

The known, the unknown, and the unknowable:

An introduction to the history of the search for self, and its demise.

"If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you.

If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

From the Gnostic Gospel of St. Thomas. Circa 50 AD

David Lynch: "How would you describe yourself?"

Harry Dean Stanton: "As nothing. There is no self."

David Lynch: "How do you want to be remembered?"

Harry Dean Stanton: "It doesn't matter."

From the documentary: Harry Dean Stanton: partly fiction. By Sophie Huber. 2012

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There wasn't always an egoic conscious sense of self, and this is as true for every individual human as it is for the species. It *emerges* in us each from early life onwards, because it once emerged culturally and entered the energetic realm of human potentiality.

From where it came, no one really knows for certain, just that on some portentous day it crossed the horizon of our consciousness. Why this happened to us is also a mystery adorned with much speculation, and whether it was a good thing for the species is certainly a matter worthy of some intense discussion.

For most humans, there appears to be little priority given to an exploration of self, either experientially or theoretically. For many others, decades are spent in both its pursuit and in its refinement, across a very wide spectrum of breadth and depth. For some, a robust sense of self is the ultimate goal, for others this egoic-self is but one aspect only of a more total and complex psyche, and for a few it is simply a pit-stop on the way towards a transcendence in which the architecture of the egoic-self de-centres and a Soulful Self arises into consciousness.

As a species we would appear to be in quite a bit of trouble right now when it comes to this inherent process of self-actualisation, and if we weren't then perhaps we might need concede that such journeys of self-exploration are pointlessly indulgent. But the narcissism that emerged in the slipstream of the self nearly three thousand years ago and that has long guided our journey has come to besiege us, as might a parasitic virus whose principal evolutionary defence is to hide plainly in view whilst mesmerising its victims into complicity; as children to the Pied Piper.

We are consumed by image, simplification, superficiality, pride and self-importance, and have quite probably never been as emotionally fragile as we are in the present day, with addiction, self-harm, suicidal ideation, anxiety, and an identification with anxiety somewhat prolific.

Culture is failing us as we are failing culture, and we are dangerously close to the kind of collective collapse that will become a significant and regrettable chapter in a future book on the history of civilisation; in that the flourishing Romans also probably didn't predict that their great Empire would Fall.

Across a bandwidth of articulation, we know that the world of the human isn't working well, and as psychotherapists we should be clear that we have a privileged role in the navigation of this crisis; and, as with everything really, our attention should be first brought to our selves.

As with many teenagers and young adults, I began my conscious search for self with journeys, with travelling, venturing into the unknown of other countries and cultures; and whilst I can nowadays look back at this quest with a paternal patience that reminds the young man that the self no more resides in other countries than it does in one's own, I can nevertheless celebrate this impulse to tear away from the habitual identity of the family-ego in search of someone else.

This instinct to travel into the unknown is an ancient reflex, and not one I believe to be always explained by the basic need for survival that another land's resources might provide, but also a pre-conscious search for something yet unknown; and I'm moved to imagine that it was the archetype of the self that was being sought long before the self had even been imagined.

Maybe 70,000 years ago we left Africa, probably because climate change had brought lush plenitude elsewhere. Some crossed towards India through Arabia, others eventually towards Europe and The Americas via Central Asia, and others ultimately to Australia via Indonesia.

These latter coastal Indonesians, having laid their footprints through modern-day Iran, Pakistan, India, and so on, became the first folk known to set sail for a land that they couldn't already see when they embarked upon a journey that took them to the shores of a new identity as Aborigines. We can only really seek to imagine what motivation inspired these people to float off into the complete unknown. A scarcity of resource so profound as to necessitate a potentially disastrous oceanic journey in the direction of *potentially nowhere* seems unlikely, as does escape from enemies when there are 17000 islands around that coast that could have offered refuge, and it seems implausible that prior travellers had accidentally made this journey, survived it, set sail again on an inadequate boat with no navigation tools, and returned successfully to find their brethren in order to share the tale and inspire the quest.

Perhaps these people had an inherent adventurousness that always called for more, as humans do as an antidote to the atrophy that is threatened by comfortable habituality; though we might imagine that the basic need to survive would have impeded such a reckless instinct. I find myself drawn instead to bring consideration to a spiritual calling, a soulful attachment to a Homeland that, because it did exist somewhere, was *felt* to exist; and that summoned them through the ethereal energies of what would become their Dreamtime connection to the creation of the world. I like to imagine that they were drawn irrevocably to

a land that was forever their own, upon which they finally *emerged* rather than arrived; and that the heart of this calling beats on in their Walkabout rituals that summon the paths of ancestors and invite spiritual awakening.

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I wonder if it was from this particular journey that the oceanic depths became such a comfortable symbol for the unconscious, and the journey across an endless landless sea to a distant shore such a comfortable symbol for individuation and transformation; or if these symbols were already embedded in the seed of our psyches, and were whose eager whispers that ensured the inevitability of such voyages.

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We might imagine that it was a similar calling some decamillennia later that inspired the Paleo ancestors of the current (technically, misnamed) *Natives* of the Americas to enter into Alaska through Beringia, and from there to explore and open-up the entire Americas within a few thousand years, down to Patagonia. This only amounts to maybe 15km a year, but when we consider that these people were still surviving the tail-end of an ice-age, were cutting through and traversing uncharted land previously untouched by human hand, contending with an array of fearsome creatures, surviving wildly different climates as they headed south, and would surely have discovered very many areas of sufficient abundance en route, otherwise they wouldn't have survived anyway, then we can note that at least in the intuition of some there was seemingly an obstinate reflex to continue the journey into the unknown until there was nowhere further to go.

It's a little problematic to suggest that these early journeys in human history had anything consciously to do with a search for the self, as we need some hint of self to know that there's a self to search for; and the egoic self wouldn't emerge with any distinction until around about the eighth century BC.

This archaic human was instead bound within nature still, nowhere near yet even the conceptualised-mythological world that preceded the arrival of self; and this extrication from nature, this wrestling of soul from the entanglements of the primal forces of early existence, were enacted literally as they carved their way through the jungles and forests of a dangerously unfamiliar world.

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Come the time of Younger Dryas, about 13000 years ago, most of the world had been discovered by someone, but this global cataclysm inevitably impeded our journeying into it. During this period the earth suffered a sudden and considerable dip in temperature that

contrasted with the movement away from the glacial temperatures of the Ice Age, and this was plausibly caused by an asteroid strike on the North American ice-sheets that released an incomprehensible amount of sea-water; quite likely, I imagine, the source of the Flood Myths that have travelled through time in most cultures worldwide.

The submergence of fertile land and the consequent lack of wild resource may have constellated fortuitously with technological development and guided the roaming and exploratory hunter-gatherers urgently towards settlement, and to the agricultural farming that was their most efficient means of survival.

We settled and mated, grew our numbers and formed community that expanded beyond its capacity for relational self-regulation; and came therefore to require governance, laws and morality with which to maintain stability. It wasn't only the unpredictability of the outside world that we needed to protect against, but our own primal nature, our instincts and drives: in short: our innate opposition to the inevitable repressions of the *civilisation* that we were very slowly forming in order to better protect ourselves from the wrath of nature and the incursion of adversaries.

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We can see here that the development of civilisation is reminiscent of the development of the ego, a *cultural-ego* as it were that preceded the establishment of the egoic-self; and we can imagine that the latter is at least in large part an internalisation of the former. A fractal re-presentation. A self-similar pattern repeating.

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Over the next few thousand years, the species birthed Gods, along with variations of Royalty who were their ordained mortal mouthpiece. The mouth is central to this time, as the Gods were in the sway of mythology, and mythology is not possible in the absence of a mouth; and it's notable that the mouth commonly appeared in their ancient art when in previous times it was far more scarcely represented.

The mouth emerged into consciousness, along with language, and along with the urge to try to make sense of things through stories of the history of time and of the order of the cosmic world. Or, to put it differently, to try to structure the chaotic forces of nature and psyche into a manageable schema.

There was little in the way of self yet, *little consciously self-directed agency*. Everything that happened was entirely the dictate of The Gods. The mind was becoming increasingly complex and powerful, but all of it disowned. The soul though was beginning slowly to take shape, to emerge from the mists of nature. Many of the ancient cultures of this time believed in some kind of afterlife, some kind of immortality, a soul: *in one form or another, an eternal self*.

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The developing psyche of the Ancient Greeks found home for a while in the Gods of Olympus, each endowed with floral characteristics and qualities, storylines, plans and whims, and not by any means necessarily those that we would celebrate as wholesome and ethically well-intentioned in our mortal world. These psychically endowed Gods came to rule after defeating The Titans, the primordial cosmic forces who, upon defeat, were banished to Tartarus, the abyss of The Underworld.

Even on a basic level, the symbology is obvious. The emerging psyche demands precedence and controlling-influence over the primitive unconscious drives; a pretty apparent companion for Freud's Ego and Id. But The Psyche, too intense to be embodied in a fragile human consciousness, is projected into The Olympian Gods, who enact the human dynamics and fantasies of power that we are not yet ready or able to identify as being of our own nature, temperament, fantasy and volition.

There is no self, *only The Gods playing through us*; which they did wholeheartedly for a good thousand years more until the 8th Century BC when Odysseus autobiographically proclaimed, from within his previously unthwartable compulsion to be and follow a journey celestially-dictated:

"I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, known to the world for every kind of craft..."

This is the first known literary statement of known-self, of ego, and it signalled the beginning of the end for the Olympian Gods; our projected self. For a moment at least, within a sea of capricious divine design, Odysseus became a transitory lighthouse for the emerging self.

We might imagine that this energy of self spread outwards from Odysseus, but it's more likely that a sense of self was beginning to collectively peep at us all from behind net curtains and, as artists can be inclined, Homer transformed this implicit and lurking energy into form. Ironically, it's not so clear as to whether Homer was a self at all, but quite possibly the solitary name given to a collection of bards from whom these stories collectively arose.

