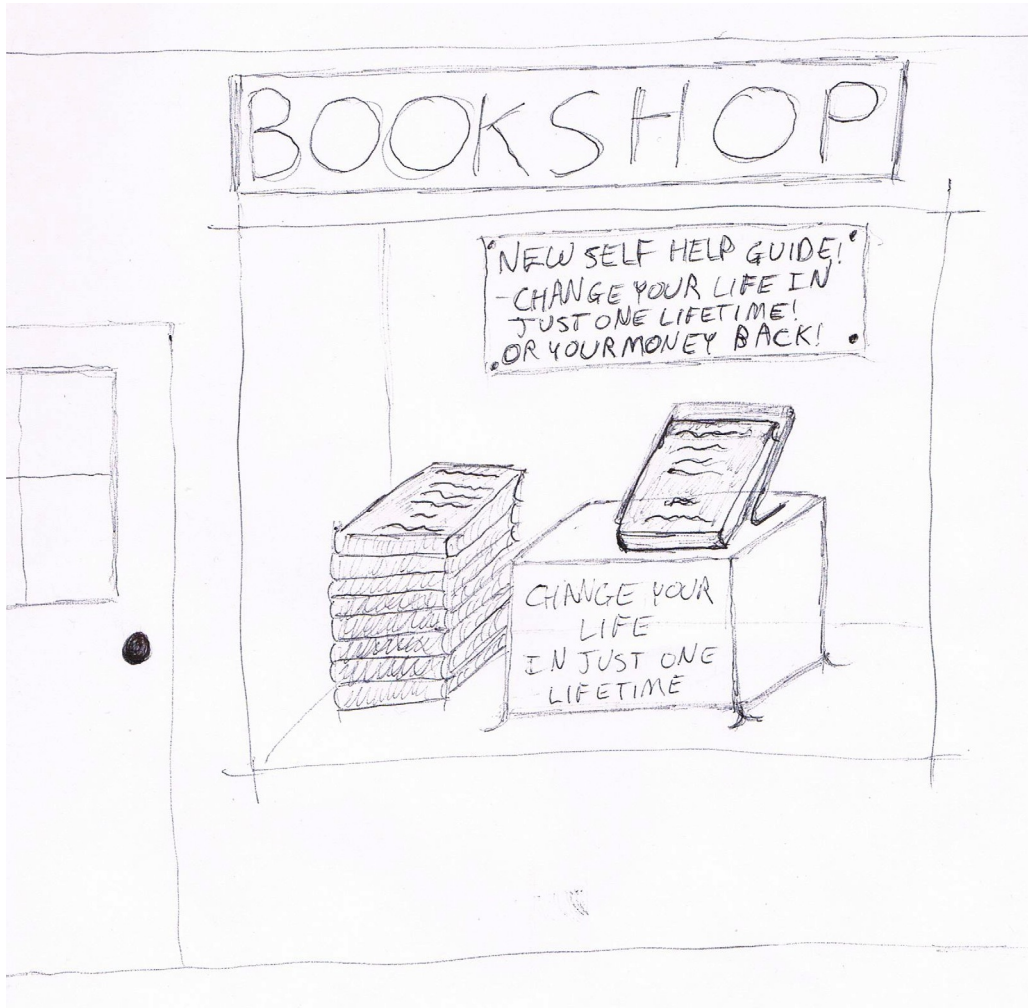


Word in Process

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Spring 2015



'Be your own edge case'

Some love

One love

Love one's self

Love one another

Love one other

Love others

Know thyself

This whole project is a highly personal work. Although it is willingly shared, it is fundamentally written for me. It is my intention to now produce something new, that is fundamentally written for others. Tentatively, this will be titled *A Question of Consciousness*.

A personal work like this cannot escape opinionation and essentialization. Much here could be torn apart with ease. Still, I feel there are seeds of an idea here, that took shape exactly through this adventure of ideas, that I stand by.

Not least, I just wish to emphasise a related set of deceptively simple statements, that at one level, amongst all the complexity of life, are hardly worth a second thought, and yet point to a certain *strangeness* of human consciousness, that I have long perceived but found difficult to articulate. Where the strangeness really lies is left to the reader.

