

The background of the book cover is a landscape photograph. It shows a dense forest of green trees in the foreground, leading up to rolling hills and mountains in the distance. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a misty or overcast day. The overall tone is natural and serene.

The Uprising of Man

A Proposal

Mark Josephs

The Uprising of Man aims to offer to men what feminism - in its most balanced, egalitarian, courageous essence - offered, and continues to offer, to women all over the world: empowerment, unity and dignity.

It holds up a mirror to male socialisation - to how we as men have been 'masculinised' and domesticated - and points a way through the mirror, so that each of us can become his own authority, no longer controlled by his socialisation.

The Uprising Of Man invites each of us to be radically honest with himself, and explains how, through the courageous commitment to radical honesty, we find freedom, love and purpose.

And because the personal is political, and because we live in an era of ecological emergency, The Uprising Of Man also presents the potential ecological, social, sexual, religious and political impact of many of us making such a profound commitment to ourselves.



**THE UPRISING
OF MAN**

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THE UPRISING OF MAN: A Proposal

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1

A PROPOSAL



“freedom, equality, purpose”

BABY STAGES

It has often been said that we are at the end of an era.
I feel this is true.
I feel we are in the baby stages of a new civilisation –
but that just as the wise old man is already inside the baby boy,
we've already got all we're going to need.

There is every sign the new civilisation will be matriarchal...
our porn-addicted, intimacy-inept teenage boys
are being academically outrun by the girls...
even the heroes of the slickest Hollywood adventure films
are trustworthy, authentic, young warrior-leader women.
There is, of course, an inevitability about this –
but I don't feel it would be good for the Earth.

I feel it would be healthier if Man rose up
from the shudders of his patriarchal past
and stood in his dignity.
She in hers.
He in his.

Babies dream,
and from their dreams they create their personalities.
This is the stage we're at.

This book proposes a way we, as men, can dream together –
a way we can unite in brotherhood
in the cultivation of dignity
for ourselves
for the generations of men to come,
for all people of all genders,
for all creatures,
and for all of existence...
and co-create a new civilisation.

I MET THIS OLD HIPPY

I.

To rise up
is also to return down
to the Earth.

II.

I met this old hippy.
He was in his eighties.
"Was it really such a difficult choice", he asked me,
"between love and war?"
He said he could still feel those times in his bones –
the vitality, the eroticism, the possibility..
"We wanted to make love, not war,
with each other – with life!
We just didn't know how."

He hummed me Neil Young's 'Woodstock' –
"We've got to get ourselves back to the garden."

III.

Perhaps we still don't know how.
Or perhaps we're just not being brave enough
to admit we do.
And do it.

In this book I propose a framework
for uniting in learning together.
And for doing.

ECOVOLUTION

"Players with huge power and global reach are released from democratic restraint. This happens because of a fundamental corruption at the core of politics. In almost every nation, the interests of economic elites tend to weigh more heavily with governments than those of the electorate."

- George Monbiot

Heartfelt ideas move revolutions, not guns. We don't need guns to say 'no'.

Violence would only be more of the same.

'The means are the end'.

So more important than the 'no' is the 'yes'- not what we stand against, but what we stand for...

But as if pricked by some magic needle – drugged, enchanted – it doesn't seem to occur to us that we can stand up.

(Mostly) we go about our daily business smiling stupidly, humming to the sweet, sleepy muzak of faith in our (mostly) emotionally-challenged, intellectually-confined, physically-constricted, existentially-void 'civilisation'.

("What do you think of western civilisation?" Gandhi: "...it would be a good idea!")

There is masses of horrific and heartbreaking evidence that we are destroying the beautiful Earth that feeds us, and gives us water, and gives us air, and that our leaders are not leading – that they are not uniting us and inspiring us to radically protect the Earth we love (as they might do, for example, should they want us to "pull together for the war effort"), but, on the contrary, are lost inside some irrelevant video game with their corporate sponsors, wheeling and dealing treaties and trade agreements – utterly irresponsibly accelerating our global civilisation's suicidal self-consumption.

Despite all of this, we continue, unbelievably, to believe the newspapers are the news, and that the men and women in black suits have things in hand.

We are bemused. We keep ourselves amused.

And it's not 'their' fault. The leaders and the led – we are one. We are as good and as bad as each other. We are one united, intoxicated, deadly story unfolding.

But you know all this... Like Leonard Cohen sang, "Everybody knows that the boat is leaking / Everybody knows that the captain lied / Everybody got this broken feeling / Like their father or their dog just died / Everybody knows".

You want to say, "no! enough!", but the words come out in a mumble that already expects defeat.

And brother, here, in my opinion, is why: because inside every 'no' is the 'yes' to its opposite – and the latent 'yes' pulsing inside us is a 'yes' to a freedom and love we do not live. In other words: if we were to truly proclaim our opposition to our collective insanity we would be exposed as the hypocrites we are.

How can "no!" echo from millions of rooftops when we don't even know what it means to live, individually, in freedom and love – or even if we understand, intellectually, when we ourselves don't walk in freedom and love through our everyday lives? We can't say "no!" because we know we are not living the "yes!"

This is why it is absolutely crucial we define our 'yes'. And, then, that we embody it, that we get to know it from the inside – that we become it.

We might have a vague conceptual sense of our 'yes' – our 'yes' to ourselves, to our individual autonomy and authority (freedom), our 'yes' to equality (love), and our 'yes' to the beauty and mystery of life on planet Earth – but that is not enough. These ideas will only become passionately heartfelt enough to be 'ecorevolutionary' once we know them in our bones – once we are experiencing them. Only then will we really know what we stand for.

To co-create a radically new civilisation we each need to make a radical commitment to ourselves. All of us, so-called leaders and so-called led – whoever is brave enough – now needs to stand in front of the mirror of their own birth-to-death journey and dedicate themselves to learning to live as their 'yes'.

Many people have woken up in a relationship, or a job, or a place and said, "What am I doing here? I don't have to stay. Why didn't it ever occur to me that I could leave?" It's time to wake up. It's time to get up. "Oh, can we have a revolution? I didn't know that was allowed!" Of course it's not allowed!

But who is not allowing it? Our leaders? Or our fear?

What are you afraid of, brother? Death? We will anyway both be gone, you and I, in a fingersnap.

The time has come for 'ecolution'. We need to educate ourselves in living our 'yes', and we need to act. This is a time for legal reform (civil obedience). Definitely. And this is a time for direct action (civil disobedience). Definitely. But above all, it is a time (as Leonard Cohen also sang) "For the innermost decision / That we cannot but obey" – a time for 'innermost obedience'.

Although our leaders have access to power in ways most of us don't, they are also tied in systemic knots in ways that most of us aren't. The task upon us all, therefore, is the creation of a new civilisation - - a civilisation not based on fear and defendedness from the Earth, from each other, and from ourselves, but a civilisation of love for the Earth, of love for each other, and of individuals in love with themselves. But I do not see our leaders sobbing for the land or ocean or sky, so I don't believe they can lead us into a loving relationship with the Earth -. And when I hear their speeches I do not sense psyches that have been psychotherapeutically kneaded into maturity, so I don't believe they can lead us into becoming a balanced, centred, kind, respectful global family.

And 'we', for the most part, are as dried up, and drugged up, as 'they' are. We all need to make the radical, self-educational commitment to becoming the kind of people who could populate a new civilisation. And in this book, I will be proposing an utterly non-dogmatic, non-hierarchical, unifying, mass-educational programme to do just this. It is simple, straightforward, honest, unpretentious – and extremely powerful. What's more, it gives quick results – which is just as well, given the eomergency we're in.

And this programme is not a preparation for action. Action is part of it. It is self-education, and united, meaningful, creative action is part of the educational process.

This proposal is addressed to men because (as we will discuss) I believe we as men need it, just as much we are needed. But I can't imagine any woman, or anyone of any gender, who is open minded, open hearted, and open spirited, being anything but hundred per cent supportive of such an Uprising of Man.

It is not an exclusive or inward-looking uprising that I am proposing – 'the men for the men' – no! I am proposing an Uprising of Man in absolute equality and connection with every other person, animal, tree and insect on this Earth.

You know – we are free! We are free to obey or not. We could stop paying our taxes tomorrow. We could become conscientious tax objectors – in our millions! I am saying this to nudge our forgotten freedom awake. We have forgotten that above and

before being citizens of the state, each of us stands alone beneath the sky, walking vulnerably towards his own death, a child of the great mystery of existence.

