

# DYNAMIC PROCESS

by

Phillip Pulfrey



*“The Buddha taught that beyond this world created by our own senses and limitations, the phenomenal world dissolves into a dynamic process. The true nature of reality lies beyond the realm of language and linear analysis.”*

Helena Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient Futures*

*“The Buddha described human life as comprising a series of ever-changing processes; a physical process, a feeling process, a memory and recognition process, a thought and reaction process, and a consciousness process. These processes are dynamic and continuous, without a single element we can call our unchanging self. We ourselves are a process, woven together with life, without separateness. We arise like a wave out of the ocean of life, our tentative forms still one with the ocean. Some traditions call this ocean the Tao, the divine, the fertile void, the unborn. Out of it our lives appear as reflections of the divine, as a movement or dance of consciousness.”*

Jack Kornfield: *‘A Path with a Heart’*



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## THE DISCOURSE

We find ourselves existing, “coming from we know not where, going we know not whither” with a complex of senses activated by the continual bombardment of external stimuli from our environment. The mind creates organisation and hierarchy within the information it receives: seeking similarity and difference: pattern and development: cause and effect. From this organisation we create narrative that gives structure and coherence to our being; individual narratives of our own being and shared narratives of our group and culture. Over time these narratives influence our perception: we see the world in terms of our own story and give our own specificity to reality.

The problem is that, being the centre of our own world, we lose the perspective that these realities are subjective, dynamic creations of existence at specific instances of space and time and begin to impose them on the world as indisputable “Fact”: we begin to mistake the map for the terrain. This tendency is reinforced by our basic natural instinct for survival that incites us to control and dominate our environment and its resources. It is often in the interest of the group that has gained this control that certain precepts and values be not questioned and their perception becomes the accepted reality.

The search for explanation beyond difference; the evolving domination of rationalism and science, left brain abstraction and the belief, arising out of Modernism, that the human mind can achieve definitive explanation through detached observation, has broken our sense of connection with the natural world and the system of which we are an integral part. Metaphors are an integral part of our understanding and metaphors of the machine have replaced those of the natural world and the idea of definitive explanation replaced that of meaning and understanding. The Modernist myth of absolutes has become the myth of Frankenstein: in seeking to create the perfect being, we have created a monster. The impulse towards control and absolute, indisputable explanations of situations has allowed the putting in place of fixed systems and global, centralized bureaucracy that ignore the very nature of life and being human so that we are sold into the slavery of a system that puts profit and economic growth before human happiness and the preservation of the natural environment central to our survival.

Life is a dance of continuity and change; all natural systems are based on dynamic relations between discrete elements: animated, changing relations between individual parts and the whole that allow adaptation and evolution over time. The reception of stimuli by our being is far more subtle, complex and multi-dimensional than can be articulated through language and logical thought. Our connection to the world is ontological and an on-going dynamic process. Throughout the history of man our connection with a larger reality beyond subjective perception has been expressed through the arts and spiritual practice. The recognition that mystery is an integral part of being.

We need to rediscover a respect for our capacity for an awareness of our relation to existence that goes beyond rationality and allow that sense of open awareness and perspective of our minute place in space and time within an infinitely complex system. To gain that humility that incites respect for other perspectives and narratives and to

create small, local systems that can adapt and interact with changing needs and to put in place a mechanism (as hunter-gatherer tribes did for thousands of years) that does not allow the domination of specific interests that destroy flexible interaction and the harmony of the system.

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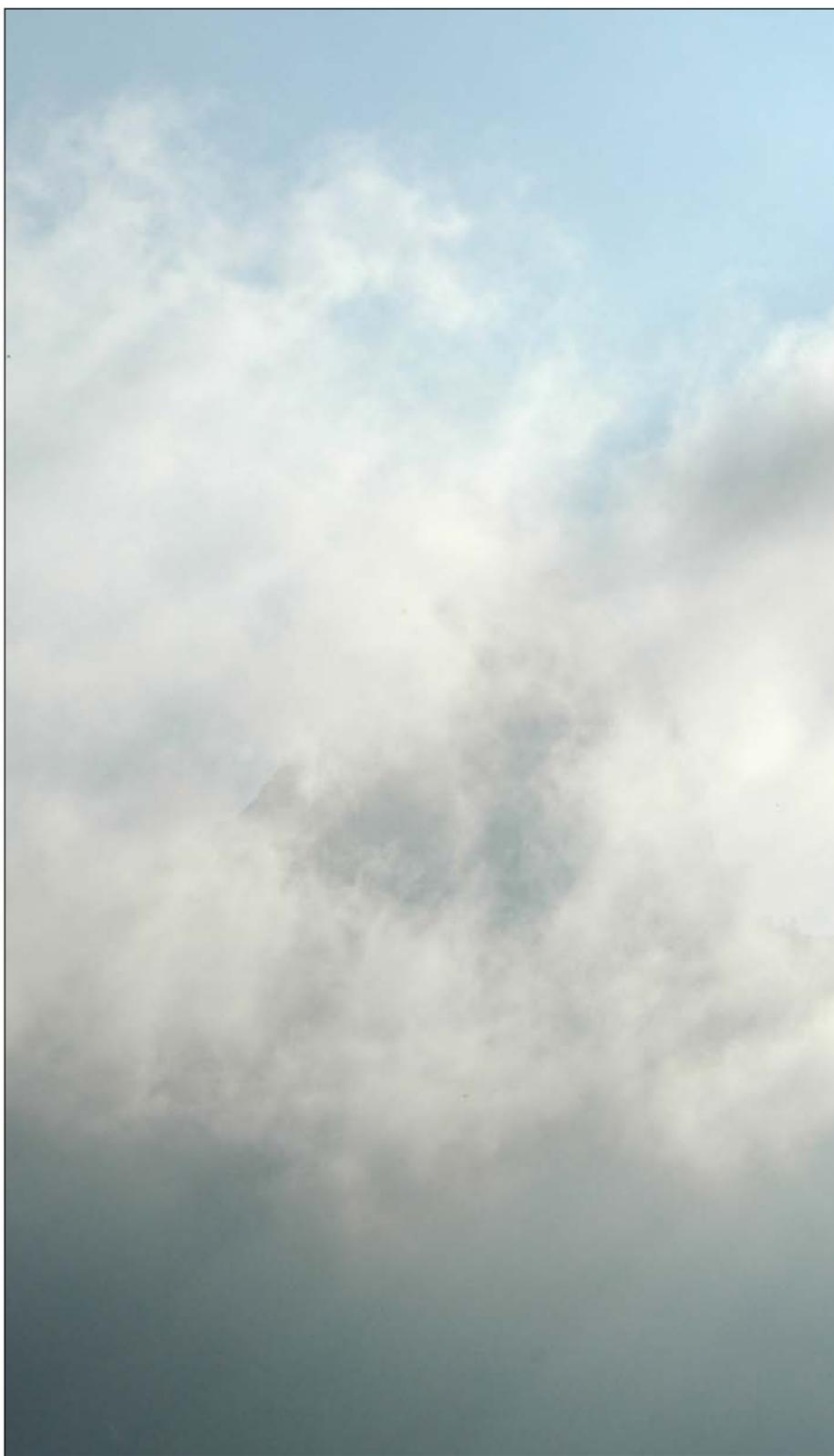
*“The core of our humane identity is nothing more or less than the fitful apprehension of the radically inexplicable presence, facticity and perceptible substantiality of the created. It is; we are. This is the rudimentary grammar of the unfathomable.”*

Steiner, G. (1989)

But, poor Adam,  
You are not light.  
Your sight partial,  
Your nature must create  
Structure and continuity  
Else or dissolves into insanity:  
The key to your evolution,  
Metaphor and analogy  
Which you too often confuse  
    For Reality.  
Ah, Adam –  
All your tricks  
Your attempts to fix  
    The Universe

Phillip Pulfrey: 'Lucifer'





## INTRODUCTION: THE ETERNAL CONUNDRUM

*"We cannot know things as they exist independently of our perceptual and conceptual apparatus because the only way we can gain knowledge is through our perceptual and conceptual apparatus."*

Gilligan (2004)

We find ourselves existing, as Sartre wrote "coming from we know not where, going we know not whither". As Heinrich Kleist put it, caught between the innocence of animals and the perfect knowledge of angels; between the necessity of individual being and the dialectic of this separation from the whole. The essence of being *is* separation: the minute space of tension between the fingers of God and Adam as Adam's consciousness is cast into being, depicted in Michelangelo's famous portrayal of the creation.

The world, existence, is dynamic process; a constant state of becoming in a dimension of time, and relationships, beyond human comprehension. As human beings, we are an integral part of this complex, dynamic energy that is the earth. We are one small infinitesimal part of this process. It cannot be viewed in its entirety in human terms through which all description is subjective in time and in its point of view.

Thus life itself is caught in this relation between the infinite and the circumscribed; the individual consciousness arises and experiences itself as separate and unique before giving itself back to eternity. I can only see the world from where I am standing; from this particular vista of time and place. From this point I look through the lenses of culture and education, of the nature I inherited and the experience life has given.

I make meaning from what I have and from what I am.

I, this being; here and now with this experience and these perceptions, with this desire to express the condition of being human; this relationship of one, small microscopic part observing the whole, from my microsecond of eternal time. I try to grasp the essence of our nature: of being, of consciousness and of time.

"Present" implies fixity, and yet there is only movement and relationship.

It is only through realising the tenuous hold we have on life, on 'reality', on 'knowledge' that we can come to any true understanding of ourselves and reconciliation to the world. Moving beyond the centre of self and seeing our being as one infinitely small cell in the vast, on-going process of return and renewal that is existence changes all. I believe that we cannot live peaceful lives until we become conscious of this limitation of ourselves and our knowledge. The cell of man has become cancerous, destroying the infinite variation and subtle balance of the system because, like the child he is, he believes he is the centre of the universe. The primeval animal instinct for power and control dominates his being.

I would like to bear witness to an eternal truth beyond individual desire and ambition; to use my one beat of energy in time to keep the eternal flame alive and pass it to the next generation. *"For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business."*

You, reading this in another context, another now, will you find an echo in my world? Where are you in the flow of time: are you young or old? Man or woman? Which value systems were you born to: American, Chinese? Egalitarian, hierarchical, Individualistic or social (*link*: Schwarz)? How are you situated in the structure of power and control that dictates our lives? A leader or follower? Famous or unknown? What vision creates your understanding: are you scientist, artist, banker or gardener? Is this book for the bedside or the bin? Are you bored by this abstraction or intrigued? Where's the plot, where's the story? What label to categorize this confusion?

Caught in the business of survival, with most of our waking hours occupied by the necessities of now and the imposition of exterior forces, how do we nourish this perspective? I try to imagine contexts and situations of life beyond my experience: other cultures, other landscapes. What is it to be a gang leader, a sex slave, a homeless person, a prisoner, a prison warder? A worker on a production line, a trader in the world financial markets? A billionaire, a farmer? A famous actress, a doctor? From All these realities breeding the urgency of now.

Already caught in the anomaly of impossibility: I want to talk beyond difference, yet to address everyone is to talk to no one: for we communicate through shared language, experience and values. Narrative requires a context and a voice. So I teach my students: who is your target audience? What is your communication? What is the Focalisation, Distance, Voice? I slip in the word "God" or "god" and reactions will polarize into interpretation depending on culture, understanding and experience.

How to speak across the understandings; the disciplines, perspectives and cultures that form our understanding? We join clubs that recognise and endorse certain rituals, patterns of behaviour and modes of expression. The reward for accepting these is to be embraced and supported by the club and to be able to evolve within it. If you don't belong to a club, you can't enter the conversation; there are rules to observe and initiation rites to gain acceptance into an on-going discourse. If it is an academic club there is vast quantities of research to read: I can be shot down by specialists in the fields that I engage, for a generalist cannot have the specific knowledge of a specialist who has devoted his whole life to one line of research. Yet often the specialist lacks connections across disciplines that might bring another perspective to the subject in question.

Being within the club forms and limits what we perceive; each discipline has "a cultural immune system" (Persig, 1991). I am a painter who also took a Masters degree in Art History through which I discovered a totally different way of perceiving painting that was completely detached from that of a painter. My wife is a social psychologist, which is distinct from sociology or psychology: they are all academic clubs and share the rituals of research methodology and the validation through the publication of articles in prestigious journals, yet perceptions differ within these clubs and within the cultures to which they belong. Meaning comes from limitation; from context, from belonging, from complicity; a shared contract of agreement. Reality is a social construction and outside the club perhaps there is only the self-indulgent personal ramblings of an amateur that lead towards madness.

Yet, beyond words and separation there is Everything. The whole of which we are a fleeting part, behind the descriptions of human delineation of specific observation

of time and place. For each world is a unique reflection of the Eternal Spirit. This one truth is the condition of life and, if we can truly embrace it, everything changes. Enlightenment is this: a perception, laughter at how seriously we take our shadows, our endless divisions of what is whole.

Yet the egocentricity of knowing is no small matter, our absorption in our own narrative can reduce variation to sameness, Truth to my truth: the world to me and my concerns. We live in a world where even what is considered knowledge is reduced to one ball game: to talk of knowledge “beyond” rationality is not to be taken seriously, for the idea of explanation replaces that of understanding.

Explanation: reasoned constructs of logic within defined structures of disciplines are useful and necessary, but they represent only one facet of the human capacity for knowing. Yet the arrogant myopia of these thought structures make us neglect certain other concepts, once considered central to the development of a complete existence: Grace, Wisdom, Beauty, Silence, Space, Eternity: Spirituality, Soul, Mysticism: Humility. We are not just a mind, imposing and bending the world to our will, yet acting dominates being and interpreting dominates listening.

As Douglas Adams (2002) wrote, if you take a cat to pieces to find out what it is, all you have is a dead cat. Analytical knowledge allows the subjective being to understand specific aspects of the whole, to achieve stable ground among the ever-shifting sands of being, to build houses. Yet this does not replace the necessity for a more ontological awareness: “Soul knowledge”, a different kind of poetical truth that has to be continually rediscovered. To “explain” love: its origins in anthropological development, the chemicals released, the stages experienced, may be interesting and helpful to gain perspective on the experience, but it is not sufficient to relate this transformation of existence to our existence and development.

Explanation is not meaning. Philosophers may talk of meaninglessness – of eternal referral of meaning. That is because they remain within structuralism and, as Wittgenstein (1958) admitted at the end of his analysis, philosophy cannot go beyond itself (“*of that which one cannot speak one must remain silent*”) – but there is possibility of understanding beyond language: in the world of art, poetry and mysticism (Steiner, 1989). The problem that arises is that broached by the enlightenment: without fact, how can one go beyond the differences of human emotion and interest to arrive to arrive at any objective judgement?

*“I sense that we shall not come home to the facts of our unhousedness, of our eviction from a central humanity in the face of the tidal provocations of political barbarism and the technocratic servitude, if we do not redefine, if we do not re-experience, the life of meaning in the text, in music, in art.”*

Steiner, G. (1989)

However, the putting in opposition of rational and poetic description of reality is artificial; the two are not mutually exclusive, but integral facets of our capacity to relate to the experience of life. Individuals tend to be developed in one or other of these perspectives (genius being perhaps the ability to embrace them both?), and history appears to oscillate between periods of “classic” and “romantic” tendency. At best both

are involved in the articulation of “truths” concerning the relation of the partial to the whole.

In our present age a force seems to be in play that imposes values and a perspective beyond any consideration of human nature. The metaphors of the machine and, more recently, the computer, do not sit comfortably with our humanity. The nature of living, breathing systems is based on dynamic, developing relations, not on fixity. Life is a matrix of energy: a poetic dancing casting momentary insights of juxtaposition that throw certain relations into relief. Being, becoming, changing are connected in the nature of time itself. Our explanations tend to be based on separation, not on this ontology

Like Faust, I fear that we have sold our souls to the devil. The devil showed us the world and said “all this can be yours”; the temptation was too great and we turned it into reality T.V.

