot be free if you are contained within a fiction.'
- Julian Beck, *The Life of the Theatre*

Theory is a place of circumstantial reality
which doesn't actually exist. At its core
are questions about how we read others
and how we are read by them. We can all

misremember through multiple voices and manifold perspectives, burrowing into sweet, dark places of fecundity, novels and paintings and architecture, even poems, making them our own and writing parasitic criticism before laying little translucent eggs, pollinating novels to make more novels, turning the breath of the living into irrational knowledge.

The critical gaze is tearing us apart; we learn to be by simply being, unfolding our personae, mapping and re-mapping the self onto others, onto art or literature. Being taught in this way feels forbidden, the remove makes it only sweeter but it is another idea that helps the reader understand what could be going on. Ignore the aside in an earlier chapter, the norms of chronology and narrative; after all, parataxis, chance, fragmentation are how many of us experience the world and like our reading to reflect that. I haven't read it all yet but as well as being obsessed I don't pursue expected lines of thought.

Image and information overload lack depth or meaning, are working differently, find readers in the wreckage of biography, dread and excitement. Both dystopia and utopia signify nothing which has not happened yet; everything changes when the world can only be read by considering webs of associations, connections, connotations, perpetual motion occasionally broken up by over-zealous poets, jagged editing and fractured time. Reviewers suggest that reading is not working: people are interested in moments, places and their responses to and memories of them. There is an absence throughout the book, missing rather than fractured time. Improvisation is a narrative shaped like itself by narrative shaped itself by chance in the middle of the moment. Everyone has just left this mediated and constructed fiction, wandered off to track down lost locations, looking for obscure references, a perpetual state of mind.

There are many costume changes, sets can be

dismantled overnight; these experiences are easier to talk about afterwards. In some ways, you are manipulating reality, as you continue to attempt to grasp something no one can understand: fictional real life fiction breaking the rules using different rules. It is unclear if we will ever get truth bolted together, is all about perspective, about the angle that you're looking from as we fall into language. If the actual mechanism is hard to discern don't bother reading from beginning to end. Discernment still facilitates the process of interpretation, expression and communication, allows readers to pretend they understand.

3. SENSATION

I want things to only happen
when the world around me changes,

can sense I'm made of the same materials
as our planet, that we both need caring for

as well as thinking machines to document
the multiple dimensions between inner selves

and the outside world, create a highly original
and comprehensive overview of forms of body.

What are these types of energy that we sense?
How does the brain interpret the information

it receives? I have always been interested
in predictions, want things to only happen

when they occur. It gets more fascinating
and much weirder, is one thing to allow that

there might be an alternative perspective
on colour, but quite another to accept

that colour doesn't actually exist outside
our brains. What does it mean to be alive?

Processing incoming information is known
as perception, the brain actively collects

and organises data, regulates and conditions.
Signals from the outside world are interpreted

and layered with prior expectations and emotions.
This is the seat of all knowledge and personality,

the home of your innermost thoughts, the place
where you experience everything. Sensations

provide perceptual links to the world, allow us
to write the autobiography of each other's lives.

I can feel the morning breeze, taste aniseed,
sense the intuited evidence of invisible worlds.

4. INEVITABLE

'In a sense, it might be seen as inevitable that an artistic
experiment entirely devoted to the celebration of the
here and now stubbornly resists its own immortalization
as a work of art.'

– Tilman Baumgärtel, *Now and Forever*

You can't pretend accidents don't play their part.
In fact, the pivoting joints were organised using
calculations based on the exploitation of bounce
in relation to phenomenology and tape delay.

Writers take possession of accidents and errors
and stitch them together, suspend the presence
of the world for a brief moment, make it closer
to temporal rather than narrative experience.

You can't pretend faith doesn't play its part.
Transcendence lives in proximity to doubt
open within circles activated with a kind of
psychological awakening to their own being.

Perhaps the fierce wind that created everything
is God, perhaps it was a final attempt to obtain
perpetual motion using only gravity and inertia?
All the calculations were checked by an engineer

but you can't pretend chance won't play its part.
The stories we tell are why the number of words
is always growing as time to read is running out.
Everyone plays with repetition and difference,

consumes the now just as they do everything else.
In our world, things acquire meaning not through
their own individual properties but through the
remaining fragments of perception they become.

You can't pretend we know exactly what is what.
I am always surprised that this voice belongs
to me, wherever I find the words. Poetry is more
a name for process than a prospectus for belief.

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Rupert Loydell is the editor of *Stride* and a contributing editor to *International Times*. He has many books of poetry in print, including *Dear Mary*, *The Return of the Man Who Has Everything*, *Wildlife* and *Ballads of the Alone*, all published by Shearsman, who also published *Encouraging Signs*, a book of essays, articles and interviews. He has co-authored many collaborative works, and edited anthologies for Knives Forks & Spoons Press, Shearsman, and Salt. He also writes about post-punk music, pedagogy, poetry and film for academic journals and books.