Imagine such tax objection! What a mass statement! And not just of our personal authority and existential freedom. It would also be a radical, collective, symbolic statement of our equality – that no leader is above us. That we do not have to listen. That no one is above us, or below us – however big and black the limousine – however wealthy, famous or powerful. That everyone, however they might define their gender, is an equal; a sibling. That others only have the right to lead us if we give it to them. And even then we remain equals.

We could set up our own governments! We could pay our taxes to them! I don't even feel that would be particularly radical right now. I feel we could justifiably, and quite moderately, turn our backs on almost every government, since they are not addressing the ecological crisis in a way that shows any love of the Earth, nor offering us any resolute and compassionate guidance as to the sacrifices we all need to make if we want to protect, and even perhaps someday restore, this most beautiful Earth with its crazy variety of amazing creatures, and all of its magic and wonder.

It would only seem radical because we'd be breaking the trance of our disempowerment and disconnection.

We need self-education, and ecovolution. We need the gentlest, most peaceful, respectful, loving revolution the world has ever seen!

It's time to vision anew. Radically anew. Centralised power is held in place by our belief in it. Do we believe in it? Or are we just afraid?

The obviousness of the fact that we are all one family has somehow become obscured. That love should be the guiding force of government sounds ridiculous to us. For us, 'government' and 'love' don't go together. Which is ridiculous. They are two words that should be inseparable. And the fact that they're not just shows how sick our civilisation has become.

The dismissal of such words as idealistic or utopian is black-suited propaganda. It might be dismissal inside your own head, but switch it off. It's time for a mega-redefinition of 'us' and 'them'. I do not say this out of rebelliousness, but out of responsibility.

A MEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

"You must have a plan. If you don't have a plan, you will become part of somebody else's plan."

- Terrance McKenna

The First Wave Men's Movement

As I understand it, at the beginning of the twentieth century a first wave women's liberation movement focused primarily on equal rights. Midway through the century, a second wave was going deeper – promoting 'consciousness raising' and protesting sexual and workplace injustices. By the end of the century, aware of its own prejudices, a third wave was going deeper still – addressing the diversity of discrimination against women on every continent by race, religion, sexuality and social class. Today, it seems to me, no area of human enquiry or activity has not been touched by this feminist liberatory impulse.

There was a first wave men's movement towards the end of the last century – but it didn't get very far! How could the men – the patriarchal oppressors, so recently deposed... and not-so deposed (still often resistant to complete equality, and still in so many places so pre-feminist) – how could they dare proclaim a men's liberation movement?! What did they want to liberate themselves from? Themselves? Was it some sort of a joke?

It was not, and is not, a joke for me. I don't care whether you deform a baby's psyche by telling it it is less, or by telling it it is more. It is all violence and systematised indoctrination. I don't care whether you twist the mind of a little girl into believing she should be a sex-object, or contort a little boy's mind into believing real men are shameless studs. It's all child abuse.

But, yes, the men's movement didn't get very far... I was there – a young lad in my thirties and forties :) Many men remain grateful to those times, and I am one. It birthed heartfelt personal enquiries and worthy projects. But in and of itself, as a movement, it seemed to just fizzle out. I wonder if there was too much guilt. Perhaps there was too much attachment to superiority. Perhaps it held out no new vision. Perhaps we were just licking our wounds and sucking on scraps. Whatever the case, its voice was incomparably more muted than that of the women's movement. Its soulful, therapeutic, mythopoetic wing got ridiculed as 'tree-hugging', and the more activist masculinist (men's rights) wing, – while theoretically in accord with the

feminist egalitarian agenda (as was the profeminist men's wing) – was too bitter and misogynistic to move the hearts of most men.

Personally, I believe the lack of a new vision was critical: there was no vision of a manhood of the future to which to aspire, around which to unite. In fact (and here is the crux of this book), I feel it is only now, several decades on, that such a vision is beginning to take shape – as more and more men, like me, have given their years in apprenticeship to woman, to man, to achievement, to life – and got absolutely nowhere! As I write this, I laugh with joy and pain! As well as wonderful, it has been tumultuous and traumatic, bringing me – to quote Joan Manuel Serrat, "verse by verse, blow by blow" – to real honesty, to facing my life, to facing myself, to the unexpected power of humility, to the unexpected freedom of not-knowing, and the unexpected love of equality.

In this book I will be trying to articulate the beauty and implications of this gutting defeat – so that we can enquire together into whether or not we feel there actually is some sort of collective arrival underway and, therefore, whether or not we are called to unite – because, well, that would seem befitting if we are in fact already being carried along on some kind of collective cultural current.

And I don't just mean those men who were moved by that first wave. I mean all of us - - older and younger - - all of us who have been (and are being) tossed about in the questioning of the more ecologically, therapeutically, and socially sophisticated waters of the last three or four decades.

Is it happening? Is a second wave swelling? Is it a potential happening – an encoded pattern waiting to be spotted? Well, my answer will be in your response to this proposal of a book. Clearly, we are needed – the Earth needs en masse, non-governmental (and governmental), immediate, united, global protection and 'healing' – and I sense an enormous vitality available in the unity of honest men, a vitality that could serve the world, and also serve us (validating and empowering us as men).

My own intuition is 'yes': an authentic, stereotype-free, dogma-free manhood of the future is coming into focus, and great numbers of us are already living into it – a manhood to make our ancestors proud, a manhood to feel proud to pass on to our sons.

A Second Wave?

In the 80s and 90s we just weren't ready. But... since then, god knows how many of us have been swimming to shore through a sea of self-reflection, relationship wrestles, questions of life purpose, personal development, addictions, self-sabotage

and success, dignity and self-betrayal... and gradually, gradually maturing because of, and despite, ourselves... gradually learning to stand differently in our bodies: letting the earth take our weight, letting our sexuality vibrate, trusting our tender, fiery hearts and breathing in the freedom that was always ours.

In fact, I would say it is only through such personal transformation that we come to know that, like women, we too have long been dominated and oppressed. We come out the other side (of our patriarchal conditioning). We snap through some sort of invisible, ever-present, never noticed, hypnotic membrane. We come to feel how we haven't been. The mind fog disperses. We look around. We become our own authorities. We stand powerfully, vulnerably free.

We recognise how our spirits have been sterilised by religions – like Christianity and Scientism (the belief in a billiard ball universe), how our minds have been neutralised by education in information rather than in amazement, our hearts twisted up by generation after generation of insistence on a not-vulnerable manhood, our sexuality all but castrated by divine monogamy, and our wild, innocent love of the land torn out from under our feet.

Above all, we realise we have been terrorised into being 'masculine', and that this has bifurcated our being. We have been split. As if told "you can only use one leg", or, "you are only allowed to look out of one eye", as little boys we were prohibited from following the free flow of our inclinations and impulses, and straightjacketed inside a conceptual cluster entitled 'masculinity' that bound us in sensual insensitivity, emotional emptiness, and mental (and physical) rigidity – leaving us stranded in an atheistic-or-theistic flatland. Furthermore, this split 'socialising' has predisposed us to harshness, authoritarianism and violence.

We realise – wearily, angrily, finally – that man, too, has been sacrificed and sucked dry by patriarchal fear and control – sacrificed to the production line, to the economy, to the family, to the army... Masculinised, sterilised, neutralised, twisted-up, all-but-castrated, torn from the land – we realise that, even as babies, even in the womb, our minds and hearts were being trimmed and streamlined towards the worldwide, silent and invisible mass sacrifice of man.

Just as our elders were invisibly sacrificed, they in turn offered us up – placing us, mostly lovingly, into the stream of insanity and suffering with such unconscious efficiency that by adolescence we were already convinced it was our own choice to live with minimal feeling, minimal whole body eroticism and minimal trust in the beauty and wisdom of existence.

Women have been oppressed. Yes. And they have recognised this. I believe feminism was the most important evolutionary phenomenon of the twentieth century. But

caught in the crossfire of women's pain and blame, and men's shame, of generalisation (such as this), and clumsy judgement, I believe we have needed time to retreat honourably, and ask our bodies and hearts what it is that we, as men, feel and need, and long for – for ourselves.

Of course, the realisation that we, too, have been persecuted by patriarchy in no way excuses the heartlessness of so much male behaviour. I do not want to shield myself, or you, my brother, from our collective shame – or personal guilt. Rather, for me, this realisation is an open door inviting us deeper – deeper than our unconscious behaviour, deeper than our self-judgement and shame – into inspecting the education that has shaped us.