Walker Percy (cit. Lewis, Amini & Lannon 2001) wrote that *“modern man is estranged from being, from his own being, from the being of other creatures in the world, from transcendent being. He has lost something – what he does not know; he only knows that he is sick unto death with loss of it.”*

Explanation does not lead to understanding: explanation is the imposition of a system on experience and the separation of observer from observed, whereas understanding arises from humility, quiet, respect and observation without judgement: awareness of the many levels of connection of which we are capable, and relatedness.

Reduced to words the enormity of existence is lost, for the whole is beyond the comprehension of mind. For a moment the insight of direct being may lift the veil of explanation

Nothing, that has been written by great minds and spirits that I cannot hope to emulate, has changed anything: it is the condition of being human, the smile on the Buddha’s face.

*“The problem of ego comes in through the intellect in the form of definitions, comparisons, and judgments. What better way to combat these poisons of practice than with the simple Buddha smile?”*

Fa Che Shakya (2009)

We seek answers with the mind that can only be found with the heart.

The eternal conundrum of the part trying to understand the whole, caught in the limitation of form how do we go beyond? From the specificity of our perspective of being, how do we grasp our relation to the whole? For this we were imbued with body, mind, heart and soul; each has its own part to play in relating ourselves to the world, to our understanding: the body has direct intelligence, ways of understanding, and a capacity of awareness of the present which the mind forgets: conscious thought recognizes recurring patterns and differences that allow us to articulate form and stand back from constant change: yet the mind fixes form. Separate from the whole, it is not capable of

the transcendence of the soul that can lead us from ourselves into greater understanding: into the necessity of mystery for, to become Other, one with the universe, is to give up the very self that is trying to understand. Death is both a reality and a metaphor: the passage from part back to whole by which all being must pass.

I begin here with nothing and everything, trying to use language to go beyond language. This desire to go beyond this limitation to reach the eternal. The need to express this longing; this desire for transcendence: the nature of existence as separation and attachment. The dialectical necessity of form to absolute, of man to God. To gather these specific perceptions from time and space and to give them an expressive form that will carry them beyond this I, and bear witness to the eternal Truth, forever gained and lost. To touch with the vibration of the spirit, this is Art.

Desire and longing; to touch another beyond the limitation of self and human weakness: to vibrate to a harmony of that eternal. Not to be consumed by passion but, like the phoenix, to arise transubstantiated by the flame. This is Love.

Scanning the horizons, I find that the contours of the landscape, the mountains of Truth do not change; T.S. Eliot's moment in the rose garden is felt by us all at one time or another, The fact that human metaphor is constantly evolving and absolutes have to find new expression for every new generation does not mean that there is not a real landscape behind the map; real forms behind the shadows on the wall – a truth to bear witness to, a truth about the relation of the individual to the whole.

Enlightenment is also this: a momentary glimpse of the essential nature of being beyond human narrative and vision. The truth of this perception is simple and enduring and thus very difficult to reach. It means standing aside from the forward rush of our individual narratives that we have taken for reality since our birth and through which our perceptions are filtered, for we see things not as they are, but as we are.

Thus our absorption in our existence leads to a childish forgetting of an existence outside our own possibility of comprehension and, caught in technology, reality becomes the screen and the hyperlink.

*"We are becoming ever more adept at scanning and skimming, but what we are losing is our capacity for concentration, contemplation, and reflection."*

Nicholas Carr (2010)

I, writing this now: You, reading this then: your mind already making decisions. What category of writing does it fall into? What intellectual discipline? What tradition of thought? Do you relate to it? Does it fit into your value systems? Is it worth your time?

Scanning on your screen, searching for keywords – some sort of pseudo religious blah-blah? Boring! Click and you are elsewhere...

A synthesis? A forum? What's it rating?

Is there a Tweet?



## CREATING THE WORLD

*Thrust screaming thus  
Into separateness  
Existence: Life,  
The miracle  
The first cry  
“I am”:  
and all the world  
In one mind focused  
To explain the universe.*  
Phillip Pulfrey: ‘Lucifer’

*“To think is first of all to create a world (or to limit one’s own world, which comes to the same thing). It is starting out from the basic agreement that separates man from his experience in order to find a common ground according to one’s nostalgia, a universe hedged with reasons or lighted up with analogies but which, in any case, gives an opportunity to rescind the unbearable divorce.”*

Camus (1942)

*“We all observe the world through our own window. A window is a viewpoint over a horizon, a framework, a piece of glass that is always tinted to some extent, and it has its orientations and its limitations.”*

Ramadan (2010)

*“All knowledge operates through the selection of meaningful data and the rejection of data that are not meaningful. It does so by separating (distinguishing or disjointing) and unifying (associating, identifying), and by organizing into hierarchies (the primary and secondary) and centralizing (around a core of master notions).”*

Morin (1998)

Our world begins with organisation of sensation into perception. We create our reality through our perception and our articulation of that expression. This begins with our direct contact with the physical environment and the sensations the body receives through the senses (Maturana & Varela, 1988). The human mind is designed to find patterns and breaks in patterns and relationships: similarities and differences, repetitions and developments (Bordwell, 2001; Morin, 1998). Through these we create structures that allow us to function in the present and predict the future. We learn to sift the millions of sense impressions we receive at every moment ignore the irrelevant and seize on those critical to our survival. We seek relations of cause and effect to understand how the world functions and how to manipulate it. Our personal capacities, predilections, experience, education and social context influence our selection of possible perceptions and the construction of our personal, and social, narrative. Each absorbed in a present of which we are the centre, focused on our dramatization of events, we forget the fugitive nature of human understanding and the limitations of our own temporality.

*“We give stability to our world only through our capacity to recreate it by ignoring differences and attending to similarities.”*

Postman (1996)

*“We believe we see what is real; but we see in reality only what this paradigm allows us to see, and we obscure what it requires us not to see.”*

Morin (1998)

Form requires boundaries, structure and organisation: the mechanisms of perception create these limitations. Our structure, and organisation affects perception. The reality we experience is not a fixed form, but an *event* created by the dynamic of interaction with the world and limit in constant evolution: the observed changes the mechanism of observation and vice-versa. On-going exchange leads to the development of both form and perception, leading to a growing subtlety and complexity of discourse.

*“The tangle of neurons that make up a person, after all, are the same ones that generate the disparity between reality and experience.”*

Lewis, Amini & Lannon (2000)

*“We have acted as though the external world exists in itself and that our knowledge of it amounts to an accurate photographic image. But this way of thinking becomes completely untenable as soon as we realize that all knowledge is translation and reconstruction. All knowledge is translation in the sense that the stimuli which effect the eye are taken up by millions of distinct cells which together compose a message that is transmitted to the brain through the optic nerve using binary code. All of these messages are received in different regions of the brain, are mixed and transformed to produce perception or representation. Thus there has been translation and reconstruction.”*

Morin (1998)

Current brain research is beginning to highlight the fact that the process of perception and understanding itself is an on-going dynamic process, a creation of the relation between sensation and the recognition of sensation: stimuli change the neurone patterns which, in turn affect the perception of stimuli; as relations between cells are created and discarded so that it is the relationship of experience with brain activity that changes its form and creates our reality. The more often a specific neurone connection is fired, the more likely it is to fire, be used again; thus encouraging repeated perceptions or behaviours

*“Experience methodically rewires the brain, and the nature of what it has seen dictates what it can see.”*

Lewis, Amini and Lannon (2000).

*“This circularity, this connection between action and experience, this inseparability between a particular way of being and how the world appears to us, tells us that every act of knowing brings forth a world”*

Maturana & Varela (1998)

All natural and biological systems and structures, including the human brain, are based on the on-going process of interaction, action, reaction and development (Watzlawick,

Bavelas & Jackson, 1967). These interactions happen on everything from a cellular to a global level, allowing the system to adopt and change over time in constant evolution.

We are at one time the creation of, and reflectors of the world; through our perceptual systems we gather selective information to ourselves about the 'physical world' around us, it is from this information that we build our 'experience', our 'understanding', our preferences and our 'character'. It is from our past experience that we judge new ones and these determine how we react to the new experiences, which, in turn, are added to ourselves and will help determine our future decisions and reactions. Thus we are continually changing, creating our human image of the world; which creation is based on what we have gathered from the world. The mind is like a sticky surface, naturally more sticky to some things than others and as we collect so its sticky tendencies shift and change: according to what it has already collected depends what it will be likely to collect later.

We gather information discriminately and only part of an infinite variety of experience – thus do we have our variety and individuality.

Our relation, and interaction, with this structure of existence is *synthetic* and goes far beyond the possibilities of analytical reduction of the rational mind (McGilchrist, 2009). Thus, human life is caught in this dialectic of the limited trying to understand the limitless: between experience and the articulation of experience. Between the subjective and the objective. Our understanding is caught in the experience, language and metaphors we bring with us. As Morin (1998) states: "*We cannot isolate the world from our structures of knowing. Mind and the world are inseparable.*"

Thus the nature of reality is in relationships and interaction rather than in discrete entity. Understanding is an articulation in terms of the agent of perception; what is of central importance is the relationship between the two. Such an approach moves the discourse from "answers" to an understanding of the dynamic nature of the relationship between experience, viewpoint, language and perception: "*Reality is therefore as much in the connection (relationship) as in the distinction between the open system and its environment.*" (Morin, 2007). This approach should develop a true humility and respect for alternative perceptions.

I look out on the world, and I write, from my unique perspective and experience, about a world I separate into objects, the world in which I live. I live in the mountains surrounded by nature: I don't have a television: I love silence and will spend hours watching changing light, love to read and to reflect on ideas. This world is very different from that of a city dweller, responsible for running a large company, surrounded by sound and animation, and constant activity or of that of my students, many of who never read (one boasted that he have never read a book at all) and spend their waking hours locked into the Web (one student told me that he had spent about sixteen hours a day during his holiday playing a computer game on the Web) and for whom telephones and constant communication are an inherent part of reality. Our references and experience are very different. The world to which they are born has evolved a new reality, new metaphors and associations; different perceptions, references and discourses from that to which I was born: there was life *before* cell phones and the Internet? Before the *car*? This new context of experience is actually changing the way the brain observes,

and deals with, information (Carr, 2011). There are also worlds within worlds; experiences, beliefs and values vary from country to country, even from region to region: I have taught students from more than forty different countries and this experience has made me very aware of how fundamentally different attitudes and perceptions can be.

If a group of people compare their perceptions of an object, a chair for example, seen from different points of view we can try and gather a more complete vision of what that chair might be. We attach also to objects symbolic and metaphoric meaning: the idea of a throne for example, or an electric chair, which gives it further human connotation in semiotic terms. However, most models separate the observed from the observer whereas a more complete model must take into account chair, observer, context in time and space and the relationship between them.

A simple shift of context can change perception; the low cloud created a cold, grey, subdued atmosphere. I walked up the mountainside through it into another world of glorious sunshine and warmth. Each day I view a mountain seen from my window: a mass of rock that is never still, ever-changing with light, moisture vapour and season. The view from the top reveals another world: one from which I observed ants scuttling about their life on the peak, offering another sense of scale.

Singular, discrete, explanations are necessary and useful for survival and the organisation of our daily life, but the consideration of dynamic, pluralistic situations are necessary for deeper understanding. This has already been understood by physics in which traditional conceptualization cannot explain phenomena recorded in experiments and that observing influences what is being observed. Organs of perception are not the same in all animals; a cat or a bat do not see in the same way as a human being. I change what I interact with and it changes me; as Lewis, Amini and Lannon (2000) write:

*“When someone loses his partner and says a part of him is gone, he is more right than he thinks. A portion of his neural activity depends on the presence of that other living brain. Without it, the electric interplay that makes up him has changed. Lovers hold keys to each other’s identities and they write neurostructural alterations into each other’s networks. Their limbic tie allows each to influence who the other is and becomes.”*

The consciousness of the world is a shared endeavour, sculpted by the world itself. Awareness is the fine line between two forms of madness that tear us apart: that of dogmatic, obsession orthodoxy and that of individual disconnection where our personal, interior world finds no shared ground with the group consciousness.

We are born into separation, thrust screaming into existence, a centre of sensation and experience that we divide and name and explain into stories. We create static perception of discrete entities, separating and labelling, tying knots of connections and consequences. Absorbed in our stories we find it difficult to change our seat in our theatre of life or move to a different theatre. We become caught in dialectical discourses about the ‘right answer’ and forget the context of our conversation. If you accept that human reality is not a fixed absolute, but this dynamic process of evolving perception arising out of specific conditions: the nature of the organ of perception, previous experience and time an place, static models are no longer relevant and are replaced by a personal

engagement in the process of development and evolution: the discovery of our personal relation to Existence.

Successful human systems require the same adaptability as the brain, allowing for interaction, and action, on an individual and local level and providing the possibility for dynamic interaction on various levels of organization. No single human perception can embrace all the complexities of the whole system and it is only through variety and nuance that successful evolution can take place. The larger, more global and more complicated human systems become, the more impossible it is for an individual to make decisions that encompass all necessities and centralization of decision making becomes dangerous.

Life is about change; about learning; adjusting our shifting perceptions to the rhythm of the eternal dance. For this we must listen to life itself – and to the expression of other perspectives in time and space. In limiting the world to the static, culturally and temporally specific, explanations within which we are absorbed we lose an essential perspective on human reality and life that was articulated by the Buddha almost three thousand years ago.

Each of us is but a bubble on the foam of the universe that will sink once again into the water of time to allow for eternal renewal and new patterns of existence.

*Above the cloud...*

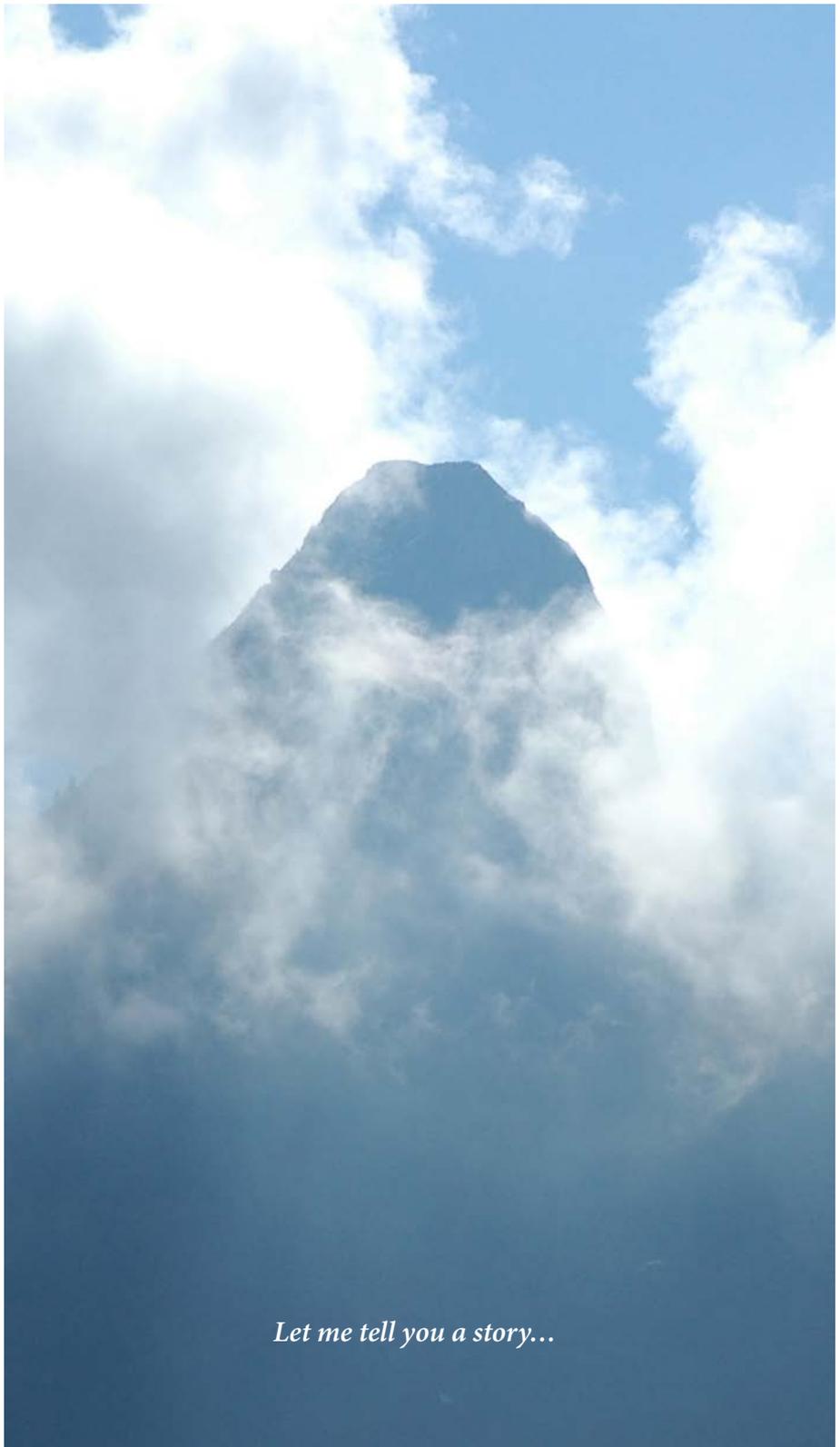




THE THEATRE OF TIME

I seek myself  
Among the wreckage of experience,  
The infinite decisions  
And reactions  
That trace the patterns  
Defining this being.  
Fragments of reflections  
In the infinite mirrors  
Of other.  
This complex  
Caught in mixed narratives  
Of roles and games  
Donned and discarded  
In the theatre of time  
To applause  
And cat calls.  
And I wonder,  
When the curtain closes,  
The make-up removed,  
What is the narrative of me,  
And who tells the story?