- Something is wrong if our consciousness ends up in unconscious service to the patterns which it created. This is the fundamental strangeness.
- The goodness or rightness of thing is not attributable to anything stateable; every method has advantages and disadvantages. While this is sometimes evident, we truly hang ourselves on certain patterns (including abstinence and excess). This is not meant to suggest life is easy, nor that we should not seek the right thing in the circumstance, nor that circumstances should become a matter of selfish advantage. However, nor

should a pattern overcome conscious choice. *In pattern and choice lie the ineffable.*

- The existence of any *strength of meaning* in the sense of a *right conviction* over some circumstance, with scientific evidence firmly included, does not *preclude a priori* the presence of other *right convictions*, that may contradict it. The association of any strength of meaning with any other strength of meaning does not *imply a priori* the dependence of one on the other.
- The worth of a worldview is generated by where it treads, and the real beauty of worldviews appears in the spaces where they meet. When worldviews do not meet each other, but rely on proclamations, the nature of things remains obscure. Knowledge at best is a beautiful undertaking, and even a playful, erotic one, but is very often abuse.
- No paradigm or worldview can ever assert its sufficiency from within itself. The ability to discern a paradigmatic evolution of knowledge does not at all seem to mean that consciousness of the present paradigm may be taken for granted.
- Both inwardly and outwardly, we ignore private admission while taking seriously public admission at our peril. Both inwardly and outwardly, we are not as free as we think we are, *but we have the capacity to discern and transmute our limited freedom.*

Implicit in the above, at least given all I have said so far, is a plea for healing in the divisive space between science and spirituality; the vital importance of this interface for the sustainability of human civilisation, in the sense that it should have a future at all; and *the ultimate significance of consciousness.*

We see the possibility of consciousness being playful and light, that things do not matter, that there is nothing even to realise and yet somehow this capacity of consciousness is not our ‘default’; if we know it we forever find ourselves lapsed from it, and into some pattern, into unconsciousness. As much as this is driven by the outcomes of conscious endeavour, so too is it driven by fear. It is clear that fear is critically implicated in where we tend to dwell.

All this has been said, in many different ways. Two sets of elaborations remain. First is a series of things I feel moved to say. Secondly is a return to the two hard questions I identified in the summary of *A Singular Reality*.

In *Psychology of the Future*, Stan Grof makes the fundamental suggestion that the horror committed by people to each other is contingent upon the degree to which psychic contents do not find expression.

In response to the question along the lines of ‘Are the Gods, the encounters of expanded states of consciousness, inside of us or beyond us?’, I heard Stan Grof answer something to the effect of ‘It depends how big you are. If you are skin encapsulated ego, they are outside. If you are Brahman, they are inside.’

My sense of compassion has been discerned from seeing both the abundant ill in the world, and the quickness with which it is judged. As I alluded to earlier, I think that ability to say truly ‘If I was in that circumstance, I cannot say I would have acted differently’ is profoundly implicated in what compassion is. It depends how big you are. Individual psychic realities and the conscious–unconscious relation are the substrate of what happens in the world. In an evolutionary sense, consciousness seems to be about our capacity to *model* the world and other consciousnesses (mates, prey, predators etc.) Regarding then the evolution of human consciousness, may it be said that this is forged in our regard for others and for the world, no more, no less? Judgement and blame go nowhere. Fatalism goes nowhere. The great dark mass of issues I engaged with at the end of *Admission of Ignorance* are some of the iniquity over which human consciousness may be forged. Our inner darkness and the darkness of the word are not aberrational, they are where we may grow, and may find a lightening of things. It depends how big we are.

Consciousness provides its own clues. States of flow; the sense of action *potentially* being its own reward; the ability to learn from mistakes rather than be dragged down by them; not

being (too) focussed on goals and knowing when to stop; being able to switch between things without (too) much dependence or preference; having ability without need for its expression; that necessary acts are never wasted; these things amount to some truth.

The highs and lows as true faces of all this; the mess and complexity and failure of ever-unfolding life as the nature of it; the exactly non-aberrational nature of that which seems like imperfection; the cracks, contradictions and paradoxes; that higher states of consciousness are *sustained* by acceptance of these things; these things amount to some truth.

Just as a flowing thing has a form, eternity bursts forth from the flow of time, right under our noses. Moments are not gone. What in our relative and varying capacities we can do for each other, our capacity to build and live in community – these things drive our chance at sustained existence.

Compassion, modesty, humour – these things amount to great truth.

A phrase that struck me very hard, from Clarissa Pinkola Estés' *Women Who Run With The Wolves* was 'cycles of individuation'. Without any elaboration, it says so much. The possibility of consciousness and the rise and fall of consciousness are of the same stuff. Day and night, waking and dreaming, the seasons, the planets, and lifetimes – these cycles are of profound significance.

An image that was also of great importance to me was that of a tree, seen growing in a mandala. The meaning is how the roots sustain the heights. It is such a simple observation about a tree, that the higher to the light it reaches, the deeper or wider it must spread its roots. So it seems to be with spirit and psyche, and this image was a moment of understanding as to their relation. In so much as psyche is reached down through, it gives rise to spirit. Moreover, soil, intermingled, regenerative and life giving, is a profound image of both matter and psyche. Soil is soul. Therefore the alchemical trio of salt, mercury and sulphur are within

this image. The comment as to how big you are perhaps relates to the extent of the root system.