It takes us to the need for re-education. Therefore, I would say that if a second-wave men's liberation movement is in fact arising, it will need to be primarily an educational movement – one that is continuing and consolidating whatever self-enquiry is already underway. Not an academic educational movement, but a movement of self-education through personal honesty, brotherhood and (perhaps above all) the learning that happens in unified purposeful action.

A Unifying Metafocus

It seems most of us are suspicious of flags and one-ways and hierarchies and obedience. And with damn good reason. So if, in this book, I propose an overarching 'metafocus' (collective focus for individual focuses) for a second wave men's movement, it cannot be an imposition. It will have to be an encapsulation of an essence within the many, seemingly disparate, focuses that individual men already hold. And I am going to propose a metafocus. In fact, without one I don't see how a movement could cohere.

The years have sometimes battered my pretensions, sometimes teased them out with tenderness, sometimes with humour. And having watched my brothers similarly reincarnate a thousand times – whether they're into therapy, or creating their own realities, or permaculture, or Ayahuasca, or corporate reform, or eco-architecture, or health foods, or social justice, or whatever – I see us all becoming simpler and simpler, clearer and clearer... I see a metafocus coming into focus.

Informed by this, by decades of coaching men and facilitation of men's groups and workshops and, above all, by the intuitive sense I have already mentioned of a collective male awakening, I want to propose a metafocus for a 'second wave' men's movement... It might seem disappointingly simple, but, as Bruce Lee would say, it comes out of a lot of 'hacking away at the inessentials'. It is this: the valuing of the

uniqueness of our individual experience (what we're experiencing, that is – not what we've experienced in the past).

Do not underestimate the weightiness of this focus, nor its social and political implications. My aim in this book will be to show its depth and breadth from all sorts of philosophical and psychological angles; to explain its social, ecological and political consequences, and to shout loud the (r)evolutionary (radical evolutionary) possibility with which I believe it confronts us; to which I believe it invites us.

More elaborately, by 'metafocus' I mean: a 'reality-focus' with which we can align our lives without any loss of personal authority, or sacrifice of existing individual focus, but through which our individual authority is affirmed and enhanced, and through which we can experience a sense of expansion and empowerment by standing in unity with others who also choose to align with this reality-focus.

Many of us do 'value the uniqueness of individual experience'. We have felt what it's like to stand alongside each other in complete equality – each of us, above all else, engaged in honest presence to his own, actual, unique, felt experience. We know, simple as it might sound, how this creates an atmosphere in which each man can encounter himself, his aloneness, his freedom, his belonging, his love and his sense of purpose.

But I believe that although some of us know this, perhaps more and more deeply at a personal level, we have hardly even sniffed its explosive, culturally transformative potential. Why not? Because, we haven't yet lived it together. We might've lived it at a workshop, but we haven't lived it in our neighbourhoods. And again – why not? Because, by default, we're running along invisible, rusty tracks laid down by previous generations, by previous mindsets. This is why we need to lay our own.

There are many vital, urgent themes to explore: power and shame, the demise of monogamy and the lack of community, the discarding of masculinity and the honouring of manhood, purpose and social engagement, and so on... And there are a million and one ways to do this. But if, as many of us have already realised, all we have ever had is our own experience, and all we have even now (in this moment), is our own experience – then it doesn't make sense to explore anything unless we are consciously in touch with our experience, and, therefore, able to evaluate everything in terms of how it's impacting us. Staying in our own experience, valuing our unique experience, is, I believe, the natural metafocus, the common holding ground for our myriad personal and social journeys.

In fact, in my opinion, the metafocus of 'experiencing our experience' is at the heart of every tradition of self-realisation – the prerequisite for successful therapy, the

ground of all authentic relating, and the big, fat start button for a new wave of radical social evolution.

The stumbling apology of so many modern men is not liberation. Guilt is not enough. Can we go beyond our obsession with woman – both our conceited intoxication with her submission, and our sulky bewilderment at her bold, proud vindication? In this end-of-times, beginning-of-times era of planetary devastation and potential species suicide, can we be courageous enough to co-create metafocused, global brotherhood?

Can we be courageous enough to turn towards our actual experience – together – to interest ourselves in ourselves, to face our aloneness/uniqueness, to each be an equal to all, to open to life and death and face our not-knowing? Can we stand in brotherhood and remember dignity?

And from this united self-honouring can we honour the women, the men-women, the women-men, the children, the animals, the birds, the insects, the fish, the earth, the sea, the sky, the land, knowing that – as Terrance McKenna says – ‘all culture is provisional’, that everywhere all-consuming, modern, industrial culture now stands where once stood other cultures; that we are free to create anew?

A NOTE ON SUBJECTIVITY & LANGUAGE

"Is, is, is – the idiocy of the word haunts me. If it were abolished, human thought might begin to make sense. I don't know what anything 'is' – I only know how it seems to me at this moment!"

- Robert Anton Wilson

All that follows is The Final Truth. The Truth, finally...

Only kidding!

But surely it can't be 'just' my opinion?! I have worked bloody hard for this opinion! I have sweated blood for this opinion! I have wrestled with dark angels for this opinion!

OK, yes, you're right – whether it's 'just' an opinion, or a hard-won, sweat-soaked opinion – it remains a subjective opinion... every word of it!

Why bother to say this? Because the structure of language itself doesn't promote subjectivity, and therefore equality. Already in the previous pages, there must be hundreds of instances in which my absolutely normal use of language makes unintendedly-pompous pretensions to objectivity, and as such takes a position of power-over. But (I consider) it would be (what I consider to be) tedious, and (what I consider to be) distracting, to try and twist language into (what I would consider to be) subjective shape, even though I want to speak to you as an equal – subject to subject, brother to brother.

And, of course, it is especially important to take note of this if we're exploring the metafocus of staying in our own (that's to say, subjective), experience. So please know that I do genuinely feel everything I have written is my subjective opinion, and that I am intensely interested in finding out whether (if it seems to me) many of us have arrived, or are arriving, at the same subjective opinion. Because if (it does seem to me) many of us have, then (for me) that has (in my opinion, what I consider to be) massive, challenging, and exhilarating implications. And so maybe also for you.

THE VISION

"An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all!"
- Oscar Wilde

I want to present a vision, and a way towards it. It is a vision of men standing up. Not standing up in conformity – not even in conformity to nonconformity. It is of men defying the mass-marketed blanket of superficiality, of men asserting the wisdom they withhold; of men, unapologetically and unashamedly powerful and free, standing in solidarity with all that is vulnerable – especially with all that is vulnerable in themselves. It is a vision of each man – as himself... standing naked-of-heart, letting the world be witness to the deep dignity of his being – a dignity, perhaps, unfamiliar to him and, therefore, perhaps that he fears.

Yes, we can be sex-obsessed morons! Yes, we can be emotionally retarded! Yes, we can be brattishly aggressive. We can be disturbingly violent. But, simultaneously, disguised as fathers and plumbers and shopkeepers and dog lovers, in a parallel underground world – to the detriment of the human race – we are also a forgotten, fractured, beleaguered network of philosophers, scientists, music lovers, adventurers, designers, visionaries, builders, mystics, nature lovers, creators, inventors, artists, poets, romantics, idealists and innocent brave cowards – listening out, each in their own way, for a truest note: some half-forgotten, half-remembered note – ‘the voice of the hidden waterfall’ (T. S. Eliot) – a note of soothing beyond securities that would sing things into sense, that would comfort the heart with recognition.

This book is a personal and political, philosophical and poetic invitation to listen together. It is an invitation to come out of secrecy and trepidation – together – carried by honesty. No pretensions. No power trips. No persuading, no enlisting. Rather, an invitation to be utterly honest, together – to stand in honesty, then be honest about that level of honesty, then fall through to a yet more naked honesty – deeper and deeper and deeper into our own experience - loving ideas yet letting ourselves be carried beyond the safety of ideas, loving our emotional patternings yet opening beyond our patterns, and loving our fragile identities while also standing face-to-face with the wondrous mystery of the unknown – the unknown moment, the unknown me, the unknown you, our unknown togetherness, our unknown belonging... To not abandon our actual experience and come, perhaps, to live in the satisfaction of self-acceptance, together – loving ourselves and letting ourselves be loved – re-imagining ourselves and perhaps redeeming the discredited image of man.