Phillip Pulfrey



## STORIES AND VALUES

*“Bear in mind that in this life we proceed by way of metaphors and images”*  
Nicholas de Cusa

*“As Immanuel Kant pointed out in ‘The Critique of Pure Reason’, if there is an objective reality, it is unknowable. All we can know is the reality we construct. That reality takes the form of a story.”*  
Sternberg (1999)

*“Our genius lies in our capacity to make meaning through the creation of narratives that give point to our labours, exalt our history, elucidate the present, and give direction to our future... The purpose of a narrative is to give meaning to the world, not to describe it scientifically.”*  
Postman (1996)

*“... narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative.”*  
Barthes (1977)

Let me tell you a story...

Our reality is given coherence through narrative: *“In the beginning was the word”*. We know nothing but stories: we weave our own coherence into events from the threads and colours that we have at our disposition. We weave cushion covers and comforters, unfinished fragments sewn into patchwork covers and large tapestries, worked on for generations by armies of weavers, marvellous in their complexity. Through our weaving we seek to decode a pattern of meaning. We seek to relate ourselves to the world, to find our place in the picture. We seek articulation and expression of our relationship to existence, to give expression to this uniqueness of identity and perception from our experience in time and space and to find connection to others. Understanding is about connection and narrative is the thread that binds our experience into time. We make life comfortable within a context, nestling down under the blanket of our stories, converting the chaotic bombardment of sensation to meaning through association; connecting time and events through the fluid movement of being.

*“Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very ‘events’ of a life. In the end we become the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives.”*  
(Bruner, 1987)

As we have seen, research is beginning to show that the brain not only reacts to stimuli, but interacts with it, physically changing and adapting according to what it must deal with. In a similar way, the narratives are not only an interpretation of reality, but a

fundamental part of our creation of reality (Rosenblum, 2010). Who are you? What do you do? Our answers to these questions are adapted to context and circumstances: we are different beings to our boss, our family, our friends, the tax office. We have our personal narratives, group and social narratives. Even within a small world within one culture different realities are created: within the college where I teach, the stories of the Director, the administration, the teachers and the students overlap and intermingle, but are not the same.

I undertook an experiment with a class; I told them I was going to present a series of ideas and that I wanted them to note what I said and write down, afterwards, in a series of bullet points, the essence of my presentation. There were twenty students and what they wrote down was so varied that they might have been listening to different presentations; in their writing I could perceive the particular interests of each; they had created a narrative out of their own specific perceptions. One exercise that I give in my drawing classes is to draw with the hand of another student; when one does this, one becomes aware of how each person sees and constructs in a totally different way. I write to communicate, but each of you will attach your own narrative to create individual meanings. I thread the image of mountains through my discourse as metaphor and symbol: until I was thirty years old I had never seen a real mountain, now I am surrounded by them, walk in them and my relation with them is very personal. During history, and across cultures, man's view of the mountain has changed: they have been viewed as Gods, as the centre of chaos: as symbols of hope and aspiration and as obstacles.

We need stories; a man who loses his story loses his sense of identity, turns to invention and can no longer distinguish what belongs to him. Memory is the glue that binds coherence. Ritual is recorded memory. I know a man who lost his long-term memory in a car accident: he no longer recognized his own wife or children and had to relearn all basic skills as a child: to walk, to speak. The old self ceased to exist and he had to begin his life again.

*"Narrative is the principle way in which our species organizes its understanding of time"*  
H. Porter Abbott (2008)

"Once upon a time...": our sense of order, connection and sequence comes from the stories that we tell ourselves about the events that we experience. Life passes through temporal changes of perception; when families lived in groups with grandparents, parents and children together, these different perceptions could be shared and the process of life seen in its wholeness. I have been keeping notebooks constantly since I was eighteen and I can see the evolution and transformation of thought over time. Reading books now that I read when I was younger is a new experience as I bring another perception to the words.

Our memory recreates the past through narrative (Loftus, 2003) which develops and adapts over time and is selective: one experiment has family members ask another member whether they remembered being lost in a shopping centre as a child; after a while he began to say that yes, he remembered and to recall details of the event. In fact the event was invented and never happened!

We can create many different stories from the same experiences, both as a group and as an individual. History itself is a story: 'his story', not 'her story' and the story of the winners whose narratives survive and become the past. Certain myths and folk tales exist across time and cultures and seem to embody certain fundamental experiences of mankind (Cinderella exists in over seven hundred versions world wide) and stories intertwine and evolve, begetting new tales or the same tale re-written in a new form, translated into other language and languages, each evoking its own perception, interpretation and values: our stories, or narratives, are dependant on cultural values, experience, education and expectations; even in the rigour of scientific research, results are costumed in cultural precepts: look at the fundamental difference of approach between research in different disciplines in different countries for example. To say these worlds are not absolute is not to deny their importance; they are the expression of subjective experience at a certain point of time and space, embodying a relationship between external reality and a perception caught in cultural values, expectations and education. Culture gives rise to a language of expression without which there could be no form. Each world is a unique and valuable creation, creating the richness and variety of human life.

Human culture arises out of the shared experience of discrete groups. The landscape of mountain or plane: the weather, flora and fauna, give rise to metaphors that explain new experience in terms of that we have already experienced; language arises out of, and evolves from this experience. Hunter-gatherer societies have different needs, rituals and relationships than farming societies. Hot or cold, temperate or extreme conditions give rise to varied relations to existence. Language itself reflects these differences: each language has its own specificities that cannot be translated into other languages. I live in a French speaking culture and teach in that language; with time I become more and more conscious that I cannot have the same ideas in French as in English. Even the structure of the language embodies different values; the French language has a very sophisticated and complex grammar that can be used to express subtlety of thought, while the English language has a richness of vocabulary and adjectives that allow another form of subtlety.

*"To be ourselves we need to learn a language, a culture, knowledge, and this culture itself needs to be varied enough to allow us a choice among the stock of existing ideas, and to think in an autonomous way. So this autonomy is nourished by dependence. We depend on an education, a language, a culture, a society, a brain, which is itself the product of genetic programming, and we depend also on our genes."*

Morin (1998)

Each culture is based on shared perception and language arising out of experience, values, narratives and codes that provide stability, social cohesion and continuity and that allow group communication. Born into a specific context of time and place we learn these values, narratives and codes, encouraged by our desire to belong and to be accepted. Our education provides a ritualized initiation and training into the norms and behaviours of the group and preparation for a defined role in that group. Our learning influences and alters our perception that, in turn, influences the learning. Thus the perceptual "clubs", which I mentioned in the introduction, are created that direct and form the perceptions within that domain: to be accepted by that club it is necessary to accept and embrace certain basic tenets of its language. Culture gives

rise to a language of expression without which there could be no form, yet, if form becomes dogma, it imposes and limits perception to its own structure, and so Galileo was shown the instruments of torture when he questioned the fact that the earth was the centre of the universe.

*“The new position is that cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems, mediate thought and place their stamp on our representations of reality.”*

Bruner (1991)

So patterns of existence, over time, become ritualized into cultural form that establishes implicit values that, in turn, influence perception. These perceptions and values are encapsulated, and become formalized within social structures and are embodied within an evolving discourse. Through language we exchange, compare and enlarge our perceptions and create a rich and varied mirror of the world that is our cultural heritage. Yet, this also leads to difference and conflict between viewpoints and values that are opposed. As Schwarz’s research (1992, 94) shows, certain cultural narratives tend to favour value structures that may be diametrically opposed to those of others; whether the freedom of the individual or the well-being of the group is more important or whether we believe society should be hierarchical or egalitarian, for example. Such fundamental beliefs can be so central to our cultural narrative that we cannot even perceive that they are not absolutes.

*“Our shared human nature is intensely social: we are group animals. We use language and empathy, and practice collaboration and intergroup competition. But the unwritten rules of how we do these things differ from one human group to another. “Culture” is how we call these unwritten rules about how to be a good member of the group. Culture provides moral standards about how to be an upstanding group member; it defines the group as a “moral circle”. It inspires symbols, heroes, rituals, laws, religions, taboos, and all kinds of practices - but its core is hidden in unconscious values. We tend to classify groups other than our own as inferior or (rarely) superior. This applies to groups based on national, religious, or ethnic boundaries, but also on occupation or academic discipline, on club membership, adored idol, or dress style. In our globalized world most of us can belong to many groups at the same time.”*

Hofstede (2011)

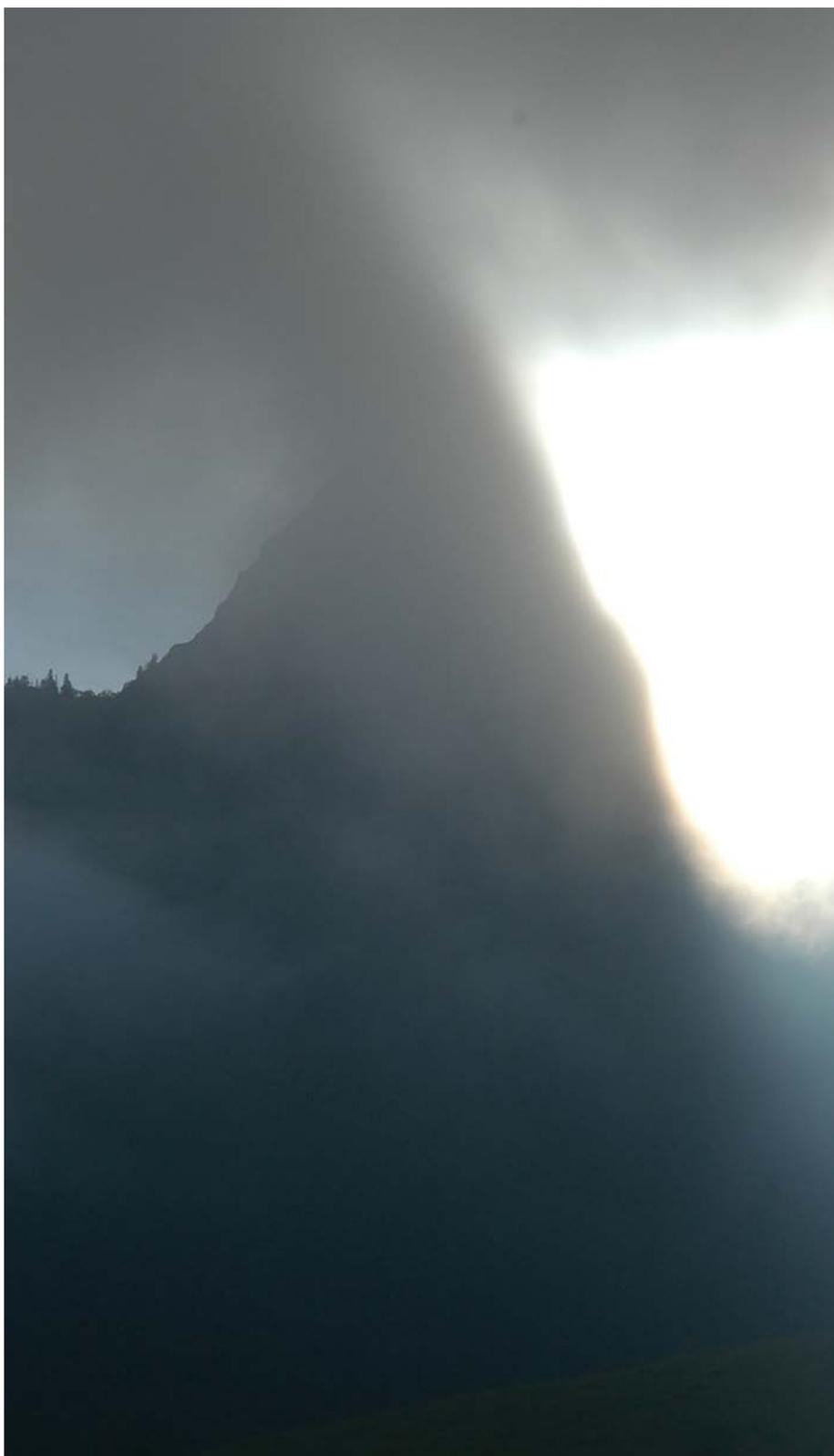
Our stories absorb us, take us over: so real are they to us that they become Reality. We reduce Reality to *our* language, *our* thoughts and *our* experience. Our stories lose the beautiful sheen of becoming; we forget that we are ourselves *within* the story that is an on-going telling. If we are absorbed entirely with the individual narrative, we circumscribe the world to this limitation. We begin to reject other stories: we believe that one form of expression is more ‘true’ than another.

*“Even though we accept, in theory, that there are many hypotheses and many truths, there is a danger that, in practice, we will assume that our certainties and truths are exclusive.”*

Ramadan (2010)

Difference is also richness; the richness of variety of culture, language, form and ideas. But within them is born the conflict of interest, of value – even of survival: one wants silence, the other loud noise: one want equality another wants to keep the resources he has fought so hard to gain: there is only so much food and water (and petrol) – so some must die.

The dominant narrative of personal success, profit and constant growth drown out other possible stories: standardization, centralization, globalization and the ever-growing control by an ultra-rich elite dominate our world and lead to the loss of the richness and variety of local culture.. According to a UN report (2006), 1% of the population own 40% of the wealth globally, while 50% of world adults own just 1%. Since this report the situation becomes even more extreme.



## DIALECTICS

*Form is the mirror of the absolute,  
Or refraction rather;  
The airy bubble blown  
Sculpting time  
One of many meanings  
A burr momentarily snags  
On the brushed attention  
An acute present  
Redolent with significance  
Snatching memory out of desire  
A half-remembered totality  
Haunting dreams.*

*To see,  
To weave this tapestry  
Dancing past to future  
To this music of time  
This is itself divine:  
Giving laughter to the universe  
Phillip Pulfrey: 'Lucifer'*

*"Thus the brain takes shape as a compromise between unyielding limits and nearly infinite freedom."*

Lewis, Amini & Lannon (2000)

*"In a universe of pure order, there would be no innovation, no creation, no evolution. There would be no life or human existence. But neither would any existence be possible in pure disorder, because there would be no element of stability on which to found an organization."*

Morin (1998)

*"Organisation without disorder leads to a sterile, homogenous system where no change and innovation is possible. Complete disorder without order precludes organization. Only with the interaction of order and disorder, is an organization possible that remains open to change, growth, and possibilities. "*

Morin (2007)

Herein lie the great dialectics of human existence: firstly, form is limitation: structure requires limits. As already discussed, without rules there is no language. The variety of form born from different contexts gives the richness and variety of world culture, but also creates conflict and misunderstanding. Secondly, we require stability and continuity at the same time as evolution and change: without such continuity and stability there can be no form, yet the dominance of one such structure can lead to a failure to see the relative nature of all such structures and a narrow perceptual focus that inhibits development and evolution: evolution as a process of development and

overthrow, requiring both movement and fixity. In Persig's (1991) terms, too much "static quality" leads towards atrophy and death; too much "dynamic quality" leads to chaos and formlessness. In Murray's (1959) terms "Too much permeability is insanity, too little is ultra conventional rationality."

