



THE POMAGELLO DOCUMENT:

A POSSIBLE BRIDGE TO ALDOUS HUXLEY'S PERCEPTUAL EXERCISES



Readers of the PROCEEDINGS OF ESTAR(SER) will already be aware of the considerable efforts made by various scholars, collectors, bibliophiles, and editors to sift the historicity of that peculiar body known as THE ORDER OF THE THIRD BIRD. Despite these labors, a great deal of uncertainty (and even some genuine confusion) persists concerning the nature and workings of this fugitive and filiating community—which would seem, at least in its modern incarnation, to function as a semi-clandestine association of histrionic aesthetes who convene to perform public and private rites of sustained attention to made things (often works of art). New documents bearing on the genesis, ideology, evolution, and practices of THE ORDER are continually coming to light, and we are pleased here to offer a sample of a striking find that surfaced recently in a Los Angeles archive. Details follow.

TEXT AND CONTEXT

The notable English writer-intellectual Aldous Huxley (1864-1963) is known to have taken a strong interest in meditative, mystical, and parapsychological practices. Was he associated with the Order of the Third Bird? The Editorial Committee of ESTAR(SER) has come into possession of new evidence in the form of the "Pomagello Document," privately purchased in 2013. A full account of this layered and complex document is beyond the scope of this brief introduction, but full publication can be expected in a forthcoming volume of the *Proceedings*. Of immediate import, however, are the fascinating and suggestive marginalia on this otherwise banal typescript letter, which appears in its substance to deal passingly with an insurance matter confronting the Huxleys in the spring of 1939. Most urgent for present purposes are the parallel lists scrawled in ink on the right side of the document. These appear to link the familiar tropes of Bird Practice (Encounter, Attending, Negation, Realizing) with four of the controversial eye exercises (Palming Swinging, Flashing, Shifting) originated by the reforming medical oculist William H. Bates (1860-1931), whose work Huxley promoted in his 1942 volume, *The Art of Seeing*. The precise relationship between these lists—and, indeed, between the Batesian methods and those of the Order more generally—remains ambiguous, and further work is needed. It would seem, however, that Huxley likely used Batesian exercises as a form of "training" preparatory to exigent, Bird-like exercises of long-form practical aesthesis. Works of art test the faculties of perception, sometimes perilously. One must prepare. A précis of these four Batesian techniques is offered overleaf.

NOTE: New information has come to light as we go to press, calling into question the validity of the document here discussed. A full airing of these matters is in press.

The Prudential

INSURANCE COMPANY OF AMERICA

EDWARD D. DUFFIELD, PRESIDENT

HOME OFFICE: NEWARK, N. J.

JAMES S. KENDALL, SUPERINTENDENT

POST BUILDING, WILSHIRE BOULEVARD AND BERENDO STREET

LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

NO. 2

April 18, 1939

Dear Mrs. Huxley:

I am in possession of your inquiry of Tuesday last, concerning 701 Amalfi Drive, Pacific Palisades. Upon review of Policy #006-3579, I see no contractual difficulties with the arrangement as presented. This should not be understood as a legal opinion on the matter, however.

Sincerely,

cc: rhn;jsk;Leg.

225
1500
125
223

337-1500 x 225
223 =

337/10/-

Encounter
Attending
Negotiating
Realizing
Palming
Swinging
Flashing?
Shining
Seeing
or
Seeing

IN RE

Attention!



FIGURE: A facsimile of the letter known as the "Pomagello Document," not part of the W. Cache. Provenance unestablished. (Version C, State 2; photo courtesy of Anaqui Seer).

PERCEPTUAL EXERCISES FROM *THE ART OF SEEING*

Locate a work of art and stand at a comfortable distance. Resisting the temptation to stare, let the eyes and the attention move constantly with a relaxed dynamism like that of a musician, dancer, or athlete. Give yourself several minutes for each exercise.

PALMING

"The eyes are closed and covered with the palms of the hands. To avoid exerting any pressure upon the eyeballs...the lower part of the palms should rest upon the cheek bones, the fingers upon the forehead." Relax the eyes and imagine blackness.

SWINGING

Hold up a finger between yourself and the work. Swing the torso back and forth, keeping upper body, head and eyes in alignment. *"One just 'lets the world go by' without caring, without even making any effort to perceive what it is that is going by....Such a holiday from the self is extremely restful."*

FLASHING

Stand sideways with respect to the work. Glance at it, as if in flirtation, then look away. Repeat. *"Flashing may be described as the antithesis of staring... one glances quickly at [the work] (flashes it), then closes the eyes and remembers what has been sensed in the course of this rapid dart into the unknown."*

SHIFTING (ANALYSIS)

"It is upon this small-scale shifting of eyes and mind that continuous, concentrated and attentive seeing depends." Moving the focus of the gaze minutely from point to point, follow the outlines of the work, systematically discovering its features. In this way, gradually come to recognize what you are seeing.