And finally, perceived not least through writing all this, is the nature of creativity. Some of the elaboration feels like me, but the seeds do not. So much of this has come through dreams, from times in wild places, and probably most importantly, through conversations, where I hear myself saying that which I could not previously have conceived of. I feel like *creativity* happens to us, and that our role is channelling and inflection.

As regards the creativity of others, I have tried to acknowledge as I go the really important sources of inspiration. However, there is so much more that could be explicitly brought in, and it is my intention to draw on much more in much more detail in future work.

What remains here is to visit the two hard questions from *A Singular Reality* once again.

What has been identified is a tension between ‘push’ and ‘pull’ in natural causation. On the one hand there is an enormous weight of indication that a pattern at some level of complexity is *sufficient* for the existence of a pattern at a higher level of complexity. It would be in disregard of revelations of the modern preoccupation with the material to deny that this has a significant bearing on the arising of novelty in the universe. So polarised is this into *total significance* and *there really being something else at work* that it is impossible to phrase neutrally a strong but not unconditional acknowledgment of the significance of this sort of creativity.

On the other hand, there are far harder to pin down senses of form somehow being drawn out of the universe. The awesome phenomenon of archetypes somehow inhering in the planets points to exactly this, but after centuries of neglect and plenty of abuse, is hard for us to open our minds to. And although physical law focusses on processes that act from the bottom up in the emergence of complexity, and therefore seem like efficient causes, these processes

are themselves a formal causation at their own level, in the sense that laws of physics are widely accepted to have come into being with universe. Since actually there is a formal patterning at work in their case, it can far from be ruled out that formal patterning occurs at other levels of complexity too, especially of living things. Moreover, there exists a sense that attractors are at work in the universe. Certain breakthroughs in human knowledge have latent in them their successor. The (more) general case is latent in the specific, and finding it is a matter of time. And perhaps most mysteriously, at a level of human intention and meaning, the universe can seem to meet us. Circumstances and intention can seem to constellate, in positive and negative ways, the reality drawn out by a form that is maybe our own, or perhaps has origins beyond our knowledge. I find the work of Stan Grof to be immensely insightful in this regard. I am convinced this rather diverse bundle are related; as to 'how it works' I can only admit ignorance.

What has also been identified is the sense of implicit and explicit consciousness. On the one hand, we can look at how machines work, and feel sure that whatever their sophistication, our intelligence is capable of a leap up or to the side that simply exceeds them, for their capacity is fundamentally of our making. And when looking at simple life, we see intelligence that seems machine like. Most simple is intelligence that is a constant mode of functioning. Beyond this, we see intelligence that is capable of learning, but nonetheless will only learn and understand so much. *By degree*, in the evolution of life, sophistication of behaviour, instinct, emotion, learning, intelligence and *self-awareness* seem to increase. It is hard to deny the continuity in biological evolution and to draw dividing lines. And hardest of all is to deny our reality of consciousness. In simpler life and machines, we see intelligence — or consciousness, if we are prepared to call it that — as the ability to respond and learn from the environment, and as an emergent and implicit thing. In us we see an intelligence and consciousness that is its own concern, an explicit subject–object experience. What do all the intermediate states of consciousness feel like? When do they start to 'feel' like anything? One perspective is that this reality of consciousness is simply that which arises, no more, no less, and this is Hofstadter's stance. A related thing to do with this is to say that consciousness

is an illusion, and this is what materialist philosophy is for the most part *forced to say*, given our picture of the emergence of complexity. What is meant by ‘illusion’ is interesting, for obviously the experience of being alive is at some level real. I do not think Hofstadter would call consciousness an illusion so much as not something ‘different’ or ‘special’. The real crux of what is meant by ‘illusion’ must come from something that in all these words has only been alluded to: *free intention*.

We can also take conscious existence simply as it is, and be rightly astounded at the sheer depths and heights of subjective experience; the realms of consciousness and all that sustained exploration reveals; the seeming connection at times between individual consciousness beyond the channels of the senses; the seeming connection of individual consciousness to the world, including ‘impossible’ knowledge of consensus reality; meaningful coincidence and the attraction of intention; and the possibility of partaking of the deepest nature of reality. As stated above, the basic contention here is between implicit and explicit consciousness. What is raised here adds immense significance to the explicit dimension, but is also not a *necessary* consideration in noting the perplexing continuity of stimulus-response and human consciousness.

How may these twin senses be reconciled, in *both* cases? My intuition is that each is a phrasing of the same question.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.
(John 1, King James Bible)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was made flesh. If liberties may be taken with this immense passage, how may the sense of the pattern that draws the form of things, the

Word as it were, and the *process* by which the form of things arises, the flesh as it were, be regarded? In what way is the ‘Word in process’?