A Vision for Men

This honesty-driven, self-educational invitation is a way we, as men, can unite and arise through the dumbing down indoctrination we have inherited into our minds and blood. This stripped-down commitment to deepening honesty takes us straight to ourselves. It takes us to where we already are, it takes us nowhere, and it takes us everywhere. Through steadiness in honesty we meet the unknown. There we meet our aloneness. We meet our uniqueness. And, welcoming our grief and fear, we meet a sense of belonging and a new lightness of being. We meet purpose. Life comes alive again. Meaning reveals itself everywhere: meaning with a capital M.

Then, there, in that re-lit world, having taken myself seriously again – feeling activated, invigorated – I experience my whole life as my private conversation with time, with death, with destiny and mystery and meaning. And I see you, brother – alone in your own life conversation – struggling in your own wombs and tombs, as I do in mine – sometimes surrendering through the pain with grace, sometimes seeking relief – like me. I see you and I see myself, and into the space between us, comes deep, fraternal love.

Why is this adventure of honesty specifically a way for twenty-first century man? Because in aloneness-in-the-unknown we meet freedom, and in freedom there is power – the true power of which macho power was a ridiculous reproduction. And thus the (thankfully) feminist-induced impasse of twentieth-century man reopens. We find a way through to being powerful men without reverting to patriarchal oppressiveness. We open a necessary new chapter on men and power.

And another reason: because in aloneness-in-the-unknown we meet freedom, and in freedom we are also naked and exposed and vulnerable. Thus we come to feel, directly, how our vulnerability is not the opposite of our power, but its texture. Not unmanly weakness, but the very beauty of our power. The proof of our power. And therefore, once again, the feminist-induced impasse of twentieth-century man reopens. We find a way through to becoming vulnerable, receptive, loving men without sacrificing our power and becoming anti-patriarchal, always-gentle men. We open a necessary new chapter on men and love.

A Viral Proliferation Of Brotherhoods

My vision is of a viral proliferation of brotherhoods. Each brotherhood a brotherhood of men of honesty, of men who feel the most honest thing they can say is that they don't know who they are, or why they are alive, or what it even means to exist. If each brotherhood had a flag it would say 'we don't know'!

You might say we'd be following 'the path' of not-knowing, except that it wouldn't be a path because to have a path means to have a destination, and to have a destination means to know the meaning of life, which would not be our claim. Our interest would be in living in not-knowing, in the unknown, in the great mystery.

In my vision, some brotherhoods might be more focussed on self-education, some more on a specific purpose, some on both. Again and again I have seen purpose bond and energise groups of men. I have seen men thrive on it. I have seen shared purpose elicit determination, incredible generosity, happiness and self-worth. We need it, and – in these times of disintegrating ice caps, islands of plastic, freak weather, accelerated species extinction, devouring consumerism, manipulated genocides and politicians sold to politics – we are needed.

By purpose I mean 'creative action charged by meaning'. So, in this sense, brotherhoods united in purpose would join, or create, a project or endeavour that had meaning for them. The specific creative action of each brotherhood would depend upon its interests and pool of knowledge. And the sense of meaningful unity would come not only from the worthiness of its 'cause' but from pursuing a course of action together in an atmosphere of closeness, respect and dignity.

Living in not-knowing is not an intellectual exercise. It takes courage to face life full-on – to stand alone, to stand with everyone, to let not-knowing open you to your complete and utter freedom, to be your own one-and-only authority, to stand below no man, to wield the gentlest of power, to laugh and dance and play like a child in a magic garden, to love yourself unconditionally and, therefore, to love everyone: every creature, every tree, fish, insect and blade of grass. It is not easy, and it is not a common commitment to share, but travelling together in this way invigorates us. It is the kiss of life for the withered self-worth of modern man.

Some brotherhoods meeting for structured self-education, others to just hang out, others to plan or implement creative action – meanwhile all supporting each other in living in not-knowing – all of this, I am proposing, could return us to our collective dignity: the dignity of traveling alone, together, and for the benefit of all.

I don't have the slightest intention of trying to structure this proliferation. In my vision it is centreless and leaderless. I imagine it as a spontaneous, co-creative arising, sustained by individual commitment and initiative.

I am constantly astonished by our creativity, even if it is so often prostituted to ego (I know that's a bit harsh, but hey), so I literally mean it when I say I cannot imagine the creative process that a viral proliferation of this nature would instigate. I cannot imagine what would happen on this planet if as men we united our creativity in service of freedom, power and love in service of the Earth

About this Book

This book visits and revisits its central theme of 'staying in our own experience', or 'living in the unknown', looking at it from various angles and revealing (I hope) that it is not some random, flimsy, new age proposition, but that it stands on solid, intelligent, philosophical and sociological ground.

In a collage of prose and prose-poetry – sometimes more rationally, sometimes more emotionally, sometimes more existentially – I will be looking at its epistemological, theological, philosophical and psychological foundations, as well as its implications for gender theory, cultural evolution and politics.

I am not an academic, and nor do you need to be one to come on this grand tour with me. My intention is to impart confidence, to inspire, and to show that 'staying in our own experience' is not just one among many worthy candidates as a focus for a new men's movement, but that it is the natural, emergent, kickass choice for an ecovolutionary metafocus!

In the later sections of this book I turn my attention to gender, sexuality and relationships, and to how living in not-knowing could pave a way through today's post-monogamous landscape.

We cannot live our whole lives alone. In the film *Castaway* I found it fascinating just how heart wrenchingly real Tom Hank's love for Wilson (the volleyball) was – how primal the need to love and be loved.

At the same time, living in not-knowing takes us to our aloneness. We realise that all we have is our own experience, ever. And that we are alone experiencing our experience. Nobody else is experiencing it with us – not as we are experiencing it.

Another word for alone is unique. I am alone. I am unique. I know this would be corroborated by fingerprints and so on, but I mean it in a more experiential sense, as a felt-sense of one's own uniqueness – a sense that somehow resonates with one's aloneness.

In sociological terms we could say that once aware of ourselves as unique individuals, we become aware that we ourselves are the basic building blocks of society. And in the freedom of our not-knowing, each in his unique authority – having reclaimed our right to sexual (as well as emotional, intellectual, etc.) self-expression – we realise we are responsible for who we live with and how we choose to live together. There is no absolute norm. We realise it's up to us who we want to be our Wilsons! :) In this way, living in not-knowing also leads to the reshaping of society.

Perhaps the most fundamental way in which living in not-knowing leads to social reformation is that it unfolds as a particular way of relating. One way of putting it would be that it's about being interested in one's own experience of being with another, rather than being dazzled by the other, or the shared situation. This leads, in its fullness, to both people remaining a hundred per cent interested in themselves, while at the same time not resisting in any way the impact of the other. It is, of course, a delight to meet all sorts of people in this way! This way of relating, that I call 'honest relating', takes us beyond the couples culture, beyond the currently fragmenting monogamous ideal, into the shared search for new social structures.

In the end notes on Self-Education I summarise the basic 'maps' that I use to navigate experience – to navigate the unknown. Two of the main maps I find helpful are The Four Modes of Experience and The Contraction/Expansion Axis. The Four Modes of Experience map is a division of our experiencing into four modes – the existential, the rational, the emotional, and the physical. I don't think they are 'the' modes. They are not even a hypothesis (that reality 'has' four modes). They are just an aid to observation of our experience. In reality, I feel they (and perhaps endless other modes) are all constantly interweaving. But I feel that dividing experience up into these four modes is extremely helpful for tracking our experience and for understanding how we experience, and how we don't.

On top of this map of the four modes I then place a second aid – the idea of contraction and expansion. They combine to give us a more 3D map of our experiencing: not only do we fluctuate between, say, more rational and emotional modes of experience, but our thinking and feeling are also happening at different diameters of expansion: sometimes we feel held-in, resentful, closed, and sometimes we feel delight, we are open and available.

For example, in the physical mode the extremes of this would be a tight-muscled, stiff body in pulled-back, thin-eyed, mistrusting resistance to everyone and everything, while – at the other extreme – feeling one's body to be scrumptiously melted, like a milk-drunk baby upon its mother's bosom, with that mother being all of life.

In the same end note, I suggest various activities to develop strong staying-in-our-own-experience muscles, to open up the different modes (to become available to fuller experience), to become more centred in each mode (to not be so constricted by contraction), and to be able to relate to others honouring both our own experience and theirs.

I am not attached to any of these maps or suggestions – as if they were chiselled in holy stone. I invite you to use them as you wish, refine them, evolve them, or discard them, if need be.