In the east around the same time, Arjuna emerges into Indian myth. Renowned as a warrior and the greatest archer of his era, Arjuna suffers an existential crisis on the battlefield when faced with the recognition that he is to go to battle with people he knows. Whereas Odysseus's self was a canny strategist with a mind centred upon personal survival, the character of Arjuna focused upon ethics, metaphysical considerations of the nature of the self, and spiritual enlightenment.

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Around the 7th Century BC, from the Greek Lyric poet Archilochus we can begin to see a strident sense of self emerging in the west, both in his proclamations of personal feeling and in his assessment of others.

*“Some Thracian now delights in the shield I threw down
near a bush—not that I cared.*

I saved myself.

What does a shield matter to me?”

(Fr. 5 – Lycophron’s reference)

This is a particularly significant shift in perception, as he prioritises his personal safety over honour before The Gods, for whom the preservation of the shield would be considered a matter of dignity, and whose priorities would once have been everyone’s priority.

I particularly like this next passage, as it reveals his nuanced observation of individuality, notably his acknowledgment of the inadequacies inherent in vanity, and his allusion to a character-type that we all recognise.

*“I am not a lover of a commander with long, proud strides,
or one who boasts of his hair and beauty.*

*Give me a man who is short, bow-legged, stands firm on his feet,
full of heart, steady under fire.”*

(Fr. 114 – preserved by ancient commentators)

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It’s worth noting that not all that long after the emergence of self had begun in the west came the appearance of psychological *self-inflation*; whereby the reality of a sense of self was bypassed for a grander and more comforting version, suggesting *either* our struggle to accept and embody the experiential realities of the psyche as it dripped earthwards from Olympus into our self-awareness, or else suggesting that the psyche is itself *fundamentally* insecure and inclined to polarise against its fear of inadequacy and fraudulence.

However, whilst we might say that this fundamental insecurity was a result simply of the newness of the experience, nearly three thousand years later we are beset by such narcissism; subjectively, societally, culturally, and globally. This leads us to consider whether the arrival of self and its narcissistic shadow are quintessentially entwined.

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Touching for a moment or two upon the wonderful poet, Sappho, from the same era, we can see clear indications of an emerging self, though in this example one inclined perhaps towards co-dependence.

*“That man appears to me to equal the gods who sits before you, and by your side hears your
sweet speech and your charming laughter which has put wings on the heart in my breast.*

When I look at you but once, my speech ceases to obey me. My tongue is broken, a subtle fire creeps under my skin, my eyes see nothing, and my ears begin to ring. Sweat pours down over my limbs, a trembling seizes me from head to toe, I am paler than grass, and I appear close to death. But I can endure all."

(Fragment 31)

I find this to be an exceptionally interesting piece of writing, for several reasons. Notably, in the first line she suggests an equality between the individual and The Gods, an unheard-of proposition that requires at least a pinpoint sense of self simply to consider the comparison. The story she tells is one of jealousy, in which she craves the partner of this mortal man. For there to be such jealousy, there need be first some sense of separate self, however distant from full embodiment. I want what you have, Yours, mine. You, me. Thirdly, her attention to the body when describing intense emotions clearly suggests the beginning of a conscious embodiment of self. She feels, she knows that she feels, can take these feelings, assess them, and from them build a narrative story of her interior experience in its relationship with her exterior perceptions.

The individual is beginning to emerge from within a once-entirely mythic worldview, but we need to move forward another century or before we can see a far more distinct self. These are the philosophers of Miletus who, having travelled down from Mount Olympus and set off instead in the direction of the post-mythical rational mind, presented a clearer sense of separated and observational self; both unbound from collective normalities *and* coherent in their respective conceptual distinctions.

These were the forerunners of the great Classical Greek era of thought and, over coming centuries, a wide range of philosophy, science, mathematics, arts and so on erupted into culture, as did architecture, structure, efficiency, morality, and jurisprudence from the overlapping Romans. The egoic self began to flourish, to spread its wings, to explore and organise itself, improve and become more efficient, to seek to know, and to seek to know itself.

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Iain McGilchrist has noted evidence that at this time the left-hemispheric brain was beginning to assert some dominance over the right. This is revealed in various ways, including writing styles that clearly demonstrate this shift, with each hemisphere having an inherent predilection for a preferred direction of writing, both horizontally and vertically.

According to this measure, (what would become...) Europe had a clearly defined left-hemispheric focus from about the 5th Century BC onwards, having been heading there in stages from about the 8th Century BC - around the same time as the emergence of the self via Odysseus and Arjuna.

And of course the surge in predominantly cognitive processing that would come to characterise the western age over the next few hundred years, and then in undisguised earnest again from about the 16th century, is certainly indicative of a left-hemispheric foreground.

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This suggests the possibility of an intimate association between the rise of the left-hemispheric brain, the emergence of a sense of self, its concomitant narcissism, and a determined quest for knowledge.

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Although it's a paraphrase to entirely distinguish the processing perspectives of the different brain-hemispheres, essentially we can understand the character of the right as being contextual rather than specific, somatic rather than cognitive, and more for the experientialist than for the epistemophile. So we might suggest here that as the left-hemispheric self took the foreground of consciousness, so the right-hemispheric self receded; that a knowledge of self gained considerably more cultural traction than its context or experience.

In finding an I that we yearned to explore and expand,
we hereby began to lost contact with something of who we were.

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Around this same time, to the East, The Upanishads (800-500 BC) found this known (egoic) self to be an illusion of individuality, a block to the experience of the real self, Atman. Atman is beyond the prized intellect of Classical Greece and Rome, beyond the mind and its senses, occupying instead a realm of pure eternal consciousness. Atman is crucially and centrally considered as-one with cosmic reality, with Brahman; from which everything emerges and everything returns. (Reminiscent of the 20th century quantum physicist David Bohm's explicate and implicate universe.)

From inner contemplation we can see through the illusion of the egoic self, immerse into the Real Self, and thereby experience the Self-in-the-universe and the universe-in-the-Self. Atman and Brahman are in effect the soul; the immortal element of the human experience, and characterised by cosmic-unification.

Taoism from the 6th century BC onward focuses attention on the dualistic illusion of separateness, and the value of simplicity, humility, spontaneity, flexible rather than rigid thinking; and the known self is effectively understood as being a resistance to an experience of the natural flow of the universe.

Over coming centuries, this theme continues in the Eastern philosophical traditions, of the known-self understood as an impediment to an experience of Cosmic Self; to be seen through, dissolved, or transcended if it is a full experience of reality that we crave. There is a clear distinction between self and soul, or self and Self.

Just as with McGilchrist's hemispheres, there is a split emerging between the west and the east, the former focussed intently upon cognitive knowledge and the latter, though far from immune to the complex development of knowledge, also forming sophisticated philosophies that required an experiential commitment to transcending the same self that the west was hurriedly and excitedly characterising.

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The notion of a false self was not entirely lost in the civilised development of early European society. Socrates was a force of nature who pummelled into culture the notion of *questioning absolutely everything*, of dilapidating falsehood both in the world at large and in the mind of the individual. He felt that the greatest wisdom was often found in the uneducated, those less blemished by learned-society, in a clear implication that in the educated building of the self we risk the loss of wisdom.

Heraclitus' assertion that it was impossible to step into the same river twice offers the belief that everything is in constant flux, constant change, that nothing is ever the same; including the self. Therefore the known-self would inevitably be an objectification of an unobjectifiable dynamic; in the same way that, by the time we have told our selves the exact time, the exact time has already changed.

The introduction of The Mask in classical Greek theatre - often with grossly amplified features, depicting a character, a character attitude, an emotion - was a representation of the public-face, the *persona* that sits in front of the inner self. This is, further, a recognition that the *known self* is in conflict with itself, that the appearance of its nature is not in fact its nature, and that it functions through a self-regulation that requires its substance to remain, at least to some degree, in hiding.

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Alongside the more Aristotelian approach to knowledge that formed (with careful objectifying observation, categorisation, and structured analysis), religion and spirituality were increasingly celebrating the more subjective immersion in *experience* as a way towards enlightenment.

Buddha relinquished wealth, sought the forest, spent 6 years studying with masters and 49 days meditating into enlightenment. Jesus of Nazareth took to 40 days of fasting in the wilderness, confronted and resisted The Devil's temptation in order to prepare himself for his divine mission; symbolised by the 40 days of Lent. Moses likewise spent 40 days fasting up Mount Sinai, from which he communed with God and formed The Ten Commandments.

Laozi, disillusioned with the ways of the civilised world, travelled west into nature on a water-buffalo, symbolising slowness and humility. He came to a gate, a threshold between different realms, and sought the counsel of the guard, from which came The Dao, 81 verses that explore effortless flow, humility and simplicity as a gateway to an experience of the deeper universe of truth.

The Eleusinian Mysteries of Athens between approximately 1500 BC to 400 AD were renowned for their secret rituals; purification, fasting, and most likely utilising an hallucinogen such as ergot or kykeon to initiate a dissolution of the ego, a re-unification with the shadow of mortal fears, and an enlightenment as to the true nature of the cosmos.

These rites were to be kept secret under the threat of death, and so not that much is known about them other than a commonly-told experience that the initiates emerged from their journeys no longer fearing death; somewhat ironically. Perhaps this was because the awareness of spiritual immortality was intrinsic to the rite, or perhaps because the liberating death of the egoic sense of self was suffered and survived.

Of all the other many Mystery cults of this era, the Dionysian one deserves a special mention. Dionysus was wild, erotic, primal, provocative and dangerous; and the rites reflected this energy. They demanded emotional release, a free expression of the unconscious drives, a liberation of spirit that offered the potential of boundaryless transformation and a re-unification with nature.

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There was a recognition forming that both the commonly known and commonly presented self was, at least in part, characterised by *falseness*; by an identification with a comforting image of itself rather than with the discomforts of its ambivalent self-experience.

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The soul for the Classical Greeks was a much discussed affair. For Plato, the soul was immortal, pre-existent, and inhabited the human body until it was liberated by its death. Plato understood the metaphysical realm to be composed of Forms, templates for everything that manifested; a forerunner to Jung's pre-existent archetypes. Aristotle believed that all that might survive in the afterlife was the intellect; in a clear accord with the cultural climes that were increasingly promoting the value of knowledge and intellect over other human faculties.