We *can* only know the world from the limitation of our own viewpoint and experience, thus all thought must be understood within the context that gave rise to it for each of us is caught in a specific perception arising from our context of time, place and experience which cannot contain the whole. We attempt to fix in explanation that which has movement and change as part of its very nature. Born to a system of values: social, family, cultural and to perceptions of reality, it is very hard to get the distance to see how this context is creating that reality; for example the computer and communication media are changing the world and the way the brain functions (Carr, 2010) as the car did before; altering the way we live and think and structure the world. Yet, how can one become aware of this? The next generation will perceive a different reality without perhaps even being aware of the changes that have created their thought system. It will be their reality.

We create a world from an infinite possibility of worlds. As the Chinese proverb puts it: "*You can put a Chinese garden in the world, but you cannot put the world in a Chinese garden.*" We create our worlds within Existence: the rich worlds of consciousness that are various and many. There is the unique perception of the "I" that will die with us, or evolve through our children, and there are the shared perceptions of our social groups. Each a part of the whole looking at that whole. This essence of the limitation of human perception and "truth" seems generally to escape us; that we can only know *relationships*: perception is created through the relationship of perceiver and perceived and each perception has to be understood in the context of the situation that gave rise to it.

*"The misconception which has haunted philosophic literature throughout the centuries is the notion of 'independent existence'. There is no such mode of existence. Every entity is only to be understood in the terms of the way in which it is interwoven with the rest of the universe."*

Whitehead (1964)

The simple truth is that we cannot know *The Truth*; we can know only *a truth*: that truth which arises from our own experience, perception and cultural values. Yet, if we are absorbed entirely within our individual perceptions, we circumscribe the world to this vision. Like children, as Scott Peck (1978) writes, we hold on to the illusion that we are the centre of the universe and that those who do not share our perceptions are mistaken or evil. Much human misery arises from mistaking the subjective for the objective and reducing of reality to fixed and inflexible models, rather than the living, breathing relations of which it consists. We want the "right answer" and we want to fall within our own perception. This is no small matter: we go to war, kill and torture because of it (or because of a belief in the Absolute Right of power, money and survival).

*"It's the rare person who glimpses the expanse of his own subjectivity, who knows that everything before his mind's eye is the Hindu maya – an elaborate dream of the world worthy of a god, but reverie just the same. "*

Lewis, Amini & Lannon (2000)

*“We tend to live in a world of certainty, of undoubted, rock-ribbed perceptions: our convictions prove that things are the way we see them and there is no alternative to what we hold as true. This is our daily situation, our cultural condition, our common way of being human”*

Maturana & Varela (1987)

*“We have a situation in which human beings, who must deal with each other, have vastly different views as to the nature of reality yet each one believes his or her own view to be the correct one since it is based on the microcosm of personal experience. And to make matters worse, most of us are not even aware of our own world views, much less the uniqueness of the experience from which they are arrived.”*

*“We are indeed like the proverbial blind men, each in touch with only his particular piece of the elephant yet each claiming to know the nature of the whole beast. So we squabble over our different microcosmic world views, and all wars are holy wars.”*

Scott Peck (1978)

It seems that this specificity of vision: the need to stabilize and fix that which is in constant evolution is part of the condition of mental process. The human mind is designed to fix and label; from the millions of stimuli we receive at each moment we look for difference that makes a difference: the rest we ignore, to avoid being drowned in the cacophony of conflicting information. Yet our experience goes beyond language and is larger than our intellectual structure. It is also emotional; our emotional intelligence is older and more powerful than our rational mind. Our limbic brain and our neocortex are only tenuously connected so that our behaviour is often directed by our emotional reactions and not our rational decisions. However much we imagine ourselves reasonable and rational, we remain creatures of the emotions. Our thoughts arise cloaked in a form that does not know language, arranged in folds of values so fundamental that we do not even see them as factors that shape the form of our vision; they are the sea in which our consciousness swims. We tend to defend ourselves from this uncomfortable knowledge either by hiding behind the boundaries of limiting and limited systems, where we may define and control the rules, or by falling into the indulgence of existential anxiety.

The important issue is the nature of the structures that we put in place to deal with these dialectical necessities, what is required is *“a way of thinking that does not mutilate life, but allows us to live it more fully by being more present to the complexities, paradoxes, tragedies, joys, failures and successes. He (Morin) points toward a way of thinking that is not disembodied and abstract, but rich in feeling, intuition and connection to the larger social and historical context”* (Montuori 2008). Natural systems are complex and dynamic; structured but adaptable to the changing environment. Morin points out that closed systems (such as a motor car) can be very efficient, yet if one part fails the machine will cease to function whereas an open system, such as a human being is in constant renewal: the cells in our body are constantly replaced so that we become essentially a new being, while retaining that centre that defines our identity. If a part of the brain is damaged, for example, it can rearrange itself to continue to function (Sacks, 1985). Human systems need to mirror this capacity for dynamic interaction and change.

Our articulation of reality must be flexible and breathing: in a state of constant becoming. We must remain aware of our relationship to form – our position in time and space; our context of culture and our emotional reactions. It is the obsession with absolutes and fixity that create our myopia: a confusion over the nature of our knowing on one hand, and our abandonment of local cultural context that created us on the other.

Always remaining open, questioning, doubting and reassessing takes energy, mindfulness and constant attention to the present. It means living with uncertainty. Understanding is a long slow, subtle process that takes the whole being, not just the mind. It is easier to label, fix and forget.

I teach Life Drawing: the mental processes which students bring to this activity mirror their thinking in other subjects. Firstly, when they begin, the tendency is to draw symbols rather than representing the visual information before them: “hair”, “eye”, “mouth” become labels that symbolize like words. There is no analysis of what they are actually seeing. Secondly they fix on a part of what they see: usually an edge and the eye follows it around. To understand and represent the abstraction of direction, proportion and relations requires taking distance. What is more, a slight movement of the head and these relations change. What can be recorded depends on many variables: how long you look, what media you use, what intention you have and, above all, the amount of absorbed concentration you bring to the task. Understanding of any subject takes parallel skills: it is easy to apply ready-made, simplistic formulas to a situation rather than analysing the elements involved. The relationship of ideas creates complexity and every analysis is taken from a specific perspective that must be taken into account. True seeing, and learning, takes an open, non-judgemental mind and the capacity to take distance from the subject to take account of our own habits, actions in the process. To become clear about what one is seeing or what one is thinking is not easy, it takes deliberate practice (Ericsson, 1993): that is, single minded engagement and concentration and constant repetition. It takes work and rework, constantly going over the same ground with a fresh eye and critical mind until you begin to understand what you are seeing or thinking. The result is clearer vision and enormous satisfaction: understanding the relationship between forms and ideas gives us greater depth of vision and personal freedom and understanding of others.

*“Approximations: The skein of the intellect thrown across the world, drawing it into form: fragile exercise in speculation, almost as abstract as mathematics: a tentative hypothesis on what the world might be in its wholeness.*

*Meditation between object and sensation - pure light, electric sensation taking form somewhere in the darkness of the head. Shifting patterns ruled into structures and significance through the structure of neurones the filter of memory.*

*At this point, between everything and nothing: between empty formula and chaos - between language and a meaningless babble of random noise I approach this act of drawing.”*

Pulfrey (1996)

Human history documents the development and overthrow of civilizations, empires

and systems that give a framework to reality, kept in place by the power and control of a dominant force until is challenged and replaced by new forces.

It is the history of power and control.

*'Icarus Chained'* Phillip Pulfrey: Oil on Canvas 1.95m x 1.62m



## POWER AND CONTROL: THE DYNAMICS OF POWER

*“Fights for dominance, competition for partners, a wish to belong and to know who does not belong - all of these basic drives are alive in us. No wonder that culture revolves around basic issues that have to do with group membership, authority, gender roles, morality, anxiety, emotions and drives. Culture affects our love lives, our professional lives, our wars and our dreams.”*

Hofstede (2011)

*“There is, in fact, a “universal drive to dominance” in our species, in the sense that we readily learn both domination and submission behaviors and such behaviors tend to emerge in situations of competition (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1979,1989)”*

Boehm (2001)

*“Just as there is no such thing as a couple without power relations, there is no such thing as a civilization without potential relations of domination. We may wish to enter into a dialogue, understand one another and build something together, but the fact remains that the whole apparatus that defines civilizations, identities and the universal integrates them, wittingly or not (and never innocently), into a system of categorizations that determines hierarchies, whether we like it or not, and whether or not we pretend that this does not happen”*

Ramadan (2010)

Beyond all this abstract speculation remains the reality of basic human instincts and behaviour; the intrinsic urge to survive and prosper and the dominant force of the human ego. Insecurity and fear: the need for power and control remain primary motivations in human behaviour as we attempt to find stability and certainty in the flux and uncertainty of life. Fear of what we cannot control make us put into place measures of limitation. We wish to impose our reality, our narrative and our values, upon the world and restrain its vagaries to our own measure. Built into our anthropological roots are instincts for survival; to survive we need to be accepted by our group: to embrace its rituals and precepts. Each negotiates his or her place within a hierarchy; smooth functioning of the group requires mutual cooperation, while individual success within the system is dependant on the capacity to wield power and pass it on the family group by choosing a physically and socially successful mate. The dynamics of power relations, social dominance, violence and love can be explained in anthropological terms (Bateson, 1972). As Bourdieu (1977) points out, cultural value can be used to maintain social distinction and hierarchy and legitimizes the power of the dominant group. By imposing our narrative on the world we can control it but, in doing so, we become further trapped in our narrow vision.

Those with the power over resources wish to maintain their position and impose their viewpoint and pass on this dominance to their children. Dominant and powerful systems can impose themselves, take possession of resources and even destroy other less powerful or aggressive systems, as has been witnessed innumerable times in the history of colonization. Specific and limited interests can also lead to actions that can upset the balance of the meta-system upon which we depend: immediate profit put before

long-term, or wider perspective, can lead to the elimination of elements, or species necessary to our survival. In an environment with limited resources, control of those resources may be the key to survival, encouraging the behaviour of dominance and control. In the contemporary world where precarious economic and climatic, or extreme political, conditions create large movements of population, much racial tension arises from a sense that an out-group is acquiring the assets of the in-group and results in even more tendency for controlling interests to impose intransigent measures with specific and limited interests in mind. Often, existing power structure, such as banks, international companies and schools, hold in place poorly functioning systems because of vested personal interest in the retention of assets and power. The production, exportation and importation of food on a global level has destroyed local production, but with soaring petrol prices and climatic changes the price of basic foods also rise and the question arises as to the possibility of feeding the world in the future.

It is easy to perceive control, power and dominance under regimes where, the expression of certain beliefs contrary to that of the controlling power structure, can lead to imprisonment, torture or death. It is perhaps more difficult to see in so-called “free” societies yet the power of neo-liberal capitalism and multinational companies in present society has a dominant influence on a vast variety of beliefs; in some states in America, for example, to say anything against capitalism would be considered subversive and anti-American. Advertising embodies certain values implicitly that are not made explicit; buying can make you happy: a car can make you free: a successful, loved person looks a certain way etcetera.

There are two fundamental conditions of human interaction in the evolution of human society: that of power, control and manipulation and that of integration and cooperation. These two conditions can be traced back through different stages and types of human development and the instincts for survival of individuals and groups. Hunting and gathering was subsistence strategy of human societies for more than two million years, such societies have non-hierarchical, egalitarian social structures. Ninety per cent of human history had such organization (Boehm 1999). Thus hierarchic dominance has a relatively short history.

During this short history, in many cases we have tried to impose the limitation of our narratives on others: issues of power, control and self-interest lead to control of, or submission to, structural models that dominate the consciousness and behaviour of an age on social, political and religious levels. Vested interest in specific perceptions of reality lead to the games of power and control that dominate that history. Fundamental drives for survival lead to games of power and dominance: within a given society, the forms that the narratives take tend to be directed, and eventually fixed, by the dominant power interests and economy, upholding certain value systems (Bourdieu, 1977) so that all discourse tends to be viewed and judged through the lens of this structure and the values upheld become absolute “truths” which are no longer questioned from within that system. In Marxist terms, culture becomes an element of class struggle in which the subordinate group are kept in place by being persuaded to accept the dominant values through a process that Gramsci (2006) called hegemony.

It becomes more and more clear that issues of power and control are fundamental influences on human life at political, economic and social, thus educational, levels: all

our socialization processes train us for submission. Foucault maintains that most of our social models are based on power, control and restriction, the imposition of one intelligence (or value structure) on another; the manager on the worker, the doctor on the patient, the teacher on the student. As he demonstrates in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), school is a social institution of power and control that imposes how, when and what a student learns and engenders a process of *normalization*, by which certain forms of knowledge and types of truth are valorized over others (Crossly, 2007).

We invent the world; we carry our experience as personal and cultural memory from which we build a speculative model of what constitutes the world outside our head. Only through filter and interpretation can we make sense of the ever-changing patchwork of stimulus that invades us. We guard this sanity jealously. In general we preserve our identity by being persuaded that everyone else is wrong. This leads, in the long run to miscomprehension, conflict, tension and inefficiency. The person in charge understands a situation and its needs in terms of his vocabulary, envisages a solution and tries to implement it to a group that may not share the same value structure.

The effort of constant re-assessment is painful and, besides there are fine lines between doubt and weakness, conviction and intransigence; between form and formlessness. Doubt, questioning aligned with integrity takes strength as well as imagination - they are often taken for weakness: in the classroom many students prefer to be told the answer than to be encouraged to question and work out their own point of view. It is easier to act in the blind belief of conviction and so often power seems to be in the hands of the least imaginative and most convinced; they offer ready-made maps that are easy to follow; they slough motorways across the inconvenience of gentle fordings and their simple slogans are easily graspable in the modern form of communication- the advert, the SMS, the Tweet, the headline and the quick online summary. The modern hero, the re-invention of the man of action, speaks determinedly into his cellular phone, making the quick and incisive decision as he surveys the tangle: 'cut down that forest', the road goes there. Everything is reduced to meta-tags: look up the answer on the Web and act.

Naming separates:

*"Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo"?*

*"'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,  
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part  
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!  
What's in a name? that which we call a rose  
By any other name would smell as sweet;  
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,  
Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
Without that title. "*

Man kills, tortures and destroys, as he has always done, in the name of truth and difference (Klein, 2007): difference separates and distances and allows the other to be treated differently: *you* are unclean. You are black, white, yellow: a man or a woman: you

are Christian, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jew: Capitalist, Communist, Monarchist, rich or poor, boss or worker: British, Irish, North Korean, South Korean, American, Mexican: from this side of the road or that. A freedom fighter or terrorist? Only in reducing the other to a label and subhuman status could we do to others that which we could not do to ourselves. In time, the persecuted persecute; the divide is entrenched across ages.

Self-interest abuses love, and love becomes confused within power and control. Power abuses: aggression and domination are confused with structure and order. Until lack of respect drives the dispossessed to try and restore their sense of respect and dignity, meaning and purpose – also through power: a gun, a revolution. Violence is the cry of the disposed or the arm of those for whom self-interest has woven the excuse of separation.

The research of James Gilligan on California prisons indicates that much violence arises from a sense of a lack of respect: he reports (Gilligan 2009) that during his research he heard over and over the comment *“I never got so much respect before in my life as I did when I pointed a gun at some dude’s face.”* He also point out that the countries with the most gap between rich and poor are those that have the most violence.

If I have nothing: if I and my family are starving, I must act, and if necessary, steal and kill, or die. So the powerful build walls and fences and the divide widens. Fear and distance underscore the difference. If I have vast reserves of money and the power it brings, my interest is to keep what I have and gain control over even more resources.

Some political theorists, recognizing the suppression and exploitation of an enormous section of the population see only overthrow as the means to create a new and fairer balance. In these systems a new control is put in place to redistribute wealth. However what happened under communism, for example, was that those that controlled the new system had the power and just became a new elite that replaced the existing one. The experiments of ideological egalitarianism of the last century fell into dictatorship based on control by fear and repression.

