

Follow-up 2 (Interplay 3)--A Shared Journey (exploring the play between the one & the many)

Observing others responding tends to evoke responses of our own. We learn to see and feel beauty through lenses focused by others. Our connection with them and the connection with what's represented can't really be separated. At the risk of redundancy, the information provided by observation and representation can *inform* our sense of connection, as well as our attitude. It's a mistake to think of information, feeling and sense of relationship as separate things.

Whether in one's own backyard or the most remote wilderness, feelings of *wonder* and *awe* can express a sense of connection with something larger, basic to life, though we can as easily call it inspiration, creative spirit, or a thousand other names. The world in a drop of pond-water under a microscope may evoke it, as well as the vast night sky, and most living things in between, including birds and humans.

Like many other animals, we learn from observation, direct experience and play (all three alive and well at the refuge). When we notice something beautiful, or simply incredible (you have to see it to believe it), or even dangerous, our first instinct may be purely emotional, but in practically the same breath we seek to share the awareness. This urge to share (particularly with people we feel "close" to) is so basic, we hardly notice it as something separate.

Humans are by nature social creatures, a fact reflected in our play and games, where bonding and working together are often the central aspects of the experience. Along these lines, we learn a considerable amount from *example*—experiencing how others feel, respond, act & think—in our immediate vicinity, as well as across time & space.

Even in immediate experience, our mirror neurons don't necessarily know the difference between what we perceive others experiencing & our own experience. Even where we know the difference, as between immediate reality & artistic representation, feelings, attitudes, thoughts, & even *ways* of thinking spill across between maker, character & reader or "audience."

Just as a thought is not located in a single neuron, nor a feeling in a single localized molecule, thought & feeling themselves are not generally contained within a single individual. By its very nature, thought jumps across from one to another, while feeling is inherently "infectious," triggering new feelings (not necessarily the same) among those in the vicinity.

Something similar may be said for the most basic communication of all—that between person & environment. Although we may *think* ourselves separate, the perceived (& presumably actual) relationship is fundamentally joined. We don't actually see the world "out there," for example, but *see* it "in here," in our own mind, or wherever the witness is. Scientifically, too, we seem to be in the world, but the world is also in us—whether in perception, the circulation of the air in our bodies, or the molecules of our substance.

Closeness to nature or land may be fostered by solitary personal experience developed in natural places (even a weedy city lot), but can frequently also be attributed to particular other persons who cared enough to share their own sense of the value found in nature. We notice even a stranger's drawn attention, following the line of sight (or hearing) to what has drawn it. A group like a family (also team, squad and band) can become like a single creature with multiple centers, eyes, ears, perspectives, points of view on what's around.

It's a fact that companions grow closer to each other connecting with nature together. Each may notice more, thanks to the others. I suspect each often feels more, too, as the center of awareness shifts outside individual brains and bodies, with each potentially less absorbed in his or her own thoughts simply by keeping track of where the others are. Like a pair or flock of birds, the group stands ready to react together.

This is more a complement to the profound personal relation that can develop with nature in solitude than a contradiction. Whether John Muir in the high country or Aldo Leopold walking the Sand County hills with his dog, the urge to share their experience will catch up with them later, whether inviting companions to come along later or putting pen to paper. The shared aspect is particularly clear in Aldo's case, where it was particularly obvious that the whole family shared the education received at their Shack along the Wisconsin River.

On the surface, Aldo was the trained forester, ornithologist, ecologist, land- and game-management expert. Look more deeply, however, and you find his wife Estella's land-sense, too, and his father's, each of the five offspring's, and his dog Gus'. Never mind for now the immeasurable contributions from co-workers, colleagues, students, and many others. The contributions for which know Leopold, his Shack ruminations and holistic ecological thought, were part of the family's development, as well as of his professional attention.

Even the book, *A Sand County Almanac*, was assembled and titled posthumously by his oldest son Luna, a noted expert on river dynamics. A second son, Starker, was one of the country's most respected wildlife experts, author of many books. Daughter Nina is an expert on prairie restoration. Son Carl, teaches botany at Cornell, while daughter Estella teaches paleo-botany at the University of Washington. (Or *taught*. They may all be retired by now, the way time flies for someone not keeping up.)

The point is they developed their interests, curiosity, wonder, pondering, and some tendency to expression sharing their weekend experiences together at the Shack, with their joined sense of work, play, exploration and discovery. They brought their instruments, and played games, too, inside and out. Driven inside there once during a summer storm, I saw how close together parents & offspring had to have been at times, like beavers in a den.

Proximity isn't necessary to entanglement, however, as literature, film and our other arts remind us. A work of art often transmits something of the spirit that inspired it. Writing, painting, photography, film, video documentary, music or a game can also evoke a sense of kinship with the makers who shared their experience in that form, the person providing the lens as well as the world "seen" through it. Our connection may be with John Muir's exaltations, Aldo Leopold's whole-system thinking, Ansel Adams' craftsmanship, as well as with a vicarious sense of the places portrayed.

Similarly, we *feel* with Rachel Carson, absorbing her attitude along with the more purely objective observations. The fact that manipulative advertising and propaganda exploit the same crossover deceptively shouldn't blind us to where this joining of fact and attitude is entirely appropriate, even from a rigorously scientific perspective.

Scientific method, objectivity of data, & rationality of process don't imply lack of either feeling or values. The idea that only data matters is inherently psychopathic. The fact that some quasi-psychopathic attributes may serve society is another matter, allowing a surgeon to respond clinically, for example. We make a relevant distinction between a therapeutic use & the same blade wielded "to see how it feels to scare &/or cut people."

The idea that scientists bear no responsibility outside the realm of accurate information is disconnected from reality, as well as from the nature of science. Some detachment from “immediate feelings” (as well as preconceptions) may be necessary, yes, but so is some respect for the feelings of others, and some feeling of one’s own for what is right, good, and true. It’s not a *this* or *that* situation, a choice between data & conclusions, information & attitude, immediate feeling & prior (or ulterior) ends.

First, one needs to notice & report accurately (a progressive process), with some informed humility acting as a restraint against premature degrees of belief & certainty. But then, however tentative or sure (that also being reported as accurately as one can), one tries to call things for what they are accordingly, teasing their real meaning out, which is where the greater scientists may be distinguished from others, by understanding more of the implications of the data, as well as the details of the dynamics. They may also be among the humblest, standing on the heads of giants.

The relationship between the singular & the shared seems to be as much of a mystery in science and mathematics as in poetry and the other arts. One of the things shared is the singularity of the process, in which not even the maker can say exactly “where it comes from” or “where it’s going.” We can say *creation occurs*, but we can’t pin down *what, wither, or why*. When you get right down to it, we can’t say what *we are, wither, or why*.

We can put all kinds of words to it, even so, when we’re so inclined. We can even map the geography, chemistry, anatomy, brain-pattern correlations, & other interlocking moving systems. We can describe a little of the history of the world’s body & voice, &/or our own, defined by what’s made, relationships, ideas, etc. without ever touching the stuff itself, or answering the simplest basic questions. Or can we? It seems we’re impelled to *try*.

The arts offer a variety of ways, each example both a bridge to something else & itself, known in the experience. The music is not the same as the score, however, while the main action of both drama & comedy takes place in the audience-performer overlap zone. In a game, the main action takes place in & between the players, as well as in their relationship with what’s represented or portrayed. The same may be said for the game of game design.

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