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As an aside: the number 40 is clearly significant. Additionally: the Israelites spent 40 years in the desert. The Great Flood is mythologically considered to have lasted 40 days and nights. In some Arabic countries, the fortieth day following a person's death is memorialised. In

Hinduism a God may be celebrated with a Chalisa (meaning 40) which is forty verses of poetry. The Prophet Muhammed received his first epiphanic vision when he was 40. The desiccation of a dead body in preparation for embalming took exactly 40 days in Ancient Egypt. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, it is believed that it is on the fortieth day after death that the soul comes before God for judgement. And, let's not forget, life begins at forty.

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This arrival of self and its bifurcation into the knowable egoic and, let's say, *Soulful Self* coalesced inevitably with the arrival of Christianity, which for a while represented two distinct spiritual paths. One was the more conventional route, which asserted Jesus to be the son of God who sacrificed himself in service of mankind. Buildings would come to be built for the worship of these two figureheads, at times simple and at others magnificent and imposing, adorned with gold, statue, art and pictorial glass, The Church itself structured with a clear masculine hierarchy.

Over time, images of Jesus and, sometime later, images of God would appear in conventional religious art. Jesus was generally re-presented as Caucasian, which would be somewhat unlikely in reality given the area of his birth, and God a white bearded patriarch; and it unavoidably has to be noted that it is a pretty narcissistic manoeuvre to imagine so fervently and consistently that divinity looks like us.

This is not actually at all unusual when it comes to religion, and it's worth here recalling the words of Xenophanes of Colophon (6th Century BC) who acknowledged that the Gods of any given culture tend always to be physically reminiscent of the people of that culture, and he hyperbolically suggested that if horses could draw and believed in a God, then they would draw a God who looked like a horse.

When we acknowledge the Europeanisation of our own western religious images then we might conclude that the self, to be theoretically transcended through spiritual practice, has become embedded in the iconography of the spiritual practice itself; and we should consider *the extent to which*, by worshiping such an image of God we are worshiping an idealised and projected image of the egoic self and bypassing God altogether.

Let's briefly contrast the relationship to image in the Islamic religion, in which it is understood as idolatry and as a spiritual desecration. Whilst we might decry the severity with which a transgression can be punished, we might also concurrently and nevertheless recognise a religious reflex that forbids identification with a *constructed appearance* of divinity; and inevitably therefore lends itself, in this respect at least, to the service of experience.

In contrast to Christian conventionality, for the Gnostic Christians, Jesus of Nazareth is not so much the sacrificial son of God, but the revealer of Gnosis, of *knowledge* of the divine.

Crucially, such knowledge is not understood by the Gnostics in anything like the way in which we have come to understand knowledge; not as empirical truth, but as *experiential*.

We come to know through experience,
and it is through the experience of self
that we might come to experience God.

The Gnostics did not utilise the formality of churches, of institutional structures, their so-called church being instead *the energetic unity of awakened souls*. They had gatherings, rites, sacraments, and spiritual teachers, but did not conform to the hierarchical organisation seen in the Christian church as it developed through the years. No towering buildings, gold, adornments, or evangelical preaching intended to draw in the masses. The Gnostic story went very basically like this:

The primary source of all life is The Monad, an *unknowable* God, a silent and invisible unity. From The Monad emanates The Pleroma, a realm of divine light and consciousness, the *unfolded* divinity. The Pleroma is populated by aeons, emanations of The Monad and carrying its divine spark. Sophia is one of these aeons, known for wisdom and creative impulse.

All aeons are in pairs, establishing a pleromatic harmony. However, Sophia wanted direct personal knowledge of The Monad, and therefore passed by her harmonious pairing of *Grace* and created a defective being called The Demiurge.

Lacking grace with his wisdom, The Demiurge believed himself to be God and the only God, as he had no knowledge of the higher realms and was conceited in his ignorance. He created the material world, itself now defective in his fractal-image, ignorant, and lacking a consciousness of the primal divine source. The Demiurge is understood in Gnosticism as a false-God. (We might say: an egoic God.)

However, his mother Sophia *was* an emanation of the primal divine source and carried within her a spark of it, a fragment which was passed unknowingly into The Demiurge, and then unknowingly into the material world. Therefore all humans carry this fragment deep within their psyche, and if they can connect to it then they will have access to the *experience* of divinity; an experience of God through an experience of themselves, achieved through silence, through a detachment from the noise of the material world; through deep inner contemplation.

We can see considerable overlapping similarities between Gnosticism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The Monad is reminiscent of Brahman, the divine unified truth. The Demiurge is the (narcissistic) false self, believing itself all-powerful and of the highest form solely through ignorance; to be transcended through an experienced awakening and, ultimately, through enlightenment. The proclamation that the kingdom of God is within us (Gospel of Luke. 17:21) sounds reminiscent of the Upanishad belief that through knowledge and experience of The Self, Atman, we may come to a divine experience of the universe, Brahman. We can

see the emphasis on modesty and humility shared by Taoism. And utilising prayer to dissolve ego and give rise to higher spiritual consciousness sounds quite a lot like the contemplative meditation of Buddhism.

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Christianity, it can be seen, at least for a while, was a container for both selves; one that demanded worship, image, grandiosity, masculine hierarchy, worldwide domination, and the belief that spiritual salvation lay beyond the self; and The Other that asked of itself an unadorned inner contemplation that unfolded experiential knowledge of the divine from within.

We might wonder which of these Jesus himself would have celebrated, and the historical possibility that as an adolescent he may have travelled the east in search of wisdom, if true, suggests the latter.

It is believed by some that the 18 year gap in the biblical story of Jesus, from 12 to 30, was spent by him travelling through the Eastern Buddhist monasteries of India and Tibet, where he extensively studied and was extensively celebrated as a remarkable prophet. Whilst it might seem unlikely that a 12 year old could take flight in such a way, I think it's worth noting firstly that a reportedly impressive child up to that age then mysteriously disappears from view, and secondly that for The Israelites the age of 13 was when a boy could consider marriage. We might imagine the possibility that the Boy Jesus seized this moment to step away from the conformities that stood to befall him and instead went in search of deeper knowledge and experience. A journey of individuation.

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We should acknowledge I think the difference in approach we might have to the distinction between Jesus as the son of God, and Jesus as an extraordinary human. As the former, we must worship and celebrate, but as the latter we have the option to emulate. Worshiping is an awful lot easier than emulating and, whilst worship can be learnt in a moment, emulation requires a lifetime's dedication.

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Christianity flooded Europe along with the Romans themselves as a prelude to its spread throughout much of the world in perhaps the most prolific egoic colonisation in history. In contrast, Gnosticism was condemned, marginalised, suppressed, and persecuted; and by the 5th century AD it barely existed. Their texts were hidden from this persecution, to become re-discovered in 1945 in a cave in Nag Hammadi by an Egyptian farmer. These include the

Gospel of Mary Magdalene, a woman whose more popular image as a prostitute was initiated in the 6th Century AD by Pope Gregory The Great, but who received a far more favourable reputation within the Gnostic texts as being perhaps Jesus' closest and most able disciple.

It's perfectly reasonable to wonder why it might be that those of Christian faith, claiming to advocate the word and deed of Jesus, would so brutally and, when we consider the Gnostic Cathars, *genocidally* assault a variation of its gospel; especially upon those seeming to live a life of befitting spiritual simplicity. However, when we consider the various inquisitions that arose, within which there was an extraordinarily barbaric condemnation of those perceived of differing vision, I think we have to accept that elements of the Latin Christian Church moved some distance from the teachings and spirit of **He** whom they claimed to celebrate; (and claimed to resemble).

It would seem to me that at this time Latin Christianity incorporated more of a narcissistic- psychopathic route in its gilded celebration of spirituality. Adornment. Image. Worship. A deified self. Power-hierarchy. The compulsion to spread its word and images with a global proselytising colonism. The capacity for the murderous and entitled enforcement of its principles and ideals.

Hundreds of years later, in the present day, the presenting nature and attitude of the Christian Church has changed considerably, but these less than pleasant characteristics have to a large extent bled into the culture at-large, and could be said in many respects to define where the human race remains today; certainly its biggest obstacle in the way of a deeper experience of self, life and, for some, God.

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We should consider here that it is only the deeply insecure and uncertain who *require* the worship of others, and only the deeply insecure and uncertain who demand the ideological complicity of others under the threat of any form of violence. So where did all of this insecurity come from.

It seems an unevidenced stretch that Jesus himself was particularly insecure, or that he would advocate the violent upholding of his beliefs. Any suggestion that it is God instead who is this insecure would undoubtedly be roundly dismissed – although, in the spirit of fractality, it's an intriguing consideration: is our consciousness a re-manifestation of God, and our human process of consciousness a means by which God can experience, explore, and process itself. However, as suggested already, I doubt very much if this would be a widely considered possibility by The Church.

So if it wasn't Jesus and it wasn't God, then it must have been us. I know that this seems obvious, but it clearly wasn't obvious to The Church at that time. The egoic self had successfully infiltrated religion and the spiritual temperament and, for some time at least,

stood in the foreground of the good intent and goodness from which the movement was formed.

*

Latin Christianity crushed its opposition or, we might say with reference to the folly of the Aeon Sophia, its *harmonising pairing*; and we can acknowledge now that its rise embodied many of the characteristics of the dramatic rise of the left-hemispheric brain, the emergence of an egoic sense of self, its concomitant narcissism, knowable structures, and demand for complicity; bound together with a tantalising mythology that promised us salvation in recompense for our adoring complicity.

*

The arrival of perspectivity in art during the European Renaissance (14th to 17th Century) placed the self as an invisible implication in front of the painting; the world and its subjects extending outward from the artist's gaze in a depth of field that colonised space.

Whereas portraits had once been two-dimensional, symbolic, imagined re-creations of figures perhaps such as Mother Mary, Baby Jesus, God and so on, increasingly we find individuals with realistic characters, characteristics and emotions alive within a three dimensional landscape.