Living It, Individually

For me, viral implies immediacy; even urgency. But, simultaneously, my vision is of a multi-generational educational endeavour; of us getting as far as we can, our sons going further, their sons... All of us educating ourselves in honesty, uniqueness, brotherhood, purpose... Another 'definition' of purpose would be: the expression of our uniqueness in service of life. By 'brotherhood' I mean the loving resonance that arises automatically between points of honesty. And by 'honesty' I mean existential honesty, honesty-to-self. I don't mean moral honesty – it would be presumptuous of me, to say the least – as well as rather unworldly – to suggest 'we all need to tell everyone everything'. No – I mean admitting to ourselves what we know and don't know, how we judge, what we sense, how we feel, what we intuit, and how we behave – whether or not the sum total of all this is or isn't the person we might wish to be.

Practically, this means each man opening to his moment-to-moment experience – each of us the experiencer of his experience, while remaining open to others, themselves the experiencers of their experience – with nobody on Earth either better or worse (uniques are incomparable), and, because our experience is all we have (ever have had, and perhaps ever will have) – staying in it!

This requires dedication. Perhaps you're already dedicated, perhaps you've been half-hearted, perhaps you're just beginning to turn towards yourself. Wherever each of us is, the self-management of our flow through the various modes of our experience is never-ending. Through the lens of honesty I admit, for example, that I have become obsessed with another's experience – a puppet, enlivened by their approvals and thrown to the floor by their judgements. I realise I have prioritised their experience of me over my experience of myself. I shift my focus back to looking out from my own eyes.

Slowly, slowly I come to live more and more consistently as the experiencer, and to meet in love, experiencer to experiencer, with my brothers and sisters. I am the brother of everyone. On nobody's side (not partisan). On everybody's side (a well-wisher of everyone). I give myself permission to experience it all – from the black and white, grey life promoted both by consumer obedience and religious obedience, to the wonder of the unknown. I let myself retreat, and I let myself advance. Sometimes I tend inwards, sometimes I come out and offer my talents and skills for the welfare of all.

Rather than squandering our lifetimes in efforts to control, impress or please others (who themselves are squandering their own lifetimes), and wasting our time serving implanted mass-cultural values (certain they're our own), let's co-create a global energy field to sustain us as men in being ourselves. Oscar Wilde quipped "be yourself, everyone else is already taken!" Indeed. But it is more complex than that.

Until we fall in honesty back to ourselves, we believe we are who our culture has told us we are – and that is a very limited and lopsided self-image! We are being ourselves, we say, as we ‘voluntarily’ slave away our years in conformity to, and in service of, consumerist and/or religious mindsets that are not only superficial and disassociated from the timeless magic of the moment, but which keep the human race locked in fear, division and self-destruction. Be ourselves, yes. But what does that mean?

Feminism blasted macho male identity. A century-or-so later, can we respond unexpectedly – not in honour of woman whom we have dishonoured, but in honour of ourselves? Can we meet woman as she re-gathers her self-worth with our own? Can we honour her not from apology, but from dignity?

And how shall we act, and how shall we speak, as we guide our sons, grandsons and great-grandsons in their quests to discover what it is to be a man?

The unity of such a proliferation of brotherhoods of men of gentle dignity could reform the social, commercial, political, religious and military institutions that, as we speak, grip our balls and keep us out of ourselves – hypnotised by porn and wages and football and messiahs... while shamelessly transforming this mystic planet into a factory backyard. Such a brotherhood could work within and without these institutions to shape a new, unprecedented, post-patriarchal, post-feminist world culture. That would take real balls.

It takes balls to really love.

We need a unifying vision. But it must be one of utter equality, and absolutely no bullshit.

2

BECOMING THE CHANGE



”value your experience.
what else do you have?”

THE EXPERIENCE OF EQUALITY

"Before you judge a man, walk a mile in his shoes. After that, who cares? He's a mile away and you've got his shoes!"

- Billy Connolly

I hope you enjoyed the quote! In this next piece I use phrases like 'equality is not a concept' and 'the experience of equality' to wobble you a bit – to invite you to re-evaluate the word, to ask, "Well, what is equality then?"

This is not a sentimental piece. It confronts you as the reader quite starkly: "you might have spoken about equality, you might say you want to live in equality, a society of equals, etc. – but are you capable of meeting another in equality? To do this you have to have found your aloneness – and to have found your aloneness, you have to have 'released everyone from you', from your 'manipulation' and 'entrapment' of them, and you have to have dropped into 'a greater safety'. So there's a challenge here, to us all – whether we feel moved to engage in social/political action or not.

There is a sprinkling of imagery contrasting nature ('this green and blue and brown planet') and modern, urban society ('an office block, off the ground, somewhere') because living in 'the experience of equality' is inseparable from a loving, embedded relationship with the Earth.

As I have said, by '(r)evolution' I mean 'radical evolution' – evolution with a revolutionary edge. I am not a great fan of overthrowing existentially and emotionally disassociated governments with existentially and emotionally disassociated governments. I believe, in general, in evolution. But I also want that 'r' in there. It's not just 'reform' we need.

Billy Connolly also said, "don't vote, it just encourages them!", which also amused me. I would vote for anyone capable of crying tears of joy – and apology – on finally realising that every other person's life is as important to that person as their own life is to them. That's equality. Well, the beginning of equality.

So with my brothers, my sisters, the very old, the very young – today, now – let me practice living in equality. Let me see where I struggle. And let me educate myself.

Otherwise what on Earth am I talking about when I say I stand for equality?

The Experience Of Equality

I.

Equality has been predicated
as a revolutionary concept.

But equality is not a concept,
it is an experience.
Equality as a social or political construct,
or even as a religious tenet,
is just a sketch of water.
What it is to drink, or bathe,
we can never know
from a sketch.

There is nothing more profound
on this green and blue and brown planet
than the experience of equality.

Prior to this,
I look down upon others
as the cast in the film of my life –
supporting characters, extras –
or I look down upon myself
as an extra in films starring others –
(or perhaps I live in a hazy mix
of belittling and aggrandising).

II.

The power of equality is only released
when two alonenesses meet.
To approach equality
I must first stand alone.

To stand alone I must let everyone go.
I must release them.
I must release them from me.
I must let them be free to be

as they wish.

Then I can meet others
one-to-one.
Until then I don't even know
who is and who isn't
capable of equality...
Until I stand alone I cannot see
how alone you stand.

But I can only release others
from the parts I needed them to play for me
once the safety that entrapment gave me
has been replaced
by a greater safety.

The safety greater than the safety
provided by the manipulation of others
is the safety felt having found how I fit –
how my body fits
inside the ecosystem,
how my heart fits
inside the ancestral heart,
how my mind fits
inside the racial mind,
how my awareness fits
inside the silence.

(I might need education –
and I might need your help –
to let go
into such safety.)

From this greater safety comes
the capacity for aloneness.
From aloneness comes
the capacity for equality.
From equality comes love.

III.

(R)evolutionary, grassroots movements for equality:
yes, yes, yes!

But,
simultaneously –
let us continue
to educate ourselves
in the experience of equality.

Otherwise we are in an office block,
off the ground,
somewhere,
exchanging sketches
of (r)evolutions.

The (r)evolution is underway
every time I see your aloneness
from mine,
every time I see the vulnerability of your aloneness
from mine,
every time I see your bittersweet letting go
from mine,
every time we look upon each other
and cry
because we see
we can't help each other
(although we do)
and because
we need each other,
and we admire each other –
and because
we see each other's beauty.

THE DIGNITY OF MAN

"Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh, and the greatness which does not bow before children."

- Kahlil Gibran

What Is Dignity?

Above all, for me, a second wave men's movement would stand for the recovery of the dignity of man. By 'dignity' I do not mean chin up. I do not mean pride. For me it is not about greatness. That's why I often talk about a 'humble dignity', or a 'gentle dignity'.

I see your dignity when you are congruent with your experience, when you speak your experience honestly – whether with passion or pain or both – when you blame no one, nor use anyone, when you can feel the words of others yet give the last word to yourself; when, as Rudyard Kipling says, "you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too".

I remember once watching a group of teenaged boys leave the cinema after watching Lord of the Rings. They were walking slower than usual. Each young man seemed in-himself – as if humbled – as if he'd heard the half-forgotten note, as if remembering dignity.

And then, there they were again, out on the street, that note abruptly inaudible – as if switched off – comfortable in the familiar amnesia. The goal of life, once again, fun-fun-fun...