Other systems believe that a totally “free market” allows a Darwinian natural balance and that healthy competition will create an expanding economy that will benefit all. Personal success is seen as the ultimate aim and good of life that justifies any means used to obtain them. Freedom itself perceived as the freedom to exploit the other. However not all people have access to this freedom and the market and economy becomes dominant by a small percentage of ultra-rich, while the poor get poorer and small, local competition is replaced by market domination by global companies (Crouch 2012). My worth can be assessed by how much money I have. Democracy and freedom become mythologies woven into systems of dominance and exploitation and used as another arm out of control.

And before the impossibility of this enormity I draw the blanket of self around me: what can I do for these millions? How can I change this injustice? How can my doubt fight the absolute of certainty of the zealot? Tied to a remorseless system and the bombarded by the cacophony of strident noise of propaganda that is our cultural narrative, how can I find and listen to that small centre that is the essence of being? “Succeed,

buy, consume” is the message that resounds and drowns out the self.

Sometimes there seems no choice: one man, one system, wishes to dominate the world – do I lie down and accept or do I fight? Do I submit or impose. The meek suffer under the hand of the dominant aggressor. Millions have been tortured and killed in the name of a free market economy (Klein, 2007). Those that advocate peace and forgiveness are abused: Aung San Suu Kyi was kept under house arrest for almost fifteen years for promoting democracy. Christ was crucified; Gandhi and Martin Luther King were shot.

Within complexity, how to have a vision that goes beyond my experience? Necessity and survival pushes philosophy out of the door. Born into the separation of existence we forget the eternity from which we come; seeing the world from here we become fixed in our perspective, in our egocentric divide. Man kills, destroys and dominates in the name of truth and in the blindness of selfishness. My reality against yours; my success against yours. All is sacrificed before, blindness, fear, desire for power and control: *“der Wille zur Macht”* (Nietzsche).

It is as if the endless rich variety of difference cannot be tolerated and we globalize everything into standardization and sameness with primitive force or finance.

*“Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him”*. Forever man against his neighbour: village against village: state against state: culture against culture: religion against religion – even the religion of love, divided over dogma and power, kills and tortures. Any excuse of difference: colour, tribe, wealth, belief will do; Holocaust and genocide continue and the killed become the revengeful killers. Statistics and horror beyond imagination: what are three million men, women and children killed in three months (Rwanda) in the immeasurable statistics of history? The world hardly noticed.

What can make a difference? The humble are destroyed by the arrogant. Power is seized by those least suited to wield it. Tibet is swallowed by a different idealism. Countries are invaded and bombarded into submission by powerful nations for financial interest masquerading behind mythological freedom (Klein, 2007). The individual is swallowed by the global company.

Only education can enlarge the vision and we replace education with training. Each system tries to ensure its own continuation and truly educated individuals are free-thinking and questioning and may challenge the existing system.

Why write what has been written a thousand times? To bear witness to a simple truth that is eternal and must be kept alive.

*“With power over things comes detachment rather than connection”*

Further, the abstraction of idea from experience and organisation from process creates a detachment based on abstract principles rather than human needs and interaction. Detachment allows action that does not take into account the other: we may manipulate, dominate and control in what appears to be personal interest without even conceiving the necessity of symbiosis or the destruction that may be happening on

another level. If we feel connected we remain open, listening and respectful. We may perhaps become aware that all relations are symbiotic: I alter other and the other alters me. The well being of both elements, and a flexible exchange between them, is essential to the health of the system.

Few are willing to accept the relative limitation of their own knowledge and to become tolerant and humble. Yet, as Ramadan writes, Tolerance is not enough; we must learn respect for difference:

*“Tolerance can reduce the other to a mere presence; respect opens up to us the complexity of his being. At the same time, it teaches us to recognize that the other is as complex as we are: he is our equal, our mirror, our question.”*

Ramadan (2010)

Meanwhile profit is a god that justifies all.

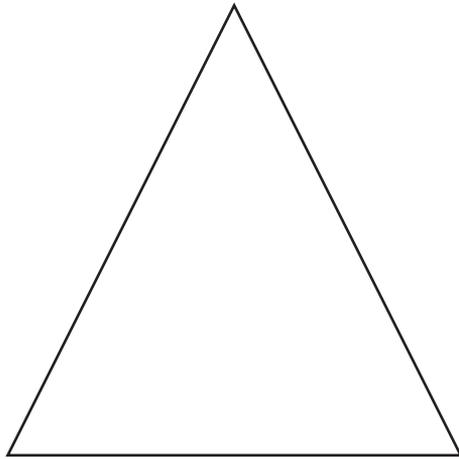
The instinct for survival through competition for resources and the defence of our own group against others in Darwinian terms is natural and can aide evolution when there is a healthy equilibrium between groups and species that help to keep a natural balance, but, in a situation where one species or tribe becomes too successful and dominant, the instinct can be the cause of mass destruction and even failure of the whole system. Is it imaginable that we might once again create structures based on mutual cooperation, where attempts to dominate could be quickly put down by the group (Boehm, 2001)?

Difference, richness in diversity and variety is an essential part of life. The nature of the Interaction and exchange between different parts of the system is the key to its survival and central to its living, breathing nature: whenever one part becomes too successful or dominant it threatens the survival of the whole. When thought and systems become abstracted from experience and the nature of human life they threaten its survival.

In separating ourselves from that which we are a part, in an arrogant and blind domination, we have blunted our perception and cut ourselves off from many ways of knowing that flow through the energies of a direct contact with the natural world and a consciousness that is embedded in the temporal rhythm that it produces. The qualities of awe, respect, humility and joy that it engenders are lost to the remorseless values of control and the of pursuit fixity. We concrete and tarmac infinite variety into sameness and, like Plato’s prisoners, watch shadows flickering across screens rather than lifting our heads and watching the wonder of the sky. Our capacity for abstraction, of symbolizing, has dominated and blunted our perception. Our narratives becomes dissociated from experience and descriptions of the world do not reflect our experience and the value structures, which are the foundation of a culture, are lost in postmodern, abstract, endless, possibility.

*“The inability to conceive of the complexity of anthroposocial reality, both in its micro dimension (the individual being), and its macro dimension (the planetary collectivity of humanity), has led us to infinite tragedies and is leading us to the supreme tragedy.”*

Morin (1998)



**M**ountain

## SEEKING THE STILL POINT: FROM RATIONALISM TO MODERNISM

*“The notion of progress became central to modernity. The belief was that the scientific method offered a way to get at truth in a manner that was empirical, testable, and gave the user power. It’s important to understand that before the scientific method was applied, people simply did not think this way.”*

Morin (1998)

*“In the days when an idea could be silenced by showing that it was contrary to religion, theology was the greatest single source of fallacies. Today, when any human thought can be discredited by branding it as unscientific, the power previously exercised by theology has passed over to science; hence science has become in its turn the greatest single source of error.”*

M. Polani (1957)

We live in two worlds: that of the rational, detached experience of the left hemisphere of the brain and that of the more direct connection of unarticulated experience of the right hemisphere. History reflects the expression of each of these tendencies and the changing balance between them. In art we have various movements of Classicism and Romanticism. In philosophy there is an on-going discourse between Rationalism and Empiricism

A whole train of western civilization has been to attempt to overcome the unreasoned animal instinct; the savage, and to control it in the cause of the general upward movement towards a truly ‘civilized man’ by the application of Reason. It is man’s reason, goes the argument, that created harmony out of the chaos of nature; that created great art works and edifices that set us apart from the animal. Our emotions are tempestuous and unreliable- we can change from morning to evening. Our reason provides stability, sweeps away superstition and fear. Unreason burns witches, reason invents medicine. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the rise of this form of rationality. The nineteenth century saw the foundations of a true scientific method and, in the twentieth science has become the standard measure of the reliability of knowledge.

Seeking the still point from which to move the world: the desire for stability in a constantly changing environment has often lead to the attempt to find a solid ground in rationality that goes beyond human difference and emotional fluctuation. The Age of Enlightenment sought to free man from the tyranny of uncertainty and superstition and was at the heart of a profound change in our way of thinking that was to culminate in Modernism. In the midst of the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fragmentary, the project of modernity was to discover the ‘eternal’ and ‘immutable’ (Harvey, 1990). Modernism claimed to have been founded on objectivity: to have found Aristotle’s fixed point from which to move the earth. Arising from the context of industrialization and scientific advance, Modernism championed the triumph of rationality. Its metaphor was the machine and its actors believed in the capacity of the rational human mind to bring utopia through the application of “master” plans. Through rationality man could solve problems of poverty, illness and communication and create a new, just society. Symbolic of this dream, a new rational architecture was envisaged

based on the purity of abstract mathematics: a house would be “a machine for living” and the town planned from scratch on a geometric grid that prioritises the modernist miracle, the motorcar. Metaphors of machines and technology replaced those of nature. Modernism embodies a belief in human perfectibility through the application of science and rationality. The rationality of science would allow us once and for all to find absolute answer beyond human subjectivity.

*“The principles for designing objects for use should be purely factual and determined by the functions that the objects are to serve... Their design ought to be so ‘rational’ that any two artisans faced with the same task would produce identical objects... We do not sit in such-and-such a way, because a table maker makes the chair as he does, [the carpenter makes the chair as he does] but because someone wants to sit that way.”*

Loos, A. (1908)

This rejects that form arises out of the material, specific needs of context and tradition: for example the design of a Swiss Chalet came from the materials available: wood and stone, and the need to protect the interior from the sun in summer and the heavy quantities of snow that would lie on the roof all winter and each *Canton* had its specific decorations in the form of engraved wood and painting.

“Il faut être absolument Moderne” wrote Rimbaud. The concept of Historicism, that is looking at and learning from the past to build the future, was seen as no longer appropriate: we must look forward, not back. Yet this severs the umbilical chord of our own narrative.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Modernism created a heady optimism, with its symbols of the vibrant energy of the city: “*La Ville Radieuse*”, and the unleashed power of the automobile:

*“We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath ... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.”*

Futurist Manifesto 1909

The First World War created an impetus to find a system that would go beyond national difference and never allow the mass destruction of that war to be repeated: reflected in the philosophy of the De Stijl movement. It resulted in a modernism that promoted functionality, abstract geometric forms as the basis for aesthetics and a belief in human technology to solve problems.

*“6. The founders of the new plastic art therefore call upon all, who believe in the reformation of art and culture, to annihilate these obstacles of development, as they have annihilated in the new plastic art (by abolishing natural form) that, which prevents the clear expression of art, the utmost consequence of all art notion.*  
*7. The artists of to-day have been driven the whole world over by the same consciousness, and therefore have taken part from an intellectual point of view in this war against the domination of individual despotism. They therefore sympathize with all, who work for the formation of an international unity in Life, Art, Culture, either*

*intellectually or materially.”*

De Stijl Manifesto (1918)

Yet, the fulcrum point of objectivity is yet another myth:

*“Modern man has increasing reason to suspect that there is something in the nature of attempted perfection that lead to imperfection.”*

Watzlawick, 1984

*“This critique holds that people have the potential to be far more thoughtful, skilful, creative and well rounded than they now are, yet they are unable to express their potential because of the constraints of a rationalized world. If the world were less rationalized, or even derationalized, people would be better able to live up to their human potential.”*

George Ritzer: ‘The MacDonaldization of Society’

Industrialization and growing urban development has taken us away from direct experience of nature while attempts to go beyond subjective and ephemeral perception at the mercy of emotional response, have lead to a dominance of left-brain rationality and rejection of the many and varied capacities for knowing within the human system.

The first mechanical war might have been a signal of caution to this enthusiasm for industrialization, but its consequences were to destroy once and for all an economic and class system and unleash the power of another great metaphor: Freud’s unconscious: in which the rationality of “civilized man” is constantly under threat from the dark, primitive urges of the animal, making us all the more suspicious of instinct. This was to separate definitively the “old knowledge” from the new and create the basis of new form of communication and control: advertising, Edward Bernaise developing techniques based on Freud’s theories to read the inner desires of individuals and fulfil them with products (BBC, 2002). Most of our decisions are not rational, however much we champion its application.

This is not to deny, or underestimate, the importance and role of science. It allows the creation of a model of aspects of reality outside individual perception and create discussion and exchange and the best science takes into account both observed and observer and the limitations of its model; much of the research, and many of the references, of this book are based on science. However, as Morin says *“We know that rationality does not grow as a matter of course. It can regress, can take on insane forms of rationalization, which is to say the form of a closed logical system, incapable of seeing reality.”* The separation of disciplines and the increasing specialisation within disciplines can mean that more overall perspectives are lost and, with the increasing quantity and complexity of knowledge, more holistic and detached vision becomes more difficult. Neither should science be allowed to obscure or make us forget our capacity for other ways of knowing that are perhaps more directly linked to our experience of life and our direct relation to it.

*“The suspicion lurks that the Enlightenment project was doomed to turn against itself and transform the quest for human emancipation into a system of universal oppression in the name of human liberation.”*

Harvey, 1990

## THE TOWER OF BABEL: POSTMODERNISM AND DIGITALISATION

*“Don't you realise’, he said, ‘that nothing survives now? Everything is instantly forgotten. There is no history any more. There is no memory. There are no standards to encourage permanence- only novelty, and the whole endless cycle of new objects”*

Peter Ackroyd: ‘Chatterton’

*“We are approaching an unprecedented mutation of knowledge. Knowledge is less and less made to be reflected upon and discussed by human minds, and it is more and more made to be imprinted in memory banks and manipulated by anonymous powers, particularly by nation states. This new, massive, and prodigious ignorance is itself ignored by scientists”*

Morin (1998)

The Postmodern condition takes us to the other extreme of our dialectical condition: we have moved from the limitation of restricted connection to the chaos of infinite choice in a world of ubiquitous information without hierarchy and order, other than that imposed by the Google search engine algorithm (which becomes more and more imposing). We are immersed in snippets of random, hyperlinked information that are constantly changing. Meanings and relations can be constantly structured and deconstructed with a click. This poses the question of what represents the cultural heritage of society and what I should pass on in my classes? For example a search for mountains on Google gave 191,000,000 returns. Even in restricting myself to scholarly articles, I had 2,140,000 possible articles to consult. DevonAgent or other specialized, programmable Metasearch clients, give me more, rather than less, returns. This is restricting myself to English; French opens a further galaxy of possibilities. What might exist in Mandarin, Japanese or Korean, luckily, remains a closed web page to me!

As discussed, human consciousness creates stability out of the constant flux of experience through narrative that reflects shared cultural values. The confrontation with technology involves dealing with the one of the characteristics of Post-Modern society; the detachment of information, and experience, from the specific cultural context that gave rise to it is. As Jameson (1991) points out, post-modern culture is a “culture of quotations”, losing its sense of history and sense of a unified culture which is replaced by endless choice and random, or individual, juxtaposition of experience. Without a coherent, cultural narrative, we experience a sense of instability and insecurity.

In a digital world, all information becomes equal, removed from a particular context to be ‘mixed and matched’ at will. Knowledge becomes a commodity and the “real” collapses into hyperrealism (Baudrillard, 1983), a Babel world of signs detached from the situations that gave rise to them. In digital manipulation, as Manovich points out (2002), the paradigm (database) is privileged over the syntagm (narrative) and content is separated from the context within which it has its origin. As my research into the iPod showed (Pulfrey, 2008) within a digital system, all information takes on equal value. Since access is no longer linear, we can create juxtapositions that were previously

impossible. The relationship between an object and its original context of meaning is lost and all information becomes a commodity to be used and consumed as described by Lyotard (1984). This consumption may be perceived as the ultimate act of freedom and personal creativity or the apotheosis of Surrealist randomness: "*The chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table*" (Lautreamont, 1869). Meaning becomes a post-modern random act of personal choice.