We might assume that improved artistic technique enabled this revolution in how it was that landscape, space, and people were depicted and explored, but we must I think consider the likelihood that the way in which we began to represent the world was also a consequence of a culturally emerging capacity to envision in such a way.

Did we, after maybe 60,000 years of practice, suddenly develop a technique that could *finally* attempt to re-present the world as we actually saw it, or did we all of a sudden start to see the world so very differently. Perhaps both, I'd say, but certainly the latter.

Either way or both ways, this era was an example of an extraordinary cultural transformation, an emergent process that was greater than the sum of the parts that it transcended; as had been the emergence of art in the first place, on cave walls around the world from artists who were, not all that long prior, passing their time scrabbling on the ground for insects to eat. The self had already come a long way since these more bestial times, but suddenly it seems that the space around it came alive; space which the self took hold of and made its own.

Some say that it was through the soul of the Renaissance poet Francesco Petrararch that perspectivity arrived in the human experience, in 1336 on the summit of Mont Ventoux in France. He had wanted to climb this mountain since a child, felt an unusual fascination with it; unusual because at this time people didn't really climb mountains unless they had to. Mountains were obstacles, and the attitude toward them was essentially utilitarian.

Ignoring the dismay of the shepherd he met on route who sought to dissuade him, Petrarch finally achieved his dream at the age of 32, and his written description of the view that overwhelmed his senses with joy is thought to be the first purely *aesthetic* written description of landscape; extending outward from his gaze and returning energetically back into his bodymind.

He was the focal-point. The beauty of nature in that moment existed because of him and within him, and to an extent that on his descent he was abruptly beset with a guilt that he had contravened the guidance of his spiritual hero, St Augustine, who stridently advocated the inner contemplation of the soul over the outward experience of the material world (and, interestingly, warned against the worship of religious imagery.) This colonisation and ownership of space, for sure, became a cultural reflex.

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From the fifteenth century onwards, Europe avidly went again in search of the unknown, this time through seafaring military colonisations that departed from solid, safe and familiar shorelines into voyages upon an oceanic surface bestowed with the unpredictabilities of nature, by the unfathomable turmoil of its abyssal depths, whilst sometimes guided by nothing much more than elaborated rumour of faraway lands.

The egoic self strode into the world, confronting its greatest enemies: nature, the unconscious fearful undercurrents of the psyche, and those whose Gods and self differed wildly from our own.

The spread of the Christian Gospel was the energising validation for what was, adjacently, a plundering of resource; and the principal guiding egos were the respective monarchs who of course believed themselves to have been empowered directly by God, just as had been so in the ancient mythological kingdoms. The egoic self sailed the seas with a determination to implant its images worldwide, and to insist upon compliance. It had to be the only self, and sowed its seed with a zeal that may have made Genghis Khan feel slightly remorseful.

Back in the homelands, the egoic self raged against any hint of a threat to the sanctity and sobriety of its architecture, sent its Inquisitional posses out in search of dissent, of variation to its scriptures; of actually any thought and behaviour that evoked its own insecure and uncertain shadow.

Women were burnt as witches, perhaps for their forest-dwelling herbalism, perceived lack of chastity, for their availability, for their lack of a husband, for their sexual desirability, and for their advocacy of an inherent archaic feminine animism rather than a modern patriarchal hierarchy.

Those suspected of heresy, blasphemy and alternative vision were hunted tortured and killed, the lucky imprisoned. These were many. Hundreds of thousands were tried, tens of thousands tortured, and thousands killed brutally.

In a resurrection of the spirit of Socrates and Jesus of Nazareth, who allowed themselves to die in celebration of free-speech, Giordano Bruno likewise sacrificed himself to The Inquisition by refusing to recant views held to be heretical by the church, instead burning alive at the stake beside the statement to his judges that:

"Perhaps you pronounce this sentence against me with greater fear than I receive it."

Bruno's crimes were many. He questioned the virginity of Mother Mary (which, to be frank, many parents would do if their own daughters proclaimed that their pregnancy had been caused by a divine intervention upon their otherwise robust virginity), the divinity of Christ, he believed God to be inherent in nature and, in a further questioning of hierarchical religion, disputed the cherished tenet that the earth was at the centre of the cosmos.

This had been an intransigent belief, though challenged as far back as the third century BC by Aristarchus of Samos, and perhaps no other belief more greatly revealed our narcissism, as on a cosmic level it describes a key ingredient perfectly: the earth was at the centre of the cosmos because the human was at the centre of God's vision; just as infants might healthily experience in their families, but may grow to experience unhealthily and unhelpfully if they don't successfully navigate this developmental self-centric era both realistically and securely.

Ultimately it was the controversy between this narcissistic geocentric version of the cosmos and its heliocentric opposition that can be understood to have removed the crown from Christianity. Galileo (1564-1642) was also imprisoned by The Inquisition for such beliefs, though not tortured or cast to the fires, suggesting a softening of the violent recourse that others had suffered for heresy; and some three decades after Galileo's death, Isaac Newton mathematically demonstrated this heliocentric vision to be provably true. The earth was demonstrably no longer at the centre of the cosmos, and the hierarchy leading from human through the ranks of the church and direct to God was hereby unsettled.

Newton has become a symbol of the modern rationalist mind that emerged as the forefront understanding of self. An extraordinary mind, an exceptional mathematician, a truly great thinker whose Reason contributed greatly to nudging superstition and mythology out of the way of science. He was a poster-boy for the modernistic self.

However, both Galileo and Newton, as with the advocates Copernicus and Kepler before them, were deeply religious people. Their faith could not be seriously doubted, and so somehow their mathematical science managed to integrate the more fervorous absolutism of a religious doctrine that would once have been tempted to burn them alive.

Isaac Newton's attention to religion and the bible was unbounded, and he wrote extensively on the subjects, certainly no less than he wrote on the sciences. He was also into alchemy, hermeticism, ancient wisdom, and sacred history; again, subjects that he wrote about extensively.

However, history chose to chisel away the mythology, the religious faith, and the esotericism from the contours of his popular presentation, as if being of no relevance to his

celebrated rationalism, as though an actual mind can be demarcated in such a way. How much more interesting it would have been to have acknowledged the non-sectarian broad and adventurous nature of his mind as the symbolic representation of a modern era, rather than the more customary mutated dilution.

However, the increasingly dominant left-hemispheric egoic-self required a demonstrable certainty that religion and esotericism could not ultimately provide, and into the breach stepped an evolving empirical science, with its insistence that everything could be known, *should be known*, and that only its own methods offered a route to such a hallowed goal. It was a new religion.

Within the same era, Francis Bacon had already decreed that *knowledge itself is power*, in particular with its capacity to seize control over the natural world; hereby distinguishing the human psyche from nature whilst emphasising the dominant need to know. Descartes had already decided that the self was entirely cognitive with his (amongst a number of other statements to this suggestion) *I think therefore I am*.

The self was neither now of nature nor of body, but of the thinking brain and of its capacity to dominate and excel through rationalised knowledge, to build a bigger, better, more powerful and more prosperous civilisation (collective ego) (ego).

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The illusion of civilisation and the illusionary-self sipped wine from each other's glasses over the coming centuries in a mutual celebration of their ultimately destructive insecure narcissism, as their fearful distinction from nature fuelled their determined colonisation of it, taking us deep into the bowels of the smog and prosperity of the industrial revolution; as we poisoned the well that we lapped from.

Along the way, we criss-crossed the planet with telegraphs and railroads, in a left-hemispheric wet-dream of structure; made the world smaller so as to increase our capacity for trade (wealth), and affixed time into a predictable chronology that tore out its complex heart.

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Whereas once the monks flagellated from their flesh their despicable ungodly desires with a masochistic erotic despair, the strengthening ego of high-society managed simply to deny such desires, to suppress them from view, banish them from the persona of their self-presentation.

For many, this suppression floundered in the conflict between its tormenting somatic energy and its insistence upon propriety, and became instead enacted away from public gaze, perhaps with the lesser beings of maids, servants, and prostitutes; who could be

projectively despised for eliciting such bodily desire, rather than in fact being better understood as the unfortunate recipients of it.

The emotional world of the soma became increasingly marginalised as the powers of cognition gained favour, the imagined capacity *to know* privileged over an *experienced* life; and emotional expression itself became all the more frowned upon once it strayed beyond the contracted and contracting confines of the acceptable spectrum of human public presentation. The Romantic poets did a pretty good job of keeping it all alive for a while, but they mostly died quite young.

Inevitably the tension between *the experienced* and *the socially acceptable* would become untenable for many, and madhouses and asylums were built for those whose behaviour or vision of life contravened moralistic civilised sensibilities. As with the black sheep of the family, they were banished to the hinterland, carrying with them the secrets, the failings, longings and insecurities behind the masks of those who evicted them.

For those strong enough to withstand the pressures, to maintain the apparent integrity of the mask, *The Unconscious* was conceptualised, a realm of psychic existence into which the unacceptable and the unbearable could be banished. The Unconscious would come to be for the psyche what the Madhouses were for civilised society.

C.G. Carus (1789-1869) was an interesting man: an empirical scientist, an artist and a philosopher with an introspective and enquiring mind. The Unconscious for him was not the Freudian storehouse of repressed memories that it would soon become, but a deeply creative and symbolic realm that, through deep contemplation, granted access to the divine; and was indeed the foundation from which the conscious (egoic) self emerged. We may see him in these respects as being of kin to the Gnostics, and in turn a philosophical ancestor of Jung.

Carus re-united the knowable self with the cosmic soulful Self, brought the universe, God and the soul back into the psyche, and he became for a moment a figurehead stood at the reconverging of previously disparate paths. However, it was the Freudian version that took hold.

Perhaps this was because such disciplines as archaeology and palaeontology were emerging more or less concurrently with psychoanalysis, all celebrating the re-discovery of that which had become buried, the disinterment of which guiding us towards historical truths, enabling us to fill in the holes in the walls of our cherished temple of knowledge.