For them, for any of us, I see little cultural access to dignity. And without the cultural mirror of dignity, how do I see it in myself?

Painting in big strokes: modern, planet-ravaging, self-excusing, 'western' man (that's me! Is that you?) is in a mixed state of post-feminist shock, shame and confusion, persistent pre-feminist denial, hardness and arrogance, and desperate (though mostly unconscious) unrequited longing. He is not in-himself, not familiar with his own experience, not faithful to his own experience. He is out-of-himself, and therefore unstable and inauthentic.

It is then inevitable: we offer ourselves the cultural mirror of an undignified manhood – and that is the image the generations grow into.

The Recovery Of Dignity

A man recovers his dignity by recognising, feeling and living in freedom. By ‘freedom’ I do not mean ‘freedom-from’, as in, for example, ‘I am free-from a habit’ (relative freedom). I mean ‘a sense of belonging to everything’ – because in belonging to everything there is nothing outside of oneself from which to be free (absolute freedom).

This ‘sense of belonging’ is the ‘greater safety’ I refer to in ‘The Experience Of Equality’. Although I don’t name the four modes in that piece, I talk about our bodies belonging to the ecosystem (in the physical mode), our hearts belonging to the ancestral heart (in the emotional mode), our minds belonging to the racial mind (in the rational mode), and our awareness belonging to ‘the silence’ that underlies, and is therefore the ground of, all sound (in the existential mode).

I am not saying that we ‘have to be’ continually feeling this sense of freedom-in-belonging in order to find our dignity. That would not only be another conceptual perfectionism, another teleology – creating a split in the psyche between the good bits of me (the belonging bits) to be encouraged and the bad bits of me (the lonely, disconnected, don’t-feel-they-belong bits) to be overcome.

But the more we stay in our own experience, the more we come to know our way around it. Increasingly, we accept our experience. We accept ourselves – as we are, in our experience, in any specific moment – all of ourselves: from the more contracted sense of self to the more expanded sense of self. And we get to know the road blocks – the places where (in whichever mode) we balk at expansion. And this staying and staying, and staying, gives way to dignity.

For example: at one end of my contraction/expansion axis within the rational mode, there is a me who thinks this book is a completely original piece of work – I am its origin, nobody else. At the other end of the axis there is a me who believes that my very capacity to think arises from millions of years of my race’s evolution of that capacity, and that the content of my thought (whatever original touches it might have), is an eddy within the thought-currents of the generations, as well as within the living mind of the modern world. I am not always, in every moment, experiencing my belonging to millions of years, or even centuries, of human evolution of the rational – but, because I have opened up that mode, and because I can move about it with ease, the sense of freedom-in-belonging (to the racial mind) is known to me. It rests somewhere inside me – and whether I like it or not, it informs everything.

Dignity is, therefore, not an intellectual matter, nor even an emotional one. It is cultivated by staying in one's own experience, becoming familiar with one's experience (and what bumps one out of it), expanding the parameters of one's experience, having the courage to speak from one's experience, and acting in consequence with one's experience.

In staying in one's own experience one 'belongs to everything' (therefore freedom, therefore dignity), because (as far as I can see) we can't ever experience anything outside our experience. As soon as we experience something, it's within it. So for each of us, there is nothing outside of our experience. Therefore, our experience is everything, and in staying in our own experience we are in-everything – we are in the freedom of 'belonging to everything'. And dignity is the word I like to use to describe the expression of that. Dignity is what staying in our own experience feels like.

BROTHER!

“If you're going to try, go all the way. Otherwise, don't even start. This could mean losing girlfriends, wives, relatives and maybe even your mind.... If you're going to try, go all the way. There is no other feeling like that. You will be alone with the gods, and the nights will flame with fire. You will ride life straight to perfect laughter. It's the only good fight there is.”

— Charles Bukowski

In this piece I attempt to create a personal encounter between us – you and me. I invite you to breathe consciously, to call yourself into presentness to your own experience wherever you might be, while I, at my end, do the same – so that we can meet in full respect of each other's uniqueness, as brothers, in deep and dignified equality.

I then introduce a visualisation, an imagining: that we are surrounded by endless concentric circles of men of all races, skin-colours, ages, and so on – what we might call ‘the brotherhood of all men’. And I invite us to extend the experience of our one-to-one connection to include them all. This, again, is intended as experiential – as an opportunity to experience a sense of unified brotherhood not borne of a common flag, or the beliefs we were fed when we were babies but, on the contrary, a sense of the brotherhood that emerges when everything except the actuality of our unique personal experience is stripped away – the brotherhood that is there when all the posturing and pretending has been dropped, when we all just cut the crap and enter intrepid honesty. This middle section is about not being held back by our low self-worth, or the low opinion of other men that we might have internalised – and about opening to a sense of how it might feel to meet in respect as sovereign individuals, trusting enough to stand in our aloneness, and powerful enough to depend on each other.

Finally, I begin to intimate the immense political power latent in such a global brotherhood. And I really mean this – I sense a volcanic power, untapped, available... If we remain, each one of us, open to our unique experience, to not-knowing, and stay bonded in respect for each other's unique experience – then we will not be persuaded by propaganda that aims to divide us. We will stand in brotherhood, and we will not be turned against each other. We will not be divided! We will not fight our brothers (or sisters, or anyone). Whether we have been conditioned into a Muslim or Christian or Secular or Whatever culture, we will prioritise honesty and equality over our local mindsets, and rise up, united in dignity – each man president and king of himself, a nation of one – an equal under the sky, and in the eyes of the trees, to any

other man on Earth – united with every other man – "every man a brother" – and over and above any more superficial affiliations to local ideas or interests, thus having the potential of acting unimaginably impactfully in global brotherhood for the protection of the entire planet.

I.

The Call To Meet

Brother,
are you open
to your non-stop experiencing
right now?
I want to meet
your most dignified you –
the one who has chosen himself
over all others,
and thus chosen us all –
the devotee of honesty –
the one who does not hit back
or submit
to silence the pain,
or the possibility of the pain,
of being found out to be
just an actor
playing the part of you.

Don't worry, brother –
I am on your side.
I have been wandering the set at all hours –
incoherent, naked, drunk –
and nobody's bothered...
they assume I am part of the plot!

Don't worry, brother –
I too am a salesman of me.
I don't judge our salesmen –
I find them hilarious,
and tragic,
and beautiful...
and I am torn through
by their unconsciousness
of their hunger for love.

So let us set armchairs around the hearth,
and get hot food and drink and be kind
to everyone
within us –
and let us meet
as the ones we would want to be
at the hour of death:
as men who have loved themselves softly.

Brother –
I want to meet
your most dignified you.
To every other you I say –
stay away!
To the trauma boys,
to the numb ones,
to the ones who battle on,
to the ones adrift in grief,
to the ones who smile all day –
to all of them I say –
stay out of me!
Stay away!
Stay out of me with your sweet praise,
and stay out of me with your cynicism.
You put others up,
and put others down –
but not me,
not now.
Brother –
please,
no bullshit!
You can say no.
But if you want to meet me,
I only want to meet
you experiencing you.

I don't mean always –
I mean now.
I honour everyone at your hearth –
I honour the needy, the sick, the wicked, the mad –
as I honour them in me –
and when sometimes they need you

to become them –
I honour that too.
But now I am calling
from not-knowing to not-knowing,
from anywhere-land to anywhere-land,
uniqueness to uniqueness,
experience to experience,
terror to terror,
joy to joy...
Let each of us stay in-himself,
and let us meet as equals.

II.

The Meeting (1)

Please, take a moment...
Breath...
Feel the air around you,
the atmosphere.
Breath and feel until
you could be anywhere.
That's when we're here!

Exhale through your every muscle and bone...
Feel your feet, your balls, your belly, your frown...
Exhale through your skin...
Let emotion move through you –
let it have its way...
Be a tree in a breeze,
sensing every leaf...
Breathe and feel until
your full weight lands
here, in anywhere-land.

Then listen again –
and hear.
Let the air find the sky,
and the sky find the black space
that watches over the stars.
Hear the sound under sound...

Must oneness be the right of mystics?

When will it be science?
If there was nothing to see
would we have eyes?!
Which came first:
the seeing or the seen?!
If there was no music or thunder or silence
would we have ears?!
I don't need a cave and rags –
I have my living room and TV!