I do not know, but will not accept arbitrary answers. I wish only to convey a sense of the emergence of levels of complexity that draws together the above questions. A purely ‘bottom up’ picture and a purely ‘top down’ picture both seem to neglect a great deal of reality. The Whiteheadian notion of subjective intention inhering in every occasion seems perhaps too general to me, as the interplay of that which has gone before and that which may draw out form seems to vary depending on the circumstance, with the ‘devil in the detail’. Sometimes what has gone before, or the lower level of complexity, seems *sufficient*; sometimes the higher pattern seems *unignorable*. I do not wish to swing to either extreme, or to generalise.

It is clear too that the above two contentions are quite deeply related. Both are about what comes about and how it does so. And perhaps consciousness is just one of things that come about, in which case, the latter is subsumed into the former. My sense is that is not such a thing, and the two contentions stand alongside each other.

My sense of reality is along the lines that by some great working of all things, the ‘Word’ inheres in ‘process’, but expressed rightly for the right expression of that process. Consciousness and complexity go all the way down. The free intention of consciousness goes all the way down. Patterns that draw form out of the material universe go all the way down, and evolve, and reach from the the laws of physics to the archetypes of depth psychology. But profoundly, that which expresses itself in all things, and which all things are, finds its *right expression* and *right freedom* in process. In such a view, the cause that propels and the cause that draws forth, and the seemingly automatic and seemingly free nature of intention are both reconciled, and are one and the same question. *The nature of reality is the right expression and the right freedom of the Word in the process.*

Can we even get close to the nature of that ‘right’? Very early on, I said that what sets us

apart from intelligences we create may have something to do with the sense of the unexplored nature of our space, and that so long as an artificial intelligence gives this sense, it will not seem artificial. Could it be that freedom does really relate to how much *could* be known, and that freedom inheres by the right amount so that there is always the potential to break through the level we are at, and our sense of things, be the breakthrough in evolution or development, or indeed at any level of complexity?

Moreover consciousness exists in relation to the unconscious, and light exists in relation to dark. The unconscious is a vast world beyond our little light of individual consciousness, visiting us by some rightness beyond our understanding. If freedom does relate to that which is unknown, then it therefore relates to the unconscious in relation to consciousness. Moreover, the seeming precursor our our conscious awareness is exactly what we would call unconsciousness, *we just do something*. Unconsciousness is simultaneously the source of automatic patterns and profound meaning, dreams of anxiety and numinosity – it is simultaneously the *formed* and the *former*. So is it that just as we attain our level of consciousness out of unconsciousness, our *relative* freedom lies not least in our ability to face, or not, that from which we came, and this pattern too, *somehow*, goes all the way down? Overall, this seeming paradox of the unconscious seems to be an immense *clue* as to the nature of reality, albeit a perplexing one.

Both of these speculations are intended to amplify the basic idea that the limited capacity of human freedom is of the Word in process.

We must, I believe, try to meet the Universe with our own consciousness. Our own consciousness, somewhat distinct from the universe, has on account of that distinctness a capacity to serve. It is neither totally free from nor totalling beholden to the many gods it exists in relation to, bound to them yet while able to supersede them, and in intimate entanglement with the natural world. The Word and flesh in profound and intimate relation.

Existing answers will not suffice, conventional or radical. As someone wisely said, ‘we must be our own edge case’. We will and must find answers along the way, but we will pay for any answer we hold to dear, including this one of course. For in the end, for any answer we hold, we cannot escape Ouroboros. Not so much is the truth of ideas the question, but rather, like music, their capacity to perhaps make us clamp our hands over our ears or perhaps make us dance, to swell our hearts, and to let us to be in relation to truth.

This is not an end. On the one hand, we are in the mists of of time, and the notion of making sense of this moment too much forgets that we cannot privilege this moment over any of the complex, nuanced, ambiguous and paradoxical moments of history. On the other hand, in every moment inheres the fire, and the possibility of the free expression of consciousness for good, which is so truly needed.



Upon completing this series of essays, I realised that one succinct perspective actually draws together the essence of almost everything I have attempted to say. This work is about levels in consciousness and complexity, with the tentative non-dual claim that these are wholly aspects of each other. On the one hand, particular levels ‘cut it’. They have sufficient power to dominate process. On the other other hand, levels interact. Here things become strange and interesting, and here even, in Hofstadter’s suggestion, lies the nature of creativity itself. This work is about giving levels their due, and giving their interactions their due. This is equally apt in regard to the actual workings of reality, our descriptions of reality, and the interactions of these. It is also equally apt in regard to levels of material complexity, and levels of patterning, intelligence and consciousness, including the collective unconscious. Insofar as we may seriously regard levels, but not to the exclusion of others, and not to the exclusion of their interactions, and maintain the possibility of different levels requiring different epistemology, we will not relegate consciousness and may therefore open a path to healing.