The Unconscious became defined as containing that which had been once known and could therefore be known again. It held no spiritual value, contained nothing inherent to itself, offered no access to unknown realms of cosmic existence, no archetypes, no collective unconscious. Just a storehouse for the unbearable.

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Despite being an intellectual trailblazer who radically changed the way of thinking about the nature of the human psyche, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was in many ways clothed in the garb of his era; and we might thereby see him as the radical solution that civilisation, in an increasingly strained conflict with its own shadow, manifested for itself as an alternative to considering how its model for civilisation might be quintessentially flawed and doomed.

Freud was an often reductive and entirely materialist scientist who perhaps undervalued the exceptional intuition that he must have been blessed with in order to notice and signpost the very many doors that he would come to walk through in his robust exploration of the psychic self.

The Freudian psychoanalyst was an expert scientist who, through sufficient personal analysis, should maintain an objective capacity to analyse the patient, and any threatening emotional impact upon the analyst themselves was an indication that the personal analysis had been insufficient. The doctor was and absolutely should be clearly distinct from the patient, just exactly as a scientist at that time was required (and imagined) to be entirely distinct from the experiment, just as we widely imagined our selves to be distinct from nature, or our own bodies.

However, even within the framework of these embedded cultural assumptions, he did more than any before him in initiating the building of a complex psychological architecture, with dynamics that can be diagnosed and categorised, and that can come to be known. Much of his language remains common-place in psychotherapy today, as well as being in the public lexicon.

Through Freud, the self became something that could be explored, known, and understood, our present could be explained by our past, and a salvation from our torments possible without a reliance upon death and a Heavenly afterlife. Freud was, after all, very much an atheist.

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However, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy have only become popular in recent times, nowhere near soon enough to thwart the energies of civilisation that managed somehow to contrive the first world war; during which we re-discovered our capacity for an extraordinary violence that very often purposed minimal gain.

The inclination of the self to identify itself with a nationalistic geography was intensified obviously, and we each stabbed, shot, bombed and gassed our enemies; each of us as though the heroic victim of the other's perpetration. The demarcation of self was not only geographical though, but also cut along the line of social-class.

Those from *good* families were more likely by far to have the decision-making jobs when it came to the battlefield, somewhat less likely to suffer quite the degree of dehumanised

trench-life that the poor and uneducated were expected to fulfil, and were certainly those whose job it was to order the common-soldier from the dismal safety of the trench and into the barbed-wired no-man's-land between self and *other* where most of them would die pointlessly and alone.

It was from this time that the expression *cannon fodder* took hold, a translated equivalent of *chair a canon* (flesh for cannon), a phrase credited to François-René de Chateaubriand in 1814, in reference to the French Revolutionary Wars of the late 18th century.

That one army should degenerate the opposing army into being something *other* does not seem terribly hard to understand. I hope that I would be able to do the same against anyone actively intent on killing me. But that we could be equally dehumanising of those on our own side is another matter; though one becoming pretty embedded in society at that time, in the form of eugenics.

The term comes from the Greek *eugenes* which basically translates as being well-bred, of good stock, and the eugenics movement expressed various iterations all intended to improve the genetic reservoir of the species; and therefore, for some in the higher echelons of the military, sending thousands of common soldiers to their death may have been no more troubling to the conscience than if they were rats.

If this sounds implausible, then it's worth bearing in mind the number of luminaries who supported eugenics which, in the context of this current conversation, is an expression of the formulation of a perfected, or at least an acceptable, idea of self; and one that in turn could discount disabilities, mental health issues, the uneducated, and various races.

Winston Churchill, Charles Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, Darwin's son Leonard, J. M. Keynes, George Bernard Shaw, Teddy Roosevelt, H. G. Wells, John Harvey Kellogg, Adolf Hitler, and very many others, along with a fair swathe through Japan, China, India, and The Soviet Union.

The implication of course is that if these names advocated for it then so did a great many in the higher, legislative, educative, and ruling classes. War must surely be more palatable for those initiating and perpetuating it if the vast majority of those dying are understood as being *something else*.

The shadow-side of humanity, that civilisation (collective ego) (ego) was supposed to keep in-check, exploded out from its unconscious swamp and had to be then swallowed back down and somehow re-integrated the day after the war ended, with everyone reunited and getting back on with being civilised in society once again. In so doing, we laid within our cultural psychic fabric a widespread trauma about what we'd done, what had been done to us, what we had become in order to survive, and what the truth of the human psyche was beneath the veneer of civilised persona.

Freud had been around for a while before the first world war, and we can certainly say that he arrived in the nick of time, so that frameworks could begin to be built in order to

approach an understanding of how the human psyche might have led itself to this collectively, and what on earth we were going to do to contain all of this psychic material and trauma now that it had to be suppressed and repressed before being passed down to successive generations of selves; and long before anything much was known about PTSD or its healing.

World War 1 had a profound effect on Freud, certainly giving some considerable weight to his death-instinct, and it's worth reminding our selves that Freud died some three weeks following the start of WW2 when he reminded his physician of an agreement not to let him suffer unnecessary pain from his prolonged jaw cancer; and instead ingested amounts of morphine large enough to bring about his death; a rarely mentioned example of physician-assisted suicide.

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The cultural impact of a genius cannot only be assessed by the merits of their own formulations, but also by what they inspire in their slipstream, even and especially with contradictions to their schema. Geniuses open the doors through which anything or anyone might wander.

Both Wilhelm Reich and C.G.Jung were closely affiliated with Freud; students, advocates, colleagues, and both imagined by Freud to be future bearers of the Freudian flame. However the three of them ended up occupying considerably distinct psycho-philosophical positions.

That they were unable to maintain an amicable connection and a common space despite their differences speaks of a mindset in which we assume that the wisdom of our perceived-opposites does not potentially shine a light into our own blindspots; when in fact it very often does.

Wilhelm Reich re-introduced the body into the psychic-self, in a strident disavowal of Descartes' dualism, forming perhaps the first fully holistic-systemic understanding of psychological process; so radical for its time that it would take decades before his formulation would begin to receive a more general rather than an esoteric acceptance – basically once contemporary neuroscience lent its support, and trauma-therapy recognised the impossibility of working with trauma effectively in the absence of at least a basic level of psychic-soma understanding and capacity for resonance.

Although Reich developed the relationship between psyche and soma to a far greater extent than any before him, he could draw upon a rich vein of work that led to his door: including the Persians Ahmed ibn Sahl al-Balkhi and Haly Abbas from the 10th century; the Germans Johann Christian August Heinroth from the early nineteenth century, Gustav von Bergmann and George Groddeck from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the

Swiss Adolf Meyer from the same era; and the American Edmund Jacobson from the twentieth century.

Reich was a scientist, and certainly positioned himself as the expert doctor whose broad-minded, multi-dimensional vision was what was needed to diagnose, address and heal the wounded patient; and whilst he worked very directly with the patient's transference position towards him, and is especially notable for assuming all patients to be presenting a negative attitude towards therapy whatever the persona of their presentation, he carried the Freudian attitude towards counter-transference: if the therapist was struggling, more personal analysis was needed. The therapist's feelings (counter-transference) in the therapeutic encounter still at this time said nothing about the patient's psyche.

Reich's self was a knowable self, though now with a body returned and to the extent that it would be, for him, impossible to know the self without experiencing its embodiment and, in particular, *its disembodiment*.

Personally, it's definitely been my experience that whilst it can be comforting to revel or settle within what I can experience of my self, deeper development is inspired by a sense of what I can't rather than what I can, what I'm not rather than what I am.

My first, and probably simplest recognition in this regard was early in my training as a body-psychotherapist, when I became aware that I couldn't even feel the ground beneath my feet. This moment initiated a (currently) thirty-year process of embodiment that has a deep sense of disembodiment at its core and, although I think my thirty-year old self would be delighted with my capacity to experience myself as I do now, I regularly have the discomfiting and equally exciting sense that this process has only just begun.

Reich was ultimately imprisoned. The initial allegation was that he was transporting his Orgone Accumulators across state-lines, but he was imprisoned because of a contempt of court brought about by his insistence that he would only discuss the efficacy of this invention with scientists, as it was a scientific invention; which would seem pretty reasonable. He died in prison shortly after of a heart-attack; or, perhaps we might suggest, of a broken heart.

The Orgone Accumulator was a human-sized box made from alternate organic and inorganic materials, which Reich claimed to concentrate cosmic energy, which could be used for healing illness; certainly, I imagine, not an especially celebrated claim by the rising pharmaceutical industry.

I've been in an Orgone Accumulator, actually the original one that remains at Reich's home in Maine, USA; now a museum. I had stifled any expectations but, whilst I remain with no idea at all how effective it might be in actually healing anyone of illness, I have to say that my experience of it was mind-blowing. The energetic resonance that I felt on my skin was

stronger than any I'd experienced before or since. I don't know if Reich managed to concentrate cosmic life-force but, judged on my own experience, I wouldn't bet against it.

And of course if I can *feel* cosmic energy then I *am* cosmic energy; an intriguing thought and not one thoroughly out of line with the eastern philosophies or the Gnostics, though Reich himself would most likely have dismissed such correlations with an irritable scientific swipe of his hand. He had no time whatsoever for what he thought of as *mysticism*.

C.G. Jung, we might say, in the most generalised of terms, re-introduced the spirit into the psychic self. Again with great generalisation: Freud was the cognitive mind, Reich the body and Jung the spirit. It is well beyond the scope or the point of this article to somehow cover the actual breadth and depth of what Jung brought to the understanding of psyche, soul, and the realms of universal nature. However, I'll dip my toes very briefly into his ocean.

The **Self** for Jung is the *totality* of the psyche (of which the egoic self is just one aspect) and the psyche is pre-existent in every new-born, inherited from the collective-unconscious, a realm of psychic existence that embodies the spiritual heritage of mankind; the memory of our history embedded in nature.

This expresses itself most explicitly in the form of *archetypes*, which are the symbolic representations of repeated and evolving self-similar fractal patterns of behaviour throughout our evolution. The Earth Mother, The Divine Child, The Rebel, The Hero, The Victim, The Wise Old Woman, The Warrior, The Wise Old Man, The Healer, The Lover; and so on and so on.