Brother –
did we create ourselves?
Did we create this place?
Are we not (you and I),
are we not (we, the human race) –
pretending we haven't noticed
our situation is just a trifle odd?!
So cavalier we are –
so nonchalant, so accomplished
in our pretending –
so convinced we are
who we say we are –
who it says we are
on our passports and credit cards
and certificates of birth –
that we create a two-way hypnosis
convincing us both
we know what's going on...

But brother –
your willingness to not-know
soothes my trembling –
your willingness to feel
emboldens me to risk
feeling where I am...
We are beginning to meet...

Breathing together,
breathing, breathing –
you and I –
not-knowing, not-knowing –
you and I –
both sucked down to Earth,

both yanked up to the stars –
you and I
finally find each other...
Finally –
we meet!!!
Thank fucking Christ!
(Apologies, believers.)
But thank fucking Hallelu!
What a fucking relief!
I cry, I cry, I cry...

III. The Meeting (2)

Here,
amidst the dancing and the horror,
here,
in this a-trifle-odd anywhere-land,
let us smile the smile
that refuses to be smiled,
the confessional smile,
the I-don't-know-if-this-is-the-end-or-the-beginning smile –
the smile that illumines
our ridiculousness –
the smile that makes us
brothers...

brothers to each other –
to all men –
to every sister –
to... well... no disrespect intended,
but I really don't care
how you define your gender –
I am still your brother.
I am still your brother.

And here,
here in this kaleidoscopic, holographic, symphonic everywhere,
simultaneously,
perhaps paradoxically,
I invite you

to appreciate this miniscule moment of yours –
to appreciate yourself –
to give thanks to the many people
you've had to be
to get here –
to be able to be naked,
to be able to smile,
to be able to apologise,
to be able to weep...

Meanwhile, here, I,
in this moment of mine,
am appreciating my own roadshow –
the towns I've toured,
the characters I've created,
the ovations, the walk outs,
the elation, the depression,
the powders, the pills, the smoke,
the sex, the love, the quest, the pain,
the boredom and the keeping going –
I see it all.
I see me –
as you see you...

We look upon each other –
these written words, somehow, mystically, uniting us –
without any pretence
to know why –
without any pretence
to know how –
each allowing the other to be
the mystery he is –
the curious creature he is –
the frightened and courageous,
innocent and corrupt,
undefeated creature he is...

You in awe of us both,
me in awe of us both –
how could we not intuit
similarity –
sameness, even...
yet, who knows...

Each a mystery to the other.
Each a mystery to himself.

And because respecting is easier
for the masculinised man
than being-respected –
than letting respect in –
let's not only respect each other,
but let's both let ourselves
be-looked-upon with respect...
Let's both be humbled
by receiving.

Yes, we meet via words –
not eye to eye –
and yes, these words were written in the past,
and yes, we could be continents apart –
but deeper than seeing,
and deeper than time and place,
I look at you, brother,
I look at you directly,
whoever you are...
(it makes no difference to me) –
and I respect you...

Whatever you're doing,
whatever you have done,
(maybe it was OK, maybe not –
I don't know.... big debate) –
whatever you're feeling,
whatever you have felt,
(even if you wished you weren't,
or never had) –
it makes no difference to me...
I see the mystery of you –
I see the mystery expressed as you,
I see the mystery expressing through you still,
and I trust
your determination and your stumbling,
your kindness and your impatience,
your loss, your regret, your aching, your hope...

I trust the universal unfolding.
We are it,
and it is us.
I trust it because I trust the spring,
because I trust trees,
and I trust the sunset.
I trust it because I trust the way fish swim,
and the way birds sing.
I trust it because I trust lust,
and I trust despair,
and I trust the humbling of the years.
For all of these reasonless reasons,
and a hundred thousand more –
I trust you.

And if,
through these words,
you receive my respect –
I imagine you might feel grateful –
because when I allow myself to stop
the pushing and the proving,
and be respected –
not for what I have done,
not for what I have made of myself,
but for what I am made of –
I hear myself say
"thank you,
thank you,
thank you –
sometimes I forget".

Here, now,
beyond here and now,
outbreath by outbreath,
in each other's mirror,
in seeing and being seen –
our face muscles relaxing,
our shoulders and chests relaxing,
our stomachs relaxing,
our cocks and balls relaxing –
let's let our bodies recall
how dignity feels.

How did we ever confuse it
with the effort of self-inflation?!
Dignity is effortless –
like a baby
letting itself
be loved.
Effortless,
yet immoveable –
monumental.

This is the gift of brothers:
my honesty and courage enflaming yours,
your honesty and courage enflaming mine –
enflaming us until
we get the guts to really look,
and to really let ourselves
be-looked-upon...
each man committed to himself –
neither reaching to save,
nor seeking salvation –
each self-responsible,
each in his own experience,
at rest in his aloneness,
strong and soft
in his belonging –
slowly, slowly, letting himself stretch –
like a cat in the sun –
inside the deliciousness
of intimacy with the unknown.

Honoured and honouring,
we open to a same-sex love
that is not homosexual
(though it might be).
We open to a love for each other
because in each other we see
the reflection of our own innocence and beauty
and lostness and degradation.
It is and isn't personal:
we see each other,
we see ourselves,
we see everyone –
especially,

we see all men.

This resonance, vibrating, somehow,
between us –
between aloneness and aloneness,
between belonging and belonging –
this is the gift of brothers –
the gift of self-remembering,
and gift of self-forgiveness.

And even within such presence and peace,
your mind repeats (yet again)
that you are not-good-enough,
unworthy-of-respect,
undeserving-of-love –
and mine the same –
and you judge me,
and I judge you –
and fear paces the hallway...

So let's look upon each other
with a gentle wisdom:
accepting each other's dignity
and also each other's pettiness –
each other's power,
and each other's fragility,
each other's freedom
and each other's neediness...

Let's let the body be energised,
the heart opened,
the mind inspired,
and awareness awoken
as we see and are seen –
potent, passionate,
frustrated, exhausted...
Let us see and be seen
in all of our (as we judge it) imperfection:
each of us not, therefore, something less,
but something living –
each of us
mystery itself –
expressing as forgetting,

expressing as remembering...

IV.

Meeting All Men

Anchored by our breathing,
here,
in the infinitely unlikeliness
of anywhere-land –
grateful for each other...

I now invite us to imagine ourselves surrounded
by uncountable concentric circles of men
of all shapes and colours and ages –
each one an unimaginable life,
a uniquely kicked and caressed body,
a uniquely constellated mind,
a unique story of hurt and longing –
each one condemned to endless freedom –
like you,
like me.

I invite us to imagine
what we're feeling –
you and I –
what we're in,
radiating through circle after circle –
passing through the heart of every man and boy...
As if we were broadcasting
the half-remembered note.

I invite us to imagine
these millions of men
having flashbacks to themselves
on surfboards, on dancefloors, on mountaintops,
making love, making plans, making pizza –
is it ever when expected? –
flashbacks to moments of belonging
within the family of all creatures, rocks, and stars.

I don't mean this as some black-and-white psychic magic
to capture men in a concept-net –

to get members for (yet another) club –
but for us to imagine how it might feel
to be surrounded by men remembering –
as we are.

I long to be surrounded by men who hate recycling
(as I do) –
not because I am against it:
I recycle, I do, I promise –
but I hate it because,
as I separate my plastic and paper and cans,
I feel like a child given a sweetie
to shut them up.

And I will not shut up!

I long to be surrounded by men
honest enough to admit the unknown,
courageous enough to enter it,
and simple enough to love everyone –
like dogs do!
I long to be surrounded by men
who understand you cannot give a psychopathic maniac a haircut
and proclaim him 'a new man'!
I long for brothers –
not in-arms, but in-honesty –
brothers ready to admit they love
the dappled shade, the ripple across the lake,
the lightening storm –
that they do:
they love, they love, they love!
Brothers who are not only willing,
but who choose,
to bet their lives on their love.

These are not times for half-arsed spirituality
or jostling liberal politics...
These are on-the-brink, mass-lunacy times
screaming at us:
"you know it all,
now stop farting around,
get together,

keep recycling :) –
and shape a new civilisation!

And why, why –
as Sweet Honey in the Rock sing –
why should we, “rest until it’s done”?

This is why I am inviting us –
you and I –
to visualise circle upon circle of men
ready to open to the possibility
that other men are not against them –
that other men are as soulful and deep and crazy as them –
that we are all brothers –
and that the rest of it
(all that we have been told and sold)
is only true because we’re making it so –
externalising the internalised dog eats dog
Darwinian and Capitalist competitive nightmare.
But dogs don’t eat dogs!
Dogs are noble.
And deeper than prophecy-fulfilment
on behalf of our masters –
so are we.

