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Sharpening the pencil

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Hector can you see me?
Phil Sawdon

An allegorical precession in the style of Hersholt's¹ translation of Hans Christian Anderson's Emperors New Clothes ...

To be read aloud

Hector can you see me?

Yes but I don't know how to draw even if I could find you.

Many years ago, during the time of the very long nights Hector² devoted his time to the consideration of his pen and ink drawings as instruments and precision tools, capable of identifying and fixing a position through a conceptual visual language that incorporated the dates of the astrological signs.

He became so convinced that he spent all his time. He had a drawing for everywhere. His contemporaries would say, "René Hector can be found in his drawing."

In the place where he worked, life was always. Many concepts travelled³ and many came, and among them one day arrived some more. They let it be known they made drawings, and they said they could draw with the most accurate and positional precision ever conceived or imagined in nonverbal form.

Not only were their lines fine and their coordinates uncommonly exact, but their drawings had a wonderful way of becoming invisible to anyone who was unsure of the point at which a drawing becomes something manifest.

"Those would be just the drawings for me," thought Hector. "If I read them I would be able to be certain of where I am. And I could know some thing. Yes, I certainly must read all of their material right away."

¹ http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/om_e.html 'Jean Hersholt (1886-1956) was a Danish actor who emigrated to the United States, making himself a career in Hollywood as from 1913. He was an avid collector of Andersen editions, and among other things he translated Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales and stories in the excellent edition *The Complete Andersen* (six volumes, New York 1949).'

² <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/ambi1.html> René Hector developed the theory of Hectorism. A theory of epistemological and personal reflexivity that states that all forms of creative practice arise and develop through the critical selection of small, innate variations that increase the practitioner's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce (personal reflexivity) memories of a creative process.

³ Mieke Bal, *Travelling concepts in the humanities: a rough guide*, Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2002

They set up supports and started to draw, though there seemed to be nothing. All the finest pens and the purest inks which they requested went into their traveling bags, while they worked the supports far into the night.

"I'd like to know how they are getting on" Hector thought, but he felt slightly uncomfortable when he remembered that those who were unsure and doubtful would not be able to see the drawings. It couldn't have been that Hector doubted himself, yet he thought he'd rather send someone else to see how things were going. Everyone knew about the drawings peculiar power, and all were impatient to find out how unsure and where their contemporaries might be.

"I'll ask Madame Pipe⁴ to see them," Hector decided. "She will be the best one to tell me how the material looks; for Madame Pipe is esteemed, certain, mindful and she knows a position in this field."

So Madame Pipe went to nowhere, the place where they sat working.

"Where am I?" she thought as her eyes flew wide open, "I can't see anything at all". But she did not think so.

They begged her to be so kind as to come nearer to approve and locate. They pointed to the empty supports, and Madame Pipe thought as hard as she could. She couldn't see anything, because there was nothing to see. "No one must know. It would never do to let on that I can't see any trace, not even a shadow⁵"

"Don't hesitate to tell us what you think," said one of the concepts.

Madame Pipe peered through her spectacles. "Such precision and assurance" I'll be sure to tell René Hector how certain the coordinates have been assigned and drawn."

"We're pleased to hear that," They proceeded to confirm all the dates of the astrological symbols and to account for the intricate relationships. Madame Pipe paid the closest attention, so that she could relay the content to René. And so she did.

⁴ Phil Sawdon, *Drawing with Prose*, http://www.slashseconds.org/index_02.php March 2006

⁵ 'It was through the service of that same earth that modelling portraits from clay was first invented by Butades, a potter of Sicyon, at Corinth. He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face, thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to the fire with the rest of his pottery; and it is said that his likeness was preserved in the Shrine of the Nymphs until the destruction of Corinth by Mummius.'

Pliny, *Natural History*: Books XXXIII-XXXV, ed. G.P.Goold, trans. H. Rackham, 1995 ed., (The Loeb Classical Library) (London: Harvard University Press, 1952), p.373, [153]

They at once asked for more and some more went into their travelling bags. Not a trace went onto the supports, though they worked as hard as ever.

