

The Content of Nothing, Part 4: On Attending.

Extract from *Living in the World as if it Were Home: Essays*, Tim Lilburn 1999.

'Consciousness walks across the land bridge of the deer's stare into the world of things. This is knowing. It tastes of sorrow and a towering appetite' (Lilburn, 1999:3) 'The desire to belong to what the deer belongs to, the wildness, the thereness, is mortified but remains true. You crane forward into the world in appetite and enter it in sorrow knowing that this good desire that casts you out of yourself is right and must not be lost but is necessarily and sharply frustrated' (5) ... 'Contemplated, the deer never loses her distance, unlikeness; if anything she becomes arrestingly darker. But the observer, led by his desire, is altered, changed into a figure of hunger, leaning without break into the wonderful peculiarity of the specific thing. Desire for the world, mortified by contemplation, is desire whose satisfaction is its frustration and continuance. Contemplative knowing is not a feeling, a rest, a peace that sweeps over one, rewards for the ferocity of one's romantic yearnings, one's energetic Wordsworthian peerings. Contemplation, knowing of the deer and the hill must gather about the conviction that neither can be known. It is the resolute taking of a stance before the world, a positioning of oneself in desire-filled unknowing before the hill and deer, that refuses all hope of consolation'(18-19). 'It is a stance of quiet before things in which your various acquisitivenesses – for knowledge, supremacy, consolation – are stilled, exhausted before the remoteness, the militant individuality of what is there. It is a stance of being alert without anticipating anything, a slackening of self which is a higher form of intensity' (21). 'How to know the thisness of things, their hectic complexity, their strangeness, cool otherness?' (21-22). 'It demonstrates an awareness of consciousness's removal from wild things and its consequent ransacking of them. It is a form of reparation. You grieve and this is a way into things and home. In awareness of things' oddness and your compunction over your separation from this is a letting-be-of-the-world while you are turned fully toward it' (22).