Deconstructionalism and Post-Modernism are but the crux of being caught in the paradox of the dialectic I presented; 'meaning' and 'connection' in human terms require a subjective, limited vision within a context. Perhaps the apple of the Tree of Knowledge was self-consciousness: "we saw that we were naked"; the realization that any context is but one possible of many and has no absolute value sets a sort of desperation where the idea of 'standard' and 'value' are disparaged and self-consciousness takes away that integrity of unaware absorption with subject that leads to quality. Why take any route rather than another? The map becomes a confusion of crisscrossing by-ways that trample the delineation of major highways - self-conscious parody has always been the defence of insecure societies in periods of decline. Making pretty maps can become a defence for not travelling. The labelling of landmarks becomes more interesting than the reality; our technology gives us more and more means to recreate the topography in a 'virtual reality' that is seductive; the idea of experience takes over from experience itself and disconnects from meaning

A map is not the terrain it represents; it has a certain schematic relation to that terrain and can express different aspects. It seems as if the left brain wishes to limit reality to its descriptions. Concentration on the language of the map distances from experience of the landscape. Industrialization and Modernism already restructured the environment to resemble the plan and covered it with man-made artefacts, so that many people have no contact with natural landscape. Digitalisation now removes our focus even further from direct experience and increases the focus on the map: the mental model of that experience. Men focus on screens, not on direct interaction with the physical world. I am beginning to have classes of a generation of students that were born into the digital world and I am intensely aware that they have a completely different perception, way of thinking and behaviour.

The ability to be able to understand the relationship between information, perception and structure: the *context* of understanding, can help develop respect, tolerance and provide tenable cultural values for the future. Without these connections, we become caught in our subjectivity where power becomes reason. Is it just the modern echo of Nietzsche's 'Will to Power' in front of existentialist anxiety and our loss of a singularity of language and value?

## THE SEPARATION

*“The old beliefs were based on a description of reality that emphasized the unity or dependent origination of all life, whereas the new scientific perspective emphasizes its separateness. It seems to say that we stand apart – outside the rest of creation. And to gain a greater understanding of the way nature works, we simply have to split matter into smaller and smaller fragments and examine the various pieces in isolation.”*

Norberg-Hodge (2000)

*“It seems clear that by cutting ourselves off from nature, by turning nature into scenery and commodities, we may have cut ourselves off from something vital. To repair this damage we can’t any longer take what we call “nature” for an object. We must merge it again with our own nature.”*

McDonald (2002))

*“Lots of people hardly ever feel real soil under their feet, see plants grow except in flower pots, or get far enough beyond the street light to catch the enchantment of a night sky studded with stars. When people live far from the scenes of the Great Spirit’s making, it’s easy for them to forget his laws.”*

Walking Buffalo (*cit.* McLuhan, 1992)

Growing urbanism, industrial production the dominant rational of science cut the umbilical cord of nature and of the past. The structures that we have put in place replace the references of nature; day and night, seasons, distance and biological time. The dominant, intellectual intelligence neglects all other forms of knowing.

We live with the heritage of the Modernist experiment. The error of this experiment was to remove solutions from human experience and behaviour into an idea of abstract perfection detached from reality. What McGilchrist (2009) sees in terms of left-brain dominance:

*“The right hemisphere saw individuals where the left hemisphere saw categories; the right hemisphere realised the importance of what is intuitive and embodied, where the left hemisphere prioritised abstraction and rationality (here I distinguish mere ‘rationality’ from the all-important, and far more complex, ‘reason’, to which both hemispheres need to contribute).”*

In separating ourselves from that of which we are a part in an arrogant and blind domination, we have blunted our perceptions and cut ourselves off from many ways of knowing that flow through the energy of a direct contact with the natural world and from a consciousness that is embedded in the temporal rhythm that it produces. The qualities of awe, respect and humility: a sense of mystery and joy that it engenders, are lost to a remorseless pursuit of fixity and sameness that allow control. Our capacity for abstraction and symbolising has dominated and blunted our perceptions. Our narratives become dissociated from experience and our descriptions of the world do not reflect our direct experience. Our value structures, which are the foundation of a healthy culture, are perplexed by a postmodern, abstract, endless sense of possibility

without experienced foundation.

Again McGilchrist:

*“I would contend that a combination of urban environments which are increasingly rectilinear grids of machine-made surfaces and shapes, in which little speaks of the natural world; a worldwide increase in the proportion of the population who live in such environments, and live in them in greater degrees of isolation; an unprecedented assault on the natural world, not just through exploitation, despoliation and pollution, but also more subtly through excess ‘management’ of one kind or another, coupled with an increase in the virtuality of life, both in the nature of work undertaken, and in the omnipresence in leisure time of television and the internet, which between them have created a largely insubstantial replica of ‘life’ as processed by the left hemisphere”*

As we have seen, Life is an on-going process of interaction, action, reaction and development. A complex system that cannot be seen in its entirety by man, who cannot comprehend the long-term consequences of his interference. A friend, who is a farmer, observed the extent to which his cows were disturbed by flies. He found a way to remove the flies from the fields, only to discover later that this meant that the cow droppings remained in the field and became a major problem; the flies process and remove waste. This small, specific example is repeated on a gigantic scale throughout human activity: we spray chemicals into the environment to remove certain pests without being able to judge the long-term affects of these when they enter the system. It is well known that many products contain chemicals that can produce possibly fatal side affects. Simply driving a road through an environment can upset the local natural balance of flora and fauna that has existed for thousands of years. Many of our decisions may be fatal in the long-term (Gilding 2011): we are altering the very climate of the planet, which may result in large areas of the earth becoming uninhabitable and the inability to produce enough food. We are emptying the oceans by overfishing and making fundamental changes to this ecosystem. The bee population is declining, perhaps because of the change in climate, perhaps because of pesticides and change in agricultural practices. Without the pollination of bees many crops cannot be grown. It is easy to fall into a habitual human pattern of conflictual opposition: a Cassandra like denunciation and a defensive reaction that does not help change the situation. Many people still refuse to admit that pollution is responsible for global warming or that cars are harmful to the environment. We are individuals, but we are also part of a thought-system that is created and evolved through our technology and way of living. We need to understand the system and be aware how human thought has changed and what other possibilities may allow a richer existence.

*“Hitherto, Western science has stressed the attitude of objectivity – a cold, calculating and detached attitude through which it appears that natural phenomena, including the human organism, are nothing but mechanisms. But, as the word itself implies, a universe of mere objects is objectionable. We feel justified in exploiting it ruthlessly, but now we are belatedly realizing that the ill-treatment of the environment is damage to ourselves – for the simple reason that subject and object cannot be separated, and that we and our surroundings are the process of a unified field, which is what the Chinese call Tao.”*

Alan Watts (1979)

This dominance given to analytical reasoning devalued such concepts as mystery, wisdom, intuition and spirituality, fixing its metaphor in the machine, yet neither machines nor computers are human: why are we so keen to impose them as metaphors on our existence? As Ritzer (2004) argues, the ostensible benefits of rational production efficiency, quantification and calculation, predictability and control lead to dehumanisation. Human needs are subjugated to the needs of the system. Bernstein (1985) wrote, *“The growth of purposive-instrumental rationality does not lead to the concrete realization of universal freedom but to the creation of an ‘iron cage’ of bureaucratic rationality from which there is no escape.”*

Our reality arises out of the subtle complex of sensation that we receive through the many level of perception that connect us to the world. This infinitely subtle, complex and dynamic relation is founded in our connection to the living, breathing system that is Nature: this oneness that may be given the name of God.

The shared consciousness of humanity evolves and changes with experience. Technology alters our lives, our perceptions and our relation to the world. At this moment, there seems to be a radical shift. Infinite quantities of information, constantly available, but disconnected from the specific context of culture or experience and received through the single perceptual mechanism of the brain. If we abstract information from context and withdraw more and more into a virtual world that severs its link from its origins we must lose a whole dimension of the sense of meaning to dominant and unthinking systems which ignore levels of being beyond the limitations of logical construct and yet which are at the heart of what makes us human.

*“The miracles of technology cause us to live in a hectic, clockwork world that does violence to human biology, enabling us to do nothing but pursue the future faster and faster.”*

Watts (1979)

Human understanding is an expressive flowering of being, arising from connection and empathy: the firing of neurones by stimulation across a border that is dynamic, not fixed, giving rise to a reality that is an on-going creation as stimulation alters the internal structure that creates perception which, in turn alters the perception. So being evolves over time and the action of being changes the environment within which it exists.

An awareness of consciousness within the context of this on-going, dynamic system, with a specific temporal and spatial perspective and within a general evolving human perception and discourse with reality must fundamentally alter our relation to existence. In this situation, all intelligent discourse becomes about relationship rather than fixed absolutes. New knowledge is not a replacement of past knowledge, but rather should be viewed as a new set of relationships under different conditions: within this context, under these conditions with this experience we create this picture. The central question should be to what extent does this perception improve the quality of our existence and our understanding?

Awareness through attention to all the different levels of connection: open, non-judgemental attention, as encouraged by Buddhist practice, frees us from the limitation of

our individual subjectivity and allows access to the spiritual path of connectedness to the whole.

Yet human thought moved away from this sense of *relation* to our existence in favour of the idea that abstracted distance, can allow an impartiality beyond human difference and disagreement. Objective description becomes more important than relation and meaning. This leads to the sense of disconnection and allows manipulation of people and the environment in ways that would not be possible with a sense that each is part of a whole. The present phenomenon of a global explosion of connected digital information and communication increases this disconnection of the individual from the present time and context, pushing the inhabited reality to a series of metatags: simplified concepts that reduce complex relationships to formulas disconnected from experience.

Systems become more powerful than any individuals and seem to have no sense of human values: the quality of life and experience. The local post-office is closed for a cheaper, centralized administration. The postman is regulated by a time and motion expert to make sure that no time is lost. All forgetting that once the job included a sort of benevolent social service and the pleasure of the work came from the human contact: keeping an eye on older people living alone and providing a social focus to village life. Decisions are taken from afar with no account of the enormous experience and local knowledge of people in a specific environment.

*“The so-called ‘global village’ – promoted by governments and industry as uniting all nations in pursuit of fruits of the “cosmopolitan” global economy – is in fact a highly volatile monoculture where no one feels any great connection to place, tradition or planet any more. Powerful monopolistic corporations are driving a speculative casino economy in which ever-faster technologies accelerate life, scale it up, and create anonymity and competition in the process.”*

Norberg-Hodge (2000)

The separation of idea from experience and of man from direct contact with the natural world has allowed the increasing domination of one system: global, corporate capitalism (particularly since the fall of the Berlin wall), which takes little account of human nature and needs. Dedicated to the single aim of profit, it focuses on cheaper production and ever-increasing turnover, without questioning whether it improves our quality of life or experience. Millions of people are exploited, working in appalling conditions for little pay (Klein, 2000) to feed the insatiable greed of the system, while the planet suffers rape, spiralling pollution and extinction of species to the extent that many serious researchers seriously question our survival.

Emphasis on individuality, rather than group values, that has flourished in, and dominated the western world through the success of America following the Second World War and the domination of Neoliberal capitalism has also encouraged a subjective vision: the narrative of self becomes all important. Active imposition for personal (financial) success becomes more important than awareness and understanding of other. An economy based on growth and consumption is underwritten by the underlying semiotic messages of advertising, based on Bernaise’s work; buying is sold as the ultimate liberty, hiding the essential conditions of slavery under which most people live:

ours is not to reason why, ours but to buy and die...

We are caught in the grasp of this system that is not human: moving on a tread wheel of time that accelerated at an ever-faster pace. Torn from the context of the natural world with its endless variety of growth and change: of colour, of light, of atmosphere and form, we move within the unforgiving environment of human standardization and the remorseless destruction of that which supports us and nurtures life. Commerce seeks the “perfect”, standard apple – not the apple that arises from the specific climatic conditions of a specific geographical location, with certain soil that gives it a unique taste and subtlety of flavour. The possible variations are infinite and infinitely subtle and only with attention, openness and time can this subtlety be appreciated. This variation is reflected in the richness of languages arising out of cultural experience and expression; this richness is also in danger. Each year languages disappear and the Atlas on Endangered Languages (UNESCO) claims over 3,000 to be endangered, seriously endangered or dying.

We are sold the illusion of a freedom that long ceased to exist. The mythology of the car is an apt illustration of this blatant contradiction: sold as ultimate freedom and luxury, we mortgage ourselves to own one, become isolated and ensnared within its confine, frustrated by the others in our way while roads dominate and destroy everywhere we go and we ignore the irredeemable damage that it is doing to our planet, sitting in a traffic jam looking at advertisements of cars on empty country roads. The link between experience and discourse is sundered: everything is processed and packaged to a system totally detached from any living, breathing contact with natural life. We are bombarded with the publicized promise of a life totally missing from the reality around us and we console ourselves within a life of the mind: an advertising-created mirage that does not exist.

Further, removing ourselves from direct experience changes our relationship to time. Time becomes a linear race rather than a space within which we exist. Thus we become ever more separated from natural life and ourselves and live ever more in the world of ideas and concepts based on constructions of perception that, however useful and necessary, are partial and separate.

In the small square of garden outside my door is a miraculous world of endless variation; small grasses and plants, beyond imagination in their variousness, and the insects, nameless to me, that inhabit them- some so small that even ants look big, yet miniature perfection; self-absorbed and important as little government officials they go about their insect business. While cars rush up and down the motorway below, never seeming to arrive anywhere, blind, unconcerned and unknowing under the mountain moving to another rhythm- putting man back in his place in the order of things if he would only stop and look.

Ontology. The interconnection of everything; our garden is in the world; we cannot put the world in that garden, to echo the Chinese sage, (the Existentialists came to the same conclusion - about four thousand years later). Man cannot step outside the world to see it; he is a gifted violin player in the orchestra, not the conductor and he shouldn't underestimate the part played by the single note of the triangle. It took sub-atomic particle physics to highlight the fact that the experimenter affects the outcome of an

experiment; the anthropologist changes the society that he visits.

The existentialists rebelled like adolescents- they rejected the implacable rigidity of their nineteenth century fathers and they anguished in a self-centred loneliness- "There is, certainly, only me". Reason is based on subjective experience- it provides a model of separateness to allow us to consider that of which we are a part and therefore cannot see. But our connection with the world is through experience and association, not through disassociation, and the experience is through the energy of life that flows through us through the gateway of our senses; Seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, touching and feeling (through those nerve endings of senses that go beyond the usual 'five' senses). The patterns and the meanings; the analogies and the metaphors, all begin here.

Such is Zen; the harmony that sends the arrow to the Gold without effort or looking; not intellectual understanding, but the understanding of heightened sensation. You cannot draw with the intellect; formula creates sameness, deadness: lack of connection. Life is greater than understanding but arrogance casts man out from Eden.

You can only receive what you can give.

You cannot teach a person what he is not ready to know:

*"I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing  
than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance"*

wrote e.e.cummings.

The argument is here; in seeking the truth behind the flux of decay Plato gave us Absolutes and our models for knowledge have always since been based on these absolutes; the perfecting of the logical/scientific model that would provide a reliable explanation of the world. An analogy of such a model would be of someone trying to make a sculpture of something which he can only feel in the dark- you add, take away, change and adjust continually, eventually getting more close to the original. But if we are *part of* the model we cannot stand outside it; Life is movement, and since it is so, nothing can be fixed, grasped and neatly tied down as, in our insecurity, we would wish: what we thought that we understood slips through our fingers- for each pattern described is only the skin shed, the cells replaced, in the constant renewal of becoming.

That the whole cannot be grasped is not the equivalent of meaninglessness.

*"It follows that we cannot devise a systematic theory of meaning in any but a metaphorical sense. Meaning is, in term of proof, no more decidable, no more subject to the arrest of experimental demonstration than is the purpose (if there is any such) of 'sense' of our lives in the unbounded script of time and the world."*

Steiner (1989)

We understand through metaphors and analogy The model of a dance seems more appropriate for a description of what our model should be; any description of the dance cannot be made from a particular step or a description of a single moment, frozen, for the changing relationship is part of its nature, yet this does not make the dance formless.

We are the dance and the dance moves through us. But it is also greater than us and continues when our steps are over. A description without the experience of dancing is meaningless. When we manage to move through the dance, and let the dance flow through us, we may sometimes approach its heart that is stillness and in this moment we can reconcile the ancient rent that separates individuality from the Eternal Spirit.