We inherit these archetypes much as we inherit primitive instincts and drives, and it's the relationship between these universal patterns and our personal psychological history, including societal constructs and so on, from which the egoic-self emerges and develops its characterology.

The purpose of a life's journey is to develop a strong and well-functioning egoic self, to come to know it through the integration of its unconscious, its shadow, and through a reconciliation of its opposing parts. Hereby we might come to observe our ego as a supportive fixture of the psyche, *but not its central-point*.

If we are observing it, then who is the observer? For Jung, this is The Self, the central organising archetype, the totality of the psyche. We *de-centre* the known egoic self, and set sail down the sacred rivers that lead us into mysteries of who we are and of who we were always meant to be. This is the soulful journey of individuation.

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Interestingly, for Jung, Jesus is an archetype of the totality of the unified Self, and the manifestation of Jesus from God is an archetype of individuation.

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Jung's comprehension was formed from a scholar's diligence, a mystic's surrender to an epiphanic experience of the collective-unconscious, and a psychologist's assessment of dynamics, process and structure. He was a polymath who channelled and explored the psychic existence from many different angles of thought and, crucially, *personal experience* of what many of us might call madness and insanity but which was for him (also) a labyrinthine journey into the nether regions, nooks crannies swamps and unheard-of realms of the human psyche. He combined intelligence and cognitive diligence with an experiential heroism.

The overlap with Gnosticism and certain eastern traditions is apparent, in that what we believe to be the self is an obstacle to experiencing The Self, and whilst the egoic self has at least the illusion of delineation, The Self does not. It is non-temporal and non-spatial at its core; and it's inherited. We are born into it, and it seeks to unfold within us.

If each estuary of a human psyche emerges from the same source, then the suggestion that individual selves can only be understood as being entirely distinct would find some analogy in the stipulation that all molecules of H₂O in the sea can only be so too; whereas, put them together, and they are also an ocean. Jung's Self connects us back to the unified cosmic soul.

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In the world of David Bohm's quantum physics, this image of a movement between a primal unified source and a more distinct separateness in experienced reality is given weight by his *explicate* and *implicate* universe.

The **explicate** is the explicit world as we see it, the world that is available to our immediate senses, in which we experience things as being separate, and the **implicate** is the universal realm from which the explicate emerges, returns to, emerges from, returns to, in a perpetual dynamic *holomovement*, and in which the-all is a unified whole.

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Back to more mainstream psychotherapy: the notion of the egoic self as an entirely distinct psyche, quintessentially separate from other selves, would come to be challenged throughout twentieth and twenty first century psychology.

Melanie Klein's Object Relations told us about projective/introjective identification, whereby the intolerable feelings of one person can be energetically passed *into* the bodymind psyche of another; feelings which this recipient may experience as being primarily their own. Klein saw this as a very early infant-mother correspondence, but it is more generally accepted now as an exchange between selves that is ongoing throughout life, and whilst more intensified in significant relationships, certainly not necessarily restricted to them. We connect to and internalise each other routinely.

We might say that, as these feelings originated from one person, the feelings are theirs, but if they are felt by the other person then surely they must be theirs too. If we are to alternatively suggest that *what I feel might not be me*, then we would have to trace back the potential origin of every feeling that we ever have, just in case it might have originated elsewhere; which would be a Sisyphean distraction from a dynamic life.

Even should we at times process feelings to the point whereby we do in fact recognise their origins and disidentify with them, nevertheless for the period that we felt them they were a part of who we are. We could not in those particular moments have described accurately the feeling of self without acknowledging these feelings that we later disowned.

Object-internalisation describes how it is that one psyche will be a structural and dynamic composite of significant others, born from meaningful interactions. Sometimes this is obvious, perhaps for example when we realise that our own self-critical voice is the re-manifestation of a parent's critique of us, or that of one parent towards the other. When we hear in our own voice or habitual attitude that of a parent or, more likely, when it's pointed out to us. *You sound just like your father! You treat me as though I'm your mother!* When we realise that our behaviour in the world is aligned with pleasing a parent's expectation. And so on. Most often, they are extremely subtle and beyond our easy reach because we are so unconsciously identified with them. They are a large part of what we think of as us.

Psychodynamics conceptualised how it is that we can construct others into versions of our own story, in the form of transference. We project onto the other an emotion, a character-trait, a significant person from our lives; see in someone else something that is from us. For example, you perceive me as though your controlling father.

This grew into a recognition that our transferential projections might also tell us something about the recipient's story; in this case, that your transferential projection on to me, in addition to telling us something about your psyche, in fact also tell us something about mine.

For example, whilst the extent to which you transferentially construct me as being your extremely controlling father may feel far from the truth, this doesn't necessarily mean that I don't have a proclivity inside my psyche to be controlling; and one that you intuited. The less aware I myself am of this proclivity, the more likely I am to be sensitive and reactive to its identification.

In the first conceptualisation, the transference was a straight-forward projection, with no particular truth to it at all. In the second the projection has intuited and connected meaningfully to an actual character-trait.

This further grew into a recognition that at times we can actually *become* each other's transferences. Not just mimic, approximate, or symbolise them, but instead they manifest within our own psyches and emerge into the relationship as though us. *I become your controlling father*. This might result in me asserting control in ways that are not customary for me, but for him, a use of language that is unfamiliar, changes in tone and timbre, nuances of body-language that are fractal expressions of him. The relationship between you and he is enacting in the bodymind dynamics between you and me. I am me, I am you, I am he, and I am we.

This process of enactment is almost certain to have a mutuality. Whilst I am partaking in your wounded story, you will be also partaking in mine. If both are equally activated, we could be in for a pretty big rupture, something known to many intimate relationships. This is where psychotherapy can be so useful, because in that relationship one of the people is charged with being self-aware, structured, containing, and separate enough to notice patterns in the relationship that is being also actively engaged in.

The beauty of this is that wounded patterns are always most deeply resolved in the here-and-now, when they re-emerge into a present-day relationship, within which they can be re-experienced, re-worked, and integrated anew. To address a wound always in its past, remembered, abstracted relationship is inevitably an under-satisfying experience, as the wound needs to be re-felt if it is to change its shape within the psyche, and there is no better way than having it re-appear in a present day vitalised connection.

It would seem that we are drawn towards each other in part because we offer each other an opportunity to disentangle our old wounded patterns of behaviour by mutually partaking in their re-enactment; and we do so by internalising each other's psyches, which in turn means internalising for example each other's parents' psyches, their dynamic patterns as they live in us through object-internalisation.

Given that our parents and significant others participated in passing on dynamics and object-representations to us, it stands to obvious reason that their parents and significant others participated in passing them on to them too, and so on through time, the unseen and unresolved patterns continuing on up the line until they eventually become experienced, observed, and integrated. Hereby we might understand that a resolution in the present may be a resolution for generations past; as they continue to live in our own particular psychological present. I am me, you, he, and them.

Systems Theory was another game-changer for the solitary egoic self, dragging it firstly (back) into a *collective* identity, secondly into a world in which it is impossible to understand the individuals within the collective without understanding their dynamic relationships, thirdly into a realm in which small changes anywhere within the system can elicit

disproportionate change elsewhere in the system - something new *emerges* that cannot be explained simply by a deterministic attention to the combination of its parts.

Life in a living being cannot be fully understood, for example, by a description of the purpose of each organ and dynamic system within the body. As Frankenstein and his monster discovered, a living being is more than the collection of its parts. Likewise a family, a culture, and so on.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

As a concept, this was first intimated by Aristotle in the 4th Century BC and gathered a very small degree of traction. However, it was defeated unceremoniously by the likes of Descartes et al, whose deterministic reductionism determined in sharp contrast that, in fact:

The whole is exactly and only the sum of its parts.

Like a machine; which is how in fact he understood everything about the human except for its thinking mind. With the luxury of retrospect, we might now assume that this said more about him than it necessarily did about the human condition; but there by the grace of God go any of us who ever try to theorise about the meaning or dynamic structure of life. How might any of us formulate an ideology or a modality that is divorced from our own psychi-self.

But in any case, *the whole being greater than the sum of its parts* found a resurgence. It was kept alive by John Stuart Mill and given great impetus by Emergence Theory, Systems Theory, Gestalt Therapy, Body Psychotherapy and, in the world of science, Chaos Theory, Complexity Theory and generally in the realm of quantum.

In deterministic but sensitive systems such as the weather, this phrase acknowledges that very small inputs can elicit a radically disproportionate output, hence the associated phrase *the butterfly effect*, which posits notionally that the flap of a butterfly's wings in China may come to elicit a tornado in Kansas.

In self-organising complex-systems, such as a human, a relationship, a family, a society, a species, this phrase acknowledges that the system can undergo spontaneous and radical shifts into a new systemic pattern in a manner that cannot simply be understood with a strict determinism. There are emergent properties, transformations, creative novelty that cannot be explained accurately only by an attention to the parts from which they emerged.

Every psychotherapist knows this experience. For example, slogging away for months, analysing, breaking down, pointing out patterns and dynamics, but with little apparent effect, only for a seemingly innocuous observation or realisation to tip the client's psyche into a surprisingly radical and sudden epiphany; sometimes even having unexpected ramifications for the client's family, friends, and colleagues.

A more common example of this, I've found, is when a powerless person suddenly finds some assertion within a bullying and bullied family-system. Such a system cannot maintain its integrity when someone within it brings a power to the victim, and therefore the possibility of power to the victimised. The whole system is compromised and threatened with transformation because of a shift in one of its parts.

This is true in the psychic system of the individual, the psychic system of all of the individuals, and the psychic system of the system of individuals; each we might say a fractal of the others.

*

We can note here that the evocative assertion that *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts* is now threatened with its own evolutionary transformation. Fractality describes how it is that reality unfolds itself in endlessly repeating, self-similar patterns, apparent throughout nature; and holographic reality describes how it might be that the whole is implicitly encoded within each part. Hereby we can suggest the tantalising possibility that everything in the universe carries some imprint of everything else; and so we can also say that perhaps now:

The part also becomes the sum of the whole.