René presently sent another to see how the work progressed and how soon it would be ready. The same thing happened that had happened to Madame Pipe. Le singe⁶ looked and looked, but as there was nothing Le singe couldn't see anything.

"Isn't it exact" they asked Le singe, as they displayed and described.

"I think I know I'm not obtuse, so it must be that I'm doubtful. That's strange. I mustn't let anyone find out, though." So he praised what he did not think he could see. To Hector Le singe said, "I was sure."

Everyone was talking, and René Hector wanted to see for himself. Accompanied by contemporaries, including Madame Pipe and Le singe, Hector set out to see. He found them. No thought in their head or nib in their pens.

"Without peer," chorused Madame Pipe and Le singe. "Just look René, what esteem!" They pointed at the emptiness, each supposing that the others could know and see stuff.

"What's this?" thought Hector. "Am I certain that I can't see anything?"

Am I other than where I think I am? Am I out of place? What date is it? It has my highest approval." And he nodded approbation at emptiness. No thing could make him say that he couldn't see any thing.

The contemporaries stared. Each saw no more than another. They all joined Hector in approval, and they advised him to use the drawings for scheduling a colloquium. "Magnificent! Excellent! Unsurpassed!" were bandied from mouth to mouth, and everyone did their best to seem well pleased.

Before the date of the colloquium they engaged in process and at last they said, "the drawings are ready."

Then René Hector came with his contemporaries, and the travelling concepts each raised a notion. They said, "These are here and there, here's the pen, and there's the ink. One would almost think there was nothing". "Exactly," all the contemporaries agreed, though they could see nothing, and was there no thing to see?

"Rene, come along with us, the colloquium is around and about."

⁶ Phil Sawdon, *Drawing with Prose*, 2006

So off went René Hector and the contemporaries in procession. Nobody would confess that they didn't think they could see anything. "But nobody is here and there is nothing to see," said La souris⁷.

"Did you ever hear such non sense and noise?" said one. And one person whispered to another, "Nobody is here. La souris says that nobody is here and there is nothing to see."

"Nobody is here and there is nothing to see!" the contemporaries cried out at last.

Hector wavered, for he suspected the contemporaries might be right. But he thought, "This procession has got to go on, it is fundamental to my understanding" So he walked more assuredly than ever, as his contemporaries consulted the drawings that might not be there at all.

La souris quietly speculated as to whether Hector and the contemporaries had allowed and corrected for precession in his drawings? She reminded the contemporaries that the dates of the astrological signs of the zodiac no longer correspond to the times of year when the Sun actually passes through the constellations. For example, the Sun passes through Leo from mid-August to mid-September, but the astrological dates for Leo are between about 23rd July and 22nd August⁸.

La singe turned to Madame Pipe and began to mutter "astronomy, astrology, procession, precession, travelling concepts, hybrid methods, spelling ... "

La souris continued "Because of precession, our framework of right ascension and declination is constantly changing. So it is necessary to state the equator and equinox of the coordinate system to which any position is referred. Certain dates are taken as standard epochs, and used for star catalogues. To point a telescope at an object on a date other than its catalogue epoch, it is necessary to correct for precession. If you know the equatorial coordinates of an object at one date you can calculate what they should be at another date, as long as the interval is not too great. If the object is a star whose proper motion is known, then that should be corrected for as well ... Alternatively, the *Astronomical Almanac* lists Besselian Day Numbers throughout the year. Take a star's equatorial coordinates from a catalogue, and compute various constants from these, as instructed in the *Astronomical Almanac*. Combine these with the Day Numbers for a given date, to produce the apparent position of the star, corrected for precession, nutation and aberration."⁹

The many travelling concepts rolled up their drawings and precessed, they were mindful that they may have changed but that we still use their old names and that drawing is a contradiction.

⁷ Phil Sawdon, *Drawing with Prose*, 2006

⁸ <http://www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/encyclopaedia/hutchinson/m0010373.html>

⁹ <http://star-www.st-and.ac.uk/~fv/webnotes/chapt16.htm>

Rene Hector and his contemporaries wondered what happens if everyone agrees with you?