However, when man lives only with his mind, he cuts himself off from the world. He eats of the apple of knowledge and finds himself, not in Utopia, but in a high-rise, concrete jungle where water tastes of chlorine and running hurts the lungs and he flocks on a biannual pilgrimage to mountain and sea looking for what he has lost and buys indulgences in the form of products, plastic reproductions of a lost world, in the hope of winning back that sense of completeness- to get rid of that feeling that something is missing- I remember intensely the experience of standing on a grey and miserable Paris Metro station with a crowd in steaming, wet coats while we were fed images of people skiing in the freedom of powder snow on the video cameras and I thought of '1984' by George Orwell.

The myth of the Golden Age: Eden.

Endless golden afternoons of picnics and leisure in a cultivated garden of culture. Harmonious equilibrium of mind, body and spirit- the ideal of civilization harboured in Western minds since the rediscovery of the Classical World: I see the irony of bodies, under exercised and with insufficient sleep, fuelled with bad coffee, cigarettes and sugared bread following a laundered myth of creativity and 'design' with earphones and a mobile communication device in the hand.

What's this, another follower of Rousseau? Sitting in comfort in his study, enjoying all the delights of protection of civilization and pretending man was innocent until corrupted by society: 'the innocent savage'? No: philosophy doesn't get written when there is wood to be chopped, water to be drawn and food to grow before you can eat and physical exhaustion from labour and weather ends the day. I like hot water coming out of taps and I like pictures; the Golden Age is not a return to primitive tribal life, it is in the harmony of man and nature in its cultivation.

It includes the image of Man as gardener; another mythology, the very word 'cultivation' contains it. Adam as the wise husband (the word husbandry denoting the care of animals), creating order in his garden and keeping the dark, primeval chaos of the unknown at bay. The dense forest that once covered Europe, full of wild animals, lawlessness and the terror of nature's power; if you want to recapture something of that sensation, go up to one of these mountain peaks by yourself in the middle of a thunderstorm- King Lear shaking his fist at the thunderstorm takes on a never-to-be-forgotten dimension. The cultivated and well-tended garden has long been a symbol for civilization (Shakespeare uses it in 'Richard II'), man's move from chaos to order, from superstition to reason.

This analogy goes back to Virgil and his poems known as the 'Georgics' written to celebrate the end of the Roman civil wars and to encourage Augustus to good government; ostensibly they form a sort of manual of how to run a farm, with information on agriculture, viticulture, epiculture and animal husbandry, while painting an ideal picture

of rural retirement. But they also contain the moral message that through learning to till the soil, man began to form settled communities that allowed culture to develop by providing the leisure, necessary to thought, to some. This idea that landscapes reflect people and civilization passed into the language of painting and of gardening.

The garden experiment in American prisons allowed prisoners and former offenders, some of which had never seen things grow, cultivate gardens. San Francisco has now a successful model for preventing crime and high rates of recidivism; the amount of these prisoners returning to prison after their release is significantly lower than the average.

*“In 1992, The Garden Project was founded with a mission unlike any organization in the country: to provide job training and support to former offenders through counseling and assistance in continuing education, while also impacting the communities from which they come. Today, The Garden Project continues this mission – innovatively empowering both former offenders and at-risk youth through training and education while transforming the urban environment. The Garden Project model for community change is an integrated, community-wide, systemic response to crime, high rates of recidivism, and unemployment which links crime and poverty with stewardship of the environment and the community.”*

<http://www.gardenproject.org/thegardenproject.htm>

It seems that connection to the earth is a powerful force in human life...

#### MULTIMEDIA

*A rich harmony of birdsong  
Mirrors the complex weave  
Of this tapestry of growth,  
Nuanced with texture and scent,  
Orchestrated by the delicate touch of wind  
And the nuance of light.  
Marking time and transparency,  
Defining space and place.  
While men watch screens,  
Seeking always new means  
To destroy this harmony.*

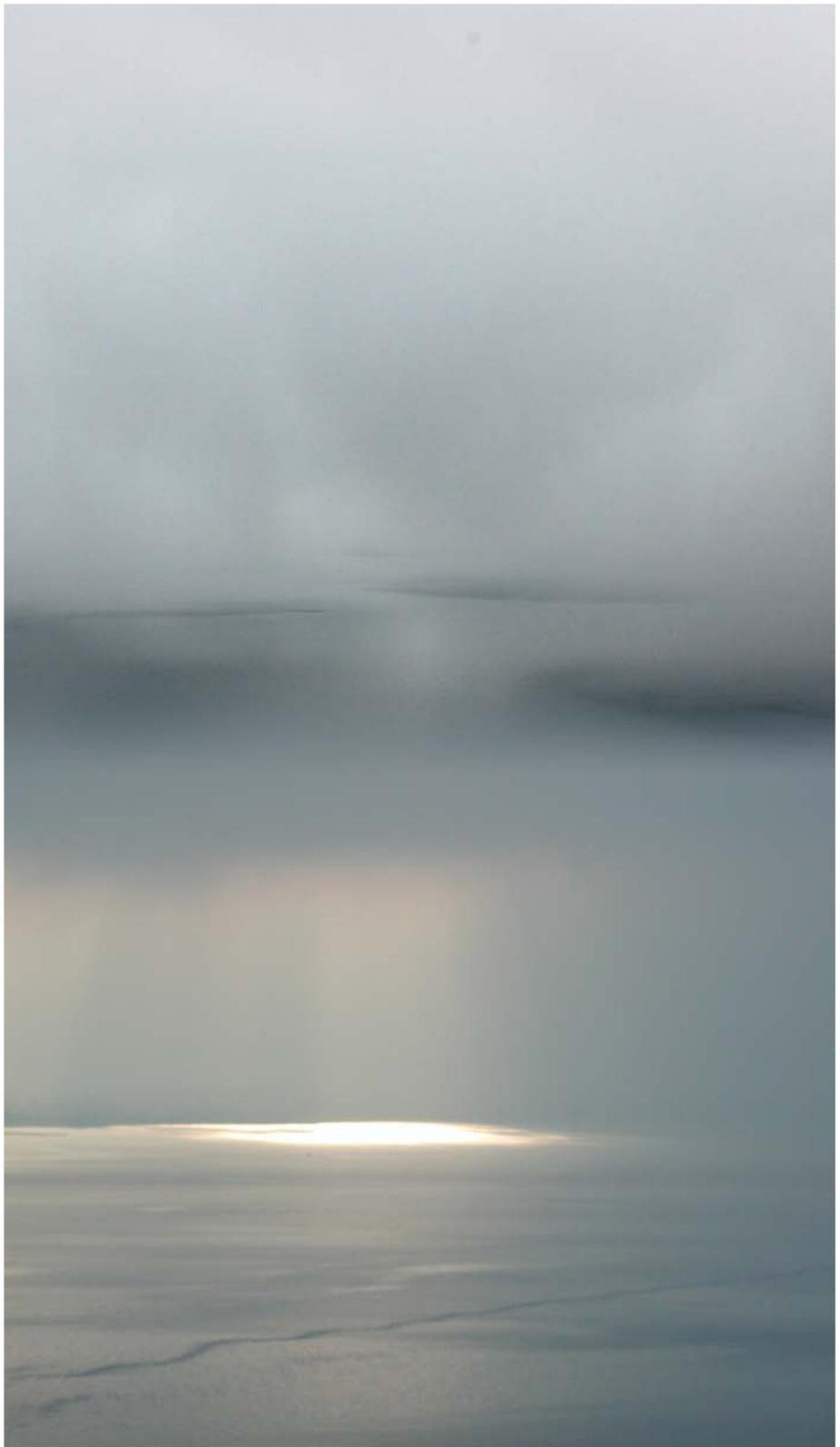
Phillip Pulfrey

*“But man had flung up his arms across his eyes that he might not see the light, had turned his back on the garden of his inheritance, had stumbled out of it and killed his brother.”*

Goudge (1942)



*'Out of Eden' Phillip Pulfrey: Oil on Canvas 2m x 130m*



## MOVING BEYOND

*Our organisms have ways of intelligent understanding beyond words and conscious attention, ways that can handle an unknown number of variables at the same time.”*

Watts (1979)

*“More purposive rationality unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dream, and the like, is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life; and that its virulence springs specifically from the circumstance that life depends upon interlocking circuits of contingency, while consciousness can see only such short arcs of such circuits as human purpose may direct.”*

Bateson (1981)

*“The intellect wants a summary meaning – all well and good for the purposeful nature of the mind. But the soul craves depth of reflection, many layers of meaning, nuances without end, references and allusions and prefigurations.”*

Moore (1992)

*“The mind is as modern as the heart is ancient. Those who listen to their hearts – so people seem to think nowadays – are closer to the animals, to the irrational, while those who listen to the voice of reason are closer to the higher things. But supposing this were not so, that the exact opposite were the truth? Could excess of ratiocination be impoverishing our lives?”*

Tamaro (1996)

Instead of viewing rationalism as a useful tool for investigating the world, it became the only valid form of discourse within which the capacity for spiritual and mystical experience was devalued. We become highly skilled at manipulating information: sifting, seizing, rejecting, quantifying. So much that the mind becomes bogged down in information. The computational brain dominates and, in our impatience, we forget so many other forms of knowing: *“We have replaced secret wisdom with information.”* (Moore 1992). In a recent questionnaire used in a social psychology research project undertaken by my wife across a large number of cultural backgrounds, a question on the importance of religion was marked as unimportant in every case. It seems that we are losing our sense of spirituality; in my classes many students have no notion of the spiritual or of religion.

Explanation, detached from experience, does not create the meaning that relates experience to our own existence; this is done through metaphor. Yet, for the part to understand the whole requires moving beyond the self. For this we were imbued with body, mind, heart and soul. The awareness of mystery and a relationship to life beyond the capacity of pure reason is part of our inherent relationship to life and our intelligence that goes beyond rational thought. As Alan Watts (1988) wrote: *“the interests and goals of rationality are not those of man as a whole organism.”* And Ramadan (2010): *“The faculty of reason very quickly reveals, in the most intimate proximity, its limitations: it is quite unable to understand the realm of the heart.”*

Our existence is temporal, many dimensional: physical, spiritual, emotional, mental and memorial – a matrix of energy. A poetic dancing, casting momentary insights, of juxtapositions, throwing certain relations into relief. Being, becoming, changing are connected in the nature of time itself. Our power of intelligence involves heart, mind, body and soul. As several psychologists (Gilligan, 2008: Taylor, 2004) have pointed out, we have a capacity of spiritual and mystical experience: ways of knowing that goes beyond simple thought.

Yet our capacity to develop this transcending perspective relies much on our relationship to time: we need to be able to be aware of the present moment, yet we are caught on a treadmill of ever-increasing speed that engages the mind in a trap of action and reaction necessary for survival and thus we find neither the space, nor the silence, to become aware of ourselves.

As the last section discussed, we also become further and further removed from the natural world in our mechanized, urban environments. The mind wants to label and move on: *“Ah, a beautiful sunset – I must remember to go the supermarket on the way home– must hand in that report in the morning – it my wife’s birthday next week – what is that fool in the car in front doing? – I’m so hungry – ah, my phone! –Yes, John; I’ll organize a meeting – Another bombing on the radio...”* It is what James Joyce labelled ‘the stream of consciousness’. This stream is part of our perception and reaction to the world around us; if we are aware of the stream and let it flow, it does not tie us down. Yet the constant bombardment of a cacophony of abstract stimuli: telephone, computer, digital sound leave no place for that awareness: the complexity and subtlety of natural life is lost. Ideas refer to ideas not to experience (Baudrillard, 1983). We lose contact with the natural world that formed us and thus with the very nature of Reality itself. In the last few years in my drawing classes I have noted a diminishing span of concentration and an inability to actually see what is before the eyes: many students find it impossible to get through a whole session without consulting a mobile ‘phone.

Techniques of prayer and meditation develop the ability stay in the moment and to be aware of sensation rather than judging it. To be open, rather than imposing our ideas. Awareness or Mindfulness, as expressed in Buddhist teaching, helps us to view experience in relation to our reaction to it, thus allowing us a distance that avoids judgement:

*“Let your awareness drop deep within you like a stone, sinking below the level of what words or acts can express... Breathe in deep and quiet... Open your consciousness to the deep web of relationship that underlies and interweaves all experience, all knowing.”*

Macy (1983)

*“Hark! Listen to the song of the bird, the wind in the trees, the ocean’s roar. Look at a tree, a falling leaf, a flower as if for the first time. You might suddenly make contact with Reality, with that Paradise from which we, having fallen from childhood, are excluded by our knowledge.”*

Mello (1998)

*“Prayer is made perfect when the timeless is discovered.  
The Timeless is discovered through clarity of perception.*

*Perception is made clear when it is disengaged from preconceptions and from all considerations of personal loss or gain.*

*Then the miraculous is seen and the heart is filled with wonder.”*

Mello (1998)

*“The man who sat on the ground in his tipi meditating on life and its meaning, accepting the kinship of all creatures and acknowledging unity with the universe of things was infusing into his being the rue essence of civilization.”*

Chief Luther Standing Bear (cit. McLuhan 1992)

– There are literally thousands of writings, from all cultures and all times that point to this central activity of awareness: a shift in perception that allows us to the process of life and ourselves as part of that whole.

Yet to do nothing in our society is considered a waste or suspect; we are bombarded from morning to night with information and distraction, constantly moving from one thing to the next: the average time spent reading a web page is now ten seconds or less (Carr 2010). Information is fragmented and separated from meaning and the problem of cultures separated by the limitation viewpoint is now exchanged for the post-modern problem of overwhelming quantities of information removed from a structural, cultural or historical context

*“We are becoming ever more adept at scanning and skimming, but what we are losing is our capacity for concentration, contemplation, and reflection.”*

Carr (2010)

The brain becomes caught in a confusion of constant change:

*“With the Net, we face many information faucets), all going full blast. Our little thimble overflows as we rush from one faucet to the next. We’re able to transfer only a small portion of the information to long term memory, and what we do transfer is a jumble of drops from different faucets, not a continuous, coherent stream from one source.”*

Carr (2010)

The results are all too evident in all my classes; students have more and more difficulty in concentrating and continually tempted with the distractions constantly on offer. In the classroom they have earphones on, a chat open, mail connected. The computer screen for work and surfing at the same time. Research is tapping a word or phrase into Google and copying and pasting content. There is little interaction or communication between those in the class, they are elsewhere. Many don’t leave the classroom during breaks but stay glued to the screen, watching videos or playing games.

*“Computers are far more than pragmatic tools. They initiate, they develop non-verbal methods and configurations of thought, of decision-making, even, one suspects, of aesthetic notice. There is the new clerisy, a clerisy of the young and the very young who are, flexibly, pre-, or counter-literate. Screens are not books, the ‘narrative’ of a formal algorithm is not that of discursive telling.”*

Steiner (1989)

To be entirely present, focused and absorbed with that relaxed concentration that allows us to become aware of the many different levels of information that we are receiving enriches experience and our connection to it. It allows us to move beyond ...





## MYSTERY

*“Almost every spiritual tradition recognizes that a point comes when two things must happen: man must surrender his separate feeling “I”, and must face the fact that he cannot know, that is define, the ultimate.”*

Watts (1988)

*“Life and the living of it, for all our knowing, is still as great a mystery at its end as it was in its beginning. As fast as our knowledge expands to the rim of the unknown, the mystery at heart forms another horizon compelling the known to keep to the same respectful distance again.”*

*“We all know more than we allow ourselves to know because of a certain cowardice in face of the inexpressible, and fear of accepting its effect on us as guide to the nature of reality. Yet those who can persuade themselves to be guided thus in their pursuit of the totality of truth find themselves rewarded not so much by a surrender of any significant part of the essential mystery, as by its transformation into something accessible as living wonder.”*

Laurens Van der Post

*I want to suggest that there is a part of the human personality that is not always fully formed in everybody, but there is certainly the potential in everybody and it is fully formed in some people that which I would call spirit: the capacity for spiritual experience, the capacity for mystical experience: awe at the universe.”*

James Gilligan (2004)

We are each imbued with body, mind, heart and soul; each has its own part to play in relating ourselves to the world, to our understanding: the body has direct intelligence, ways of understanding, and a capacity of awareness of the present that the mind forgets. Conscious thought recognizes recurring patterns that allow us to articulate form and stand back from constant change: yet the mind fixes form, separate from the whole. For the individual to become aware of the whole takes a process of transcendence that leads us from ourselves into another greater understanding: to become one with the universe. This requires some form of spiritual structure, practice and discipline.