*

The egoic self is now holistic, inter-subjective and relational, inter-generational, systemic, dynamic, creative, archetypal, subject to spontaneous transformations, fractal. Changes in its own experienced identity will energetically impact others within the same dynamic system, and perhaps every part carries an imprint of the whole that is shared by us all and from which we each emerge.

To gain an understanding of how much all of this can be known (to what extent we can *know* our selves) we first need to consider what conditions of experience constitute a definition of *being known*. Modernistic empiricism, from which we are still struggling to culturally transcend, I'd say, tells us that something can only be known if it's demonstrable and provable, and in some realms that makes sense. But in the realm of the human psyche this is an impossible measure by which to live, as it would require us either to *accurately prove* our subjective experiences *or else discount them*; and to explain a felt experience can be to abstract its life away.

How might we possibly prove the feeling of love? We can rip out its soul and its subjective feeling by deconstructing it into a series of hormonal and neural dynamics, perhaps, but if we have to remove the subjective feeling in order to describe it then we cannot possibly

actually describe it. Only approximate it. Love cannot be empirically proved, yet most of us believe love to be a yearned-for and cherished force of human nature, and many contend it to be a cosmic realm.

Likewise the nature of psyche cannot be *provably described*. We can for example prove that the human being is a complex holistic system. Neuroscience has been demonstrating that premise for quite some time. But we cannot provably describe the holistic *experience* - the feeling, as it were, of holism – except through the dilutions of physiological semantic abstraction.

This is just as true for inter-subjectivity, inter-generationality, and so on, all demonstrable but the accurate quality of their experience indescribable and unprovable. What we have to decide is whether I am what I can prove, or I am also what I feel. Is the self essentially describable or essentially indescribable. Known through knowledge, or known through experience, or unknowable. Or perhaps all three.

*

The egoic self prefers to know. It is drawn towards its own knowledge, to a sense of certainty, of habituality, structure, predictability, and is inclined to defend these tenets stoutly; but also for some reason allows space for perceptions and conceptions that threaten to undermine its own attachment to robustness.

This is the heartland of its paradox: the egoic self can deeply resist the transformations that it nevertheless invites into its world. Its search for the truth of its own nature and the truth of the universe are reflexes that emerge potently despite the pain and dysregulation they might cause.

It's drawn to preserve itself, yet driven it seems to risk its own irrelevance; especially if we are to believe the testimony of the many who have transcended into the higher realms of consciousness, wherein there is little or no egoic self at all.

However, the egoic self has the potential to know and experience an extraordinary world long before it need approach the Jungian or Eastern shorelines of Self that many may find contentious or hard to access, long before it need enter the transpersonal realms of de-centring, dissolution and transcendence that may lead it in the direction of cosmic unity, of everything and nothingness.

We can easily imagine why an egoic self might resist these latter realms, as it may feel as though a ridiculously optimistic suicide: walking through the gates of death in the bizarre hope of experiencing the unlikely possibility that death is but a new form of life. However, we might wonder why it is that we don't have a greater fascination, both theoretically and subjectively, for the wondrous nature and capacity of the egoic self to seek to know itself even to the point of its own demise. If we were each *consciously* willing to do the same then our understanding of our lives, the world around us and the world as it is within us would

become an extremely interesting, dynamic, creative, and beautifully unpredictable experience.

Instead we are in the heartland of a narcissism that has stalked the self since birth. We are obsessed with an idealised image over embodied-substance like never before, and in every walk of life. We are virulently self-important, self-admiring, proud and shameful, entitled, superior, incredibly sensitive and fragile to criticism or contrasting views, and remarkably susceptible to any influence that we imagine could offer a self-promotion; and this virulence goes largely unvaccinated due to its extraordinary though ultimately forlorn capacity to convince human culture that it knows in which direction lies a purposeful and meaningful life.

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I wonder how the slightly brooding and intense Robert Cornelius, the first person to take a photographic self-portrait, in 1839, outside his family's lamb shop in Philadelphia, would feel today if he could witness the extent to which the *selfie* has come to supplant the self.

Whilst of course many people do post landscapes unadorned by our own faces, hundreds of millions of us are inclined always to ensure that our own face is at the forefront of the views that we are sharing with the world; an egoic precedence over the view itself. It exists, in the context of me. An egoic colonisation.

Extraordinarily, many people even risk their lives in order to obtain such an image of themselves, with reportedly several hundred people dying every year from this pursuit. There was a woman fairly recently who had both of her hands bitten off by a beached shark alongside whom she was trying to take a selfie; an extremely grim moment of deep irony.

The risk of injury and death in the quest for a good image is not restricted to camera-phones. Surgical-aesthetics dates back 2500 years to the Indian Doctor Sushruta, who produced the earliest known surgical manual, and whose techniques would come to be of inspiration in the development of modern-day aesthetic surgery.

However, through history the vast percentage of this application was in the reconstruction of war injuries, and it's only in recent times that it's become used so freely to provide for people a look that corresponds to the image of themselves that they wish to be true.

That this imagistic indulgence carries with it both mortality and injury rates does not deter very many from seeking bigger lips, angular cheek-bones, raised buttocks, bigger breasts, smaller breasts, constructed 6-packs, pectorals, new jaw lines, and wrinkle-less faces; anything but their actual form.

The side-effect of a taut face is notoriously a struggle to express emotion facially, to communicate the somatic nuances of feelings that we have forever read in each other consciously and intuitively as a first-line of engagement and co-regulation; and I can only

nervously speculate as to the long-term consequences to the species of its capitulation to a scalped, chemicalised, and unrealistic impression of youth and imagined attractiveness as a preference to non-verbal emotional communication.

*

The body-form has probably never been quite so obsessed about as it is today, its appearance celebrated in billions of semi-clad pics from gyms and bedrooms and bathrooms from all around the world, and potentially sent all around this world in a feverish desire to be *liked*; their bodies a set of shapes whose principle purpose is to inspire some form of admiration or another.

Concurrently and unsurprisingly, we have seen a dramatic rise in disembodiment, the outer clearly preferred to the inner, form over content. This is not to suggest that people are unconcerned with their emotional worlds. Far from it. Emotional dysregulation has never been so celebrated, identified with, empowered, used as the basis for ideology, even remunerated.

The word *anxiety* used to be a descriptor for an overwhelming experience of feeling, which implies the option of learning how better to explore, cope with and value these feelings, given that they take us deeper into an experience of one's self. Increasingly though, anxiety is becoming a noun, an unpleasant *thing* dissociated from self, an affliction, rather as might be a virus, and to be understood and addressed **medically** as a victimisation.

No one articulately pretends that psycho-active pharmaceuticals actually resolve the issue of unmanageable feelings, serving simply in one-way-or-another to sedate the conscious experience of them, but nevertheless the rise in their use has been stratospheric in some demographics; not least in teenagers, who have experienced over a 100% increase in diagnosed mental health issues over the past 15 years. 7.5% of UK adults are diagnosed with a generalised anxiety disorder, and up to 25% report anxiety as being a significant personal experience.

This victimisation is not only medical but cultural, with it seems an increasing number of people occupied with defending their selves from opinions on social-media, deemed offensive because they fail to validate self-definitions or ideology. The opposition to these violations began with trolling but soon graduated into social-media take-downs, cancellations, and offensiveness-culture. People lost contracts and careers as cultural institutions backed the narrative of certain ideologies over the questioning of them; and until recently the UK police-force were enacting investigations into *non-crime hate-speech*. The police were investigating non-crimes. Effectively, moral policing.

We're increasingly living in a world of soundbites and catch-phrases now, and *being triggered* is one of them; by which is meant that a person's wound has been activated into consciousness by something said or done by another. This is generally understood as a grave

act that, whatever the intention of the provocative word or deed, the fact that it was *triggering* wounding it of condemnation. The premise is that our wounds should never be activated.

Off-hand, I can think of nothing that threatens the psycho-evolutionary process of the human species more than this moralised defensiveness. We only re-work and resolve old wounded patterns when they *are* activated, when they *are* triggered. Old wounds are re-worked and resolved in the experiential here and now, never in the remembered (abstracted) past.

If our wounds are not triggered they can never be (for want of a better word) healed, and therefore by requiring the world at-large to be careful about saying anything that might trigger us we are asking the world to collude in the perpetuation of the very trauma and subsequent wounded patterns that we are consumed with explicitly lamenting.

*

Our vulnerability to influence and manipulation are at the heartland of our cultural narcissism, as our desperate willingness to follow any signpost that suggests a route towards self-esteem, self-importance, and easy gratification of our sense of self-ideal supersedes any reflex we might have to instead encounter our ordinariness, fragility, and wounds.

In the 1920's Sigmund Freud's nephew, Edward Bernays, reformed the world of advertising by integrating some of his uncle's basic concepts about the human psyche, specifically the suppressed and repressed urges and drives, emotions, desires, fears and aspirations that, if activated through advertising, would guide the population as to how to spend their money.

A classic example of his dingy work was the boosting of cigarette smoking in American women by linking it directly with women's liberation. Liberated women smoke, so if you aspire to liberation then you will need to smoke.

Doctors smoking in front of pregnant women reassured us that smoking was safe, and in the 1950's smoking became cool. Cool people like Marlon Brando, Marlene Dietrich, Françoise Hardy, and James Dean smoked.

Unfortunately I discovered that smoking doesn't always make a man look somehow both cool and smouldering, but often instead somewhat socially-nervous and out of place.

Bernays referred to his method as *engineering consent*, which somewhat challenges any concept of absolute free-will. This model remains typical of advertising still, and its success is remarkable really when we consider how basic the associations are, when we consider how little is needed to manipulate the human mind, to artificially change the shape of its imagined sense of self.

A car powering fast through a wooded tunnel with an attractive woman in the passenger-seat is on its own enough to make enough men think of this vehicle as an irresistible aphrodisiac and, by proxy, they themselves too.