Beyond our selfishness is the impulse of self towards other: in the part's awareness of the whole. The desire for transcendence of our human nature; to go beyond ourselves, beyond the limits of time, of space and of death. A shift of perspective that will change the world, a willingness to give up the security of the known for the unknown. This takes us into realms of mystery beyond rationality. I believe that this capacity for transcendence is integrated into our nature: a perception that can free us from our myopic vision: an emotional and spiritual connection and a creative leap of imagination that takes us beyond ourselves.

Some call this realm God, others Tao, others Gaia. The Romantics sought to touch this mystery through the Sublime: a man on a mountaintop at the height of a storm, or in a graveyard at the full moon, is brought face to face with the smallness of his

preoccupations and his limitations. The Buddhist monk approaches the same point from within; waiting until the chattering mind becomes still and existence becomes aware of essence at “the still point of the turning world”.

Yet, even here, there are those that want to cling on to a proprietary brand of Truth: As Anthony Mello puts it (1998), *“It is not the diversity of our dogmas but our dogmatism that does the damage.”* Truth exists beyond its expression in specific cultural form and this is perhaps the hardest thing for humans to accept and perhaps no issue has been responsible for so much violence, conflict and war as religion. We must look at belief in the cultural context that gave rise to it and not “mistake the finger for the moon”<sup>1</sup>.

Knowing that our ideas, beliefs and feelings are not absolutes, but part of a complex interactive dance, should teach us this respect and tolerance for others. Each person we meet can give us a new insight into Reality and into ourselves.

The path of Love, of true religion, is that of transcendence: of moving from an egocentric perception to embrace the whole of reality, to become one with the Other and the Universe. This is by nature mystic, since the individual is consumed into the whole.

The essence of spiritual practice, as of love, is the decentralisation of the self: of the recognition that we are not the centre of the universe and that which we can know is limited in time and space. The practice of openness and acceptance: the awareness of ourselves in relation to experience without judgement changes the experience of life.

*“When I speak of mysticism what I mean is the awareness of mystery that is the capacity for intellectual humility: the awareness that even with science, maybe I should say, especially with science, we don’t have the capacity to gain knowledge of ultimate reality”*

James Gilligan (2004)

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1 *“The sage points to the moon, the fool looks at the finger”*: Chinese proverb

## LOVE AND HUMILITY

*“Understanding comes from humility, not the pride of knowledge.”*

Tamaro (1996)

*“We know only the world that we bring forth with others, and only love helps us to bring it forth.”*

Maturana & Vorela (1987)

What would it be like to be another? Ironically, it is only through the giving up of self that the other can be truly comprehended.

In these terms the path of life may be seen as that from self to other. The first impulse towards the other is educated by the heart: the long journey from selfishness to selflessness can be instructed by love in its myriad stages from desire: to possess other, through passion: to become one with another, to putting the wellbeing of other before one's own.

*“Loving is limbically distinct from in love. Loving is mutuality; loving is synchronous attunement and modulation. As such, adult love depends critically upon knowing the other. In love demands only the brief acquaintance necessary to establish an emotional genre but does not demand that the book of the beloved's soul be perused from preface to epilogue. Loving derives from intimacy, the prolonged and detailed surveillance of a foreign soul.”*

Lewis, T, Amini, F, Lannon R. (2000)

Love and imagination are the ingredients that allow the alchemy of transcendence; that permit us to pass the boundaries of our own circumscription. Human life is a journey away from our egocentric vision of the self as the centre of the universe. This journey can begin with love of another: from attachment and desire towards detachment and love. The first step may be when another's wellbeing: our partner or our children, becomes more important than our own.

Our first stirrings towards the mystery of another come through feelings that we do not understand: the overwhelming of our senses in the presence of another and a sense of abject emptiness when the object is absent. Desire and attachment draw us to the heights of a longing that consumes us. Yet, this state has no awareness of other: we are love-addicts that desire not another, but the state they engender. Only if, in passing through this state of attachment and desire, our being becomes entwined with the other can we hope to begin to learn the detachment from self that allows the seeds of Love to be sown. Not “I love you the image that I have of you”, but “I will stand by you and allow you to be yourself” until two merge into one.

The moment of death is the ultimate giving up of self; life is a study for this moment of release that should be the inevitable final step of our journey, of giving ourselves back to the whole.

Love is a journey from imposition to acceptance: from self to other to oneness with Life. It begins with humility. Through humility we may begin to listen; remain open rather than impose and thus learn respect for life, for the planet and for others. When we do violence, we always do it to ourselves since we are an integral part of the whole that is life:

*“A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feeling as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to the affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”*

Albert Einstein (1988)

The constant refrain of this book: we are a small, finite part of the infinite and we lose this perspective at our peril.

Love is the human access to the possibility of other worlds; to open ourselves; to become the beloved and lose ourselves in union, outside time and partiality. It opens the path towards a higher understanding, beyond the self.

*“Love springs from awareness. It is only inasmuch as you see someone as he or she really is here and now and not as they are in you memory or your desire or in your imagination or projection that you can truly love them, otherwise it is not the person that you love but the idea that have formed of this person or this person as the object of your desire not as he or she is in themselves.”*

Anthony de Mello “The Way to Love”

Love is divine; it will not be pinned by language or explanation. It does not fit tidily into the order of our minds. It is not one, but many. It shows the limitation of human knowledge, the inadequacy of logic and language before a greater reality.

When embraced it teaches humility and shows the way to God.

Love is one and many. Its complexities embrace body, heart, mind and spirit. Ever moving, it embraces contradiction.

*“Love one another...”*



## DYNAMIC DISCOURSE

*“For, as it should be by now abundantly clear, nothing inside a frame can state, or even ask, anything about that frame.”*

Watzlawick, Bavelas & Jackson (1967)

*“Each language - including both its structure and its lexicon – represents a unique way of perceiving reality. They (Sapir and Wharf) believed that we are imprisoned, so to speak, in a house of language. We try to assess what is outside the house from our position within it. However the house is oddly shaped (and no one knows precisely what a normal shape would be). There are a limited number of windows. The windows are tinted and at odd angles. We have no choice but to see what the structure of the house permits us to see.”*

Neil Postman

*The Tao that can be expressed is not the real Tao; the name that can be named is not the real name.”*

Lao-Tsu

What would constitute a satisfactory account of human life in human terms?

What is a satisfactory description; what is a satisfactory explanation? What about meaning?

It depends on the context and the need.

A cook, a biologist, an artist, a gardener, an anthropologist and a hungry man might regard the same apple in different ways.

Scientist, priest, politician, artist do not seek the same understanding. A psychologist does not seek the same understanding as a social psychologist. A western doctor does not bring the same paradigm of the human organism to his diagnosis as a Chinese doctor.

Does a woman require the same understanding as a man? Does a child require the same understanding as an old person? A pupil as a teacher?

It is clear that we can only understand any phenomenon in terms of what we already know; human descriptions tend to evolve with the metaphors of the age and in terms of the language of the culture.

*“Because human beings remember with neurons, we are disposed to see more of what we have already seen, hear anew what we have heard most often, think what we have always thought. Our minds are burdened by an informational inertia whose headlong course is not easy to slow.”*

Lewis, Amini and Lannon (2000)

We see what we expect to see. The same scientific discipline in different cultures does not create the same experiments or find the same results.

Further, not all that we can understand can be made explicit.

*“We need to realize that the tacit contains experience, the unconscious, the unknown, the limitless – in short, reality – and that the explicit is merely a map of experience.”*

Martin (1990)

*“A truly objective world, totally devoid of all subjectivity, would for this reason be unobservable.”*

Heisenberg (1958)

Like children, caught in our own vision, we take this for the centre of the universe: the path of life is from this egocentric selfishness to other and eventually to the giving up of self to become one with the universe. This idea of a spiritual journey that goes beyond the self is also something that has been lost in a neoliberal, capitalist value system that emphasizes individual desires, success and consumption.

The danger is that we confuse idea and experience, feeling and form. The danger is particularly strong where culture separates idea and experience. We are obsessed with now and forget to contemplate eternity. That eternity of birth, death and renewal that is mirrored in the natural world; from the first tentative flowering of colour through receding snow, through the glorious tapestry of richness in form and colour of the burgeoning fields, to the sound of the last falling leaf giving itself back to the earth.

We forget our relationship with an existence that goes beyond anything we might imagine and the focus on analytical analysis and scientific detachment has led to a devaluing of the philosophical and religious questions posed throughout history and the loss of many ways of knowing that are essential to the understanding of the human relationship to existence. Human questions that do not go away: Why am I? What does it all mean?

*“What does the fish know of the water in which it swims all its life?”*

Einstein

*What is truth then? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations that are elevated, transmitted, beautified in a poetic or rhetoric manner, and that appear to the people after a long usage as fixed, canonical and binding: truths are illusions of which one has forgotten they are illusions, metaphors that are worn out and literally became powerless, coins that lost their images and are now metal and no longer coins.*

“On Truth and Lie in the Extramoral Sense” Frederick Nietzsche

And so my reflexions turn around and around: the philosophical anomaly of a small element of a system trying to understand that system of which it is part and to impose its understanding on existence: all the metaphors and narratives that we use to explain and understand are eventually reflexions of our own nature and possibilities and express the dynamic nature of being. Human life is a direct reflexion of the richness of

life and an on-going, dynamic process. While this is done with openness, humility and an awareness of our place within a larger, incomprehensible system, it is positive and enriching. However, when the observer tries to reduce the experience to simplistic, symbolic explanation something fundamental is lost. When time is reduced to the next thing on our list, we lose eternity. What creates rich variety of difference also, through singularity of perspective, gives rise to division and conflict. Our arrogant manipulations of the world undertaken from our limited perspectives have consequences that we cannot even perceive.

We are part of a rich and complex system that is Life: interacting with it. The path from Rationalism to Modernism and Industrialization has distanced us and separated us from this consciousness and the subtle variety of ways that we become through that interaction. Blindly we saw off the branch upon which we sit. We dominate, take over and destroy the incredible richness of the natural world and the enormous potential of evolution that it offers in order to fix ourselves within the limited paradigm of human thought and the arid environment of human construction.

Reality itself is a process that finds form through time and transition. Something that spiritual practice has always tried to relate us to: the relation between the individual and the whole becomes more clear when we accept our limitation both perceptually and temporally: “every man must die, but lives as if he will live forever” All spiritual practice has at its centre the attempt to allow the individual to move beyond his ego-centric perception to a wider vision of being: to put the self in perspective of the enormity of being: one life is but a beat in the rhythm of time. If we have true awareness of this, we might live differently. But like drivers in our own, separate vehicles, we become isolate and separate from others, caught up in our own journey and time and perception of what is happening and what appropriate behaviour is. The practices themselves have often become enmeshed in the interest of power and control of the political organs of organised religion and the dogmatic insistence of the Truth of one set of metaphors against another, leading to some of the most violent conflicts of all.

Human history is the story of the various attempts to control, dominate and impose: to have power over available resources for the good of one’s own and the repeated human behavioural pattern towards power and domination: the control of limited resources for the individual or group has repeatedly brushed aside, more altruistic tendencies. Selfless altruism has little defence against this powerful impetus. Unless we have a system such as that used in hunter-gatherer societies (Boehm, 2001) in which the group quickly reacts to any individual attempt to gain control. It is questionable whether such a system is tenable on the enormous scale of modern populations.

*“Somewhere there must be a place of reconciliation for all conflicts, a path to tread that no one had found yet, a way to live that not all scholars and saints, stumbling along in the darkness, had been able to do more than guess at. There seemed so many signposts, so many banners of beauty and flames of selfless courage crying, “Come this way!” yet though one heard them calling one was too stupid to follow their directions. “*

Goudge (1942)

To deny the importance of the larger vision: to be totally caught up in the individual narrative, or that of the age, of whatever value set or cultural origin we find ourselves

in, is to condemn ourselves to the same mistakes and patterns. Considering the scale upon which man now acts and imposes himself upon the planet, we could bring about our own destruction: we are consuming the resources of the planet at a rate that will exhaust those resources within a foreseeable future ( ). We create deadly nuclear waste that we do not know how to neutralize and live in the vague hope that future generations will find ways to deal with. We continue to artificially uphold an economic system that has been definitively proved not to function. We have created the conditions that are beginning to leash the warning bell of vast natural disasters yet, fixed perspective and individual, present interests block us from moving outside the current discourses to see the larger picture and deal with urgent necessity.

*“While some parts of the universe may operate like machines, these are closed systems, and closed systems, at best, form only a small part of the physical universe. Most phenomena of interest to us are open systems, exchanging energy or matter (and, one might add, information) with their environment... Biological and social systems are open, which means that an attempt to understand them in mechanistic terms is doomed to failure.”*

Toffler (1970)

What is required is a model of dynamic discourse where basic principles and relationship of interaction are defined, rather than fixed rules. This would be the basis of a true democratic system. Such a system would require that freedom that arises out of the capacity for true thought and judgement, rather than passive acceptance of information and manipulation through the control of media and the interests of capitalism through publicity. This means teaching skills of true judgement, logic, rigor, discipline, application and self-evaluation from an early age, rather than creating passive receptors of given values and ideas. It also requires that organization be based in small, local groups aware of local and immediate problems, involved in the well-being and happiness of the group and then creating living dynamic relations between different groups.

Openness and awareness: adaption and flexibility

So, what, in the end, is this all about? Humility. Simply the capacity to see beyond the limited, but necessary, individual vision to a wider context: to go beyond the self. In this way we learn humility and respect for Other. It also develops creativity and imagination through the attempt to see what the world might look like from elsewhere, through different eyes; even through different organs of perception. If we truly understand that our view cannot be absolute and we develop respect, openness and non-judgemental listening, difference could achieve greater understanding and an enlarged vision of what life might be in its wholeness beyond individual human life.

The on-going discourse of the infinite with the finite: relation and relativity. Perception with perceived, creating form from the absolute. As Proust wrote: *“Reality is a relation between those sensations and those memories which simultaneously encircle us”*.

Stillness, or timelessness, is a constant state. Life is movement that gives shape to the central point or stillness. We become aware of our own movement or life in an awareness of relativity. The meaning is not in the movement or the stillness, but in

the context of one to the other as music gives form to silence, objects to space and the blossoming of the rose bud to time. As T.S.Eliot (1946) wrote:

*“Without the point, the still point  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.”*

The essential truths of Life have to be rediscovered expressed by each generation through artistic expression. The expression of this connection and the eternal truth that reoccurs through the eternal renewal of life.

The words that come back again and again are openness and awareness: detaching ourselves from the fixity of our vision, to move with the dance and let the dance move through us, the richness of Life to flow through us. Flexible and adaptable, listening to the eternal: the truths that have been gained and lost:

*“There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions  
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.  
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.”*  
T.S.Eliot(1946)

I have said nothing new in this book: it is full of citations as a reminder that the cloth of Truth may be woven in many threads. The truth of Eliot’s phrase: “The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless” and the smile of the Buddha take on their true significance in awareness and can lead to another dimension of life – endlessly rich and fulfilling beyond the limitations of explanation.

The limitation of form that creates and defines us: that is being. Yet which condemns us to this separation from God. The irony of this situation is that only by giving up the self that wishes to understand can I reach understanding. This is the condition of being. That part of our being which connects the part to the whole has always been called the soul.

*“Reality or, if you will, God cannot be comprehended by the finite mind”*  
Watts (1998)

My dancer still leaps – the power of being: the anguish of the soul to become. The blind self reaching out for the Absolute. What rests is this rawness, the desire for feeling and connection, the need for mystery.

*“The Soul is the Divine aspect of our self, our Higher Self, which follows the steps of our evolutionary journey from union through separation to reunion with One.”*  
Khalsa & O’Keefe (2002)

MY DANCER STILL LEAPS . . .



*'Between Heaven and Damnation', Phillip Pulfrey: Oil on Canvas 2m x 1.30m*





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