Processed foods are marketed as healthy foods, and all the more righteously purchased if there is any way whatsoever to squeeze into the advertising campaign the possibility that by consuming it we may be, in some way, saving the planet. Again an extraordinary narcissism is needed to imagine that the planet needs us to save it, whereas it takes very little contemplation to know that the human race will likely have vanished long before the planet dies.

Ingestibles that even bacteria turn away from are sold as food and, even as we are warned of the perils of the plague of obesity that has befallen us, fast-food adverts are everywhere, one of the most marketed genre of all.

Cologne is sold not because of its media-untransmissible odour but because we are led to believe that we too might be as though the cool Hollywood star playing an electric guitar in the desert, bizarrely surrounded by wolves and ravens. Or a barefoot beauty running through the streets of an erotic midnight city, lured by the tantalising threat of an illicit encounter. A cheeky young lad whose exotic scent causes passing women to lose their silly girlie senses to sudden lust.

We are told what clothes to buy, what fashions are in, and we pay a lot of money for the opportunity of offering up our bodies as billboards in order to advertise brands wherever we roam, whatever we do, their emblems increasingly prominent the lower down the fashion-ladder we go. We are told that we are on the cutting-edge of fashion as a distraction from realising that we are simply a marketing campaign; a business-plan.

It's entirely plausible that future generations will pity our complicity, our fragile sense of self, so delicate and unsubstantial that we actually believed or at least were semi-consciously led-by the simplistic and transparently misleading marketing campaigns that told us who and how to be; how to disconnect from our own innate sense of direction and instead follow a path chosen for us because it befits the desires of those who built the path, along with its toll-booths.

*

There's no more apparent a *false-self* than in the often murky underworld of politics, wherein ethics, honesty, integrity and being-of-service-to-the-nation are becoming quaint antiquated ideas. With many a politician, it can be tricky to know even what exactly they believe, as strident political positions can become rather labile in response to the perception of public opinion. And of course they notoriously don't always do quite what they say they will.

A manifesto is no longer a firm pledge of intention, but a disposable marketing tool. Scripted lines are regurgitated. Marketable photo-shoots constructed. The right things are said at the right time, in the right way, and often enough to become lodged in the forefront-memory of digital media.

Despite it being pretty obvious that the second half of their *tenancy* is primarily devoted to soliciting a subsequent one, whilst the first half is occupied with doing not-necessarily-what-they-said-they-would-do, we nevertheless somehow imagine that they might have our interests at heart really, that they will deliver to us at least some elements of the Promised Land that they declared to be in their power. And the populace, like children perpetually disappointed by their parents but who have not yet quite given up hope on a happy family-life, hang onto the promises with a regurgitated and generally doomed optimism that ignores everything that we know these people to be really, and focuses instead on the frayed-edged fantasy of what we would like them to be.

*

The world of celebrity has become, once the home of known stars, now densely-populated with those who are, to most of us, unrecognisable. Celebrity Reality TV seems to be a boiling-pot of folk who will do nearly anything in order to extend their stay in front of camera, sometimes because they're trying to be noticed and other times because their star has waned and they're desperate to claw their way back into the public-eye.

People actually eat the genitals of other animals in order to remain in a particular TV gameshow and get more air-time, and we can delight at watching them demean and humiliate themselves alongside their involuntary retching. Otherwise, simply wearing little and giving the impression of being *up for it*, can be enough to guarantee a newbie's brief presence in the hall of fame. Of course there are very many celebrities with talent and charisma, but these traits are no longer requisites.

Fame is equated with image, imagined image, wealth and pretend-wealth. It doesn't necessarily always seem to matter so much what this image is, so long as there is one and so long as it encourages comment on any or many social-media platforms upon which their simulated lives are followed.

I watched several episodes recently of a YouTube series featuring an extremely large young man eating. That was the show. He ate as much fast-food as he could possibly insert until he could eat no more; and occasionally he gave proud updates regarding his terrifying weight-gain. He is a multi-millionaire compulsive glutton, and the poor lad looks perpetually on the cliff-edge of a profound despair.

We have given rise in recent years to this new species, who go by the name of *influencers*. They appear to earn a fair bit of money by either pretending to like products or else by cashing-in on products that they do like. Some are ideological, promoting a way of thinking or behaving, usually that encourages a feeling of empowerment in those experiencing otherwise, and usually by the implementation of an attitude of entitled dominating aggression that is in turn essentially a validation of their own life-style and character-structure. They are often extremely reactive to critical attention, quickly revealing an insecurity that is remarkably close to the surface of a veneer that might have, seconds earlier, seemed perfected polished.

Influencers often seem to be exaggerations in some way or another: unnecessarily enthusiastic, employing explicit affectations of sexuality, hilariously wacky, frenetically gesticulative, dramatically evangelical, or whatever. Sometimes they were already famous people, but often not, just those who have devoted their lives and sacrificed their souls to the glories of becoming known for being known.

Their undeniable popularity tells us much about the populace who follow them avidly. Extraordinarily influenceable, with a paper-thin sense of self capable of offering little resistance to suggestion as to how they should can stand out, without realising that all they are doing is sacrificially complying and fitting-in.

*

Our quest for knowledge has diminished paradoxically in an era in which it is most accessible. Mobile phones (perhaps a mechanical approximation of our inherent cosmic interconnectivity) are also the greatest encyclopaedia known to mankind (perhaps a mechanical approximation of the collective-unconscious) from which we can learn anything ever known and at whatever level of learning befits our intellect and mentality.

Scholars from 30 years ago would have chopped off a finger to have access to such an immediately-available wealth of knowledge. Yet it seems that, aside from incessant texting, it is used by a great many solely to photograph themselves, connect to social-media, play games, shop, and access porn. Mobiles are the great disembodiment of our time, offering themselves up as a simulation of self, as a distraction from self, and as an alternative to self.

What worries me most about mobile phones and their compulsive use though is that they are encouraging us to reduce our field-of-vision to being about a foot from the face. Once upon a time, the universe was what was right under our noses, the food we could find on the forest floor, the group, the immediate predators who we smelt before we saw. Gradually and slowly we learnt to look outward and upward, then to imagine what we couldn't see; other people, other lands, a spirit world, an eternal heavenly life after death, the moon and sun and stars of the dynamic cosmos, and so on. We have spent hundreds of thousands of years evolving in this regard, only now to find ourselves encouraged to spend as little time as possible looking beyond a device held in our hand. The long-term physiological effects of this may be somewhat more predictable than their psychological or spiritual adjacents.

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All of this intense narcissistic madness is a trauma response, a collective PTSD born from the demise of the self and the Self in our cultural consciousness, and our consequent frantic search for identity and for an approximation of *meaning*.

We've inhabited instead a land of False Gods, and whilst some of us are beginning more deeply to sense and know that their gospels are signposts to a dystopian disembodiment,

most of us have no real idea of the pickle that we're in or why we might be in it. Distractions really do work, for a quite a long time.

As psychotherapists we are far from immune. Unless we consider ourselves to have fully integrated our psyche and are heading with a quiet curiosity towards a transcendent Self, then we are undeniably a part of the problem; indeed, in the spirit of fractality, we *are* the problem. If it's in culture, then it's in us; and the more that we might prefer to imagine that we are not the problem is the extent to which we inevitably unconsciously are.

Some of this is pretty obvious. On the personal level, I'm sure that few of us would really imagine that we have psycho-spiritually developed to such a degree that we stand upon the evolutionary cutting-edge of human consciousness, far beyond the chaotic mess of the cultures we are born within, informed by, whose air we breathe. And if we are at all attached to the idea that we have, then again we almost certainly haven't.

We surely know *don't we* that our cherished and idealised modalities, perspectives and techniques will likely meet at least the gentle derision of future generations for their simplicity, myopia, misguidedness; or perhaps honoured for being but one single step down a very long road. Do we really imagine that in 100 years time, our equivalents will still be as considering of attachment theory as we can be, or might they view this much as we view the drive-theory of our ancestors; as a very partial truth and one that was attached to as a fad. Might they see *trauma-therapy* as a self-indulgence through which the species of yesteryear still thought it was relevant to find someone or something or a moment-in-time to blame for their struggle to integrate the true nature of consciousness and psyche, and to not instead just get on with their beautiful soulful lives. Are we humble enough to know that we're just another moment in time.

We have our Gods and Prophets, those whose words and wisdom we cherish, the big names of our profession whom we seek to integrate and emulate, *to become as-though*, whose gospels we spread through our social-media soundbites, catch-phrases, and poignant quotations. And of course western psychotherapy has spread its seeds across the world, dominating the landscape of even radically differing cultures, now no longer needing the gunships and Roman Legions of Christianity.

We speak and preach of much that we haven't even seriously begun to integrate yet. How many of us really *experience* the holism that is so obvious to us theoretically, of the intergenerational or systemic self whose integration would so radically contextualise for example the common expressions of trauma-theory that like to imagine the extraordinarily simplistic one-dimensional architecture of perpetrator and victim.

Many of us baulk in the face of client material that *triggers* our own, refer-out rather than confront our own monsters as we would wish our clients to do; whilst concurrently holding onto to the vestiges of an expert position that all too often is flavoured with a medical-model status that we ironically nevertheless decry and deny.

We have begun finally to recognise that our chronic splitting of modalities is a primitive defence, in which rivalry is preferred to a recognition of how much we need each other's expertise if a unified theory and modality is ever to emerge from sectarianism. But this is a very long dirt-road that we have only recently begun to tarmac, and we are each and collectively far from any destination.

One of the wise things Michael Soth said to me some decades ago, before I was able to really understand it, yet knowing that it was something that had to be understood, was that "psychotherapists are the custodians of the psychological parallel-process of the nation." It plays through us, *parallels fractally*, and this offers up to us the possibility of a tremendous honour and responsibility, but only to the extent that we recognise that in our personal and professional lives it is we who are the problem that we believe ourselves purposefully to be the solution to.

If we are to enable our clients and our species to navigate a path towards self and Self from within the labyrinthine dungeons of image, false-self, and demoralised grandiosity, then we must begin at home; with our modalities, our profession, and with our selves.