This is the message I propose we vibrate out:
brothers –
let’s outgrow our recommended social size –
let’s outgrow our pots!
Let’s plant ourselves out!
Let’s create a united, global brotherhood
that stands in protection
of every brother’s honesty and love –
that stands by him and him and him –
that stands by each brother as his sense of importance
is broken down,
year by year..
as he admits the self-promotion is exhausting –
and that deep inside
he is on his knees..
a brotherhood to stand by him
as he falls through
(think video game)

from the shaky ground of pretending
onto the solid ground of not-knowing –
and there meets other full-on, daring fools
(like you and me) –
and unites with them in honest, loving action –
which will, yes, seem radical
in a culture of such accelerated, voracious, devouring vacuousness –
what the ancient Buddhists might have called
'an era of hungry ghosts'.

Let's declare a brotherhood
that has no belief-book and no rulebook,
that witnesses each brother as he admits:
"about The Truth
I know nothing!
I pretend.
But actually I don't know
why I am alive,
or what's going on!" –
Let's stand by him as his contracted-ego-identity-small mind
short circuits
and achieves its apotheosis...

Let's be with him as he falls
hopelessly,
into glory...
As Leonard Cohen says:
"and then we fall...
into the masterpiece".

Let's create a brotherhood that honours men
courageous enough to face reality,
and look themselves in the face,
and admit:
"I so wanted to be absolutely certain.
I so wanted to be absolutely right.
But I have a limited, fallible mind
and feelings, and senses, and awareness...
Actually –
I am not infallibly certain at all!"

Let's be there for each man
as humility takes him by the hand,

and he takes his place of power
at the table of brotherhood,
at the table of life.

HIS place.

As Mary Oliver says:

"there was a new voice
which you slowly recognised...
as your own".

Let's be there for him
as the tears roll down his cheeks
as he tastes the sweetness of receiving,
as well as giving,
and delights in the sound of many voices...

Let's create brotherhood that is a reception
for everyman

as he passes through the portal
of utter insignificance...

Let us accompany him and love him,
knowing his pain as our own,
his wrecked ego our own...

"I so wanted to be different,
I so wanted to be special"

Let's be there with him as he dares to look
into our eyes,
the eyes of his brothers,
and sees:

each one a unique wonder –

each a ray of the same sun...

as it dawns in him that

he is one of us –

that we are one.

Let's create brotherhood

to support each other to stop pretending,

to stop lying –

to travel together

through meaninglessness, insignificance and loneliness

into freedom, power and love.

Let this be our proposal:
that after a century of feminism,
and a century of immature and mature male reaction –
we create not reactive, but proactive brotherhood –
brotherhood not shaped in the mirror of woman,
but in man’s mirror to himself,
in man’s deepest calling to himself...
brotherhood not to negate
the sexual shame,
and shame-of-power,
and disempowerment,
and identity confusion,
we feel when we look at ourselves
in the feminist mirror –
nor to be paralysed by it –
but to open through it with grace,
with rigour,
with forgiveness –
and arrive at a new place where,
in our evolution –
as men we have not yet stood,
where we have not yet met –
not yet,
not in significant numbers,
and stayed and stayed and stayed...

Let’s support every man’s return to himself –
to a unity deeper than race or skin-colour identity-clubs,
or identity-clubs of belief –
(determined mainly, mindlessly, by place of birth) –
to a unity of gentle yet fierce honesties –
a place to truly, truly
wish each other well –
to truly, truly
receive the well-wishing of our brothers.
A meeting place without vested motive...
a place for each man to gradually accept
his own authority,
to gradually accept he never ever has, does, or will
feel anybody’s feelings but his own,
(however empathic he might be) –
to gradually accept he never ever has, does, or will
make anybody’s choices but his own,

(however much he may influence or be influenced) –
to gradually accept
his absolute freedom...
As Mary Oliver says:
"though the whole house
began to tremble".

Let's create a place to feel
the inevitability of our fear,
and as we limp and gallop and stumble home,
the inevitability of our addictions –
a place to let ourselves be looked-upon
with respectful compassion,
with unflinching admiration,
and hear the words:

"Brother,
as you fall into honesty,
know we are falling too –
and that whatever you wish for yourself –
we are wishing for you too.
And brother –
whoever you may need to become,
we are with you.
And wherever you may need to go,
our well-wishing goes there with you."

V. An Educated Uprising

Brother –
I have no idea what might happen
if millions of men of honesty united.
I have no idea.
In my vision such a unity would be
a (r)evolutionary (radical evolutionary) power on Earth,
for the Earth.
But I don't know.

Whenever we pass the halfway mark
up towards the expansion end of the contraction/expansion axis,
(in whichever mode of experience),

we open into unity:
a grateful unity with the planet
keeping us alive as we speak (physical mode),
a compassionate unity with the humanity of our ancestors,
our worldwide contemporaries,
and the generations to come (emotional mode),
an engaged unity with the questing, evolving,
dissecting, categorising racial mind (rational mode) –
and a trusting unity with existence itself (existential mode).
So I believe
we are already united –
just thoroughly drunk
on distress, distraction, and denial...

I believe we don't so much need to unite,
as expand a little sometimes
out of the familiar anxiety and compensations and collusions
of our separatism
(life up towards the contracted end of the axis).
Then our unity will
just be there.

I believe we only need ease up on buying –
and ourselves selling –
our 'no' to ourselves and each other...
the dismissive myth
of the untrustworthy male,
(and thus the untrustworthy brother)
the egotistical male...
the superficial male...
and (of late) the incompetent male –
which, although a comforting mythology
for our smallness,
and confirming
for our shrunken self-worth,
perpetuates isolation, division and opposition.

At home in our experience
we contract, we expand –
we forget and we remember our dignity...
Remembering mine, I remember yours.
Remembering yours, you remember mine.
We remember

we were always already united.

To arise together in our dignity –
to become a united power on Earth –
we must, therefore, self-educate in experiencing.
Therefore: ‘an educated uprising’.
Why should modern, now-everywhere, ‘western’ education
have the last word?
There have been other educations on Earth.
Why should there not be another?

I do see
a possibility...
of an educated, dignified, unified male presence in the world –
of men living deeper than the trance of trivia,
deeper than the emptiness and stuffing,
not blinded by the pretty packaging
designed to hide
how we are tearing each other apart,
and tearing the planet apart...
a male force tough to manipulate
for those brothers and sisters stuck
(up the contracted end of the axis)
in the frenetic, neurotic insecurities
inherent in the state of isolation...
Above all,
a brotherhood tough to manipulate
because each brother is less lodged
in his own manipulating.

Such brothers might say
“I have been manipulable
because I have been a manipulator.
But as I come to rest in my own experience
I find myself,
and I find you.
I find myself in you.
And you find yourself in me.
Why would we fight?
When I kick your leg
it is my own leg I am kicking –
when you hit me back
it is yourself you are hitting”.

I do see the possibility of brotherhood arising –
each man returning to his own experience
(therefore ‘one for one’) –
and every man a brother
to every other man
(therefore ‘all for all’)...
brotherhood bonded across all borders –
land borders,
and mind borders –
an educated uprising –
not another ideological signing-away
of our individual autonomy and authority,
but a gradual rising to their feet
of brother after brother...
as each man takes his own, honest, empowered stand.

In moments of deep seeing
of the dignity of man
I see people caught in contraction for years
with no respite –
and therefore feeling isolated,
and therefore feeling afraid –
propagandizing hatred,
demonizing ‘them’,
deifying ‘us’ –
setting me up for battle...
for battle against my brother,
(but, but, but....
I am me, but I am also he),
against my brother’s family
(but, but, but....
all families are part of the one human family),
against the generous house that shelters him,
as mine shelters me,
against the generous garden that feeds him,
as mine feeds me –
and I imagine our arising –
brotherhood rising –
in a resounding "no!" –
a resounding "no!" from the demonised,
and a resounding "no!" from the deified –
our unity stronger than the warmongering propaganda –

a resounding "no! We will not be divided!"

I remember the marches:
"united we stand, divided we fall".
Yes,
but,
brother –
"equality is not a concept" –
and nor is unity.

Until you have loved your experience,
and seen yourself in your brother's eyes –
how can you stand for his life,
and his loves,
as you would stand for your own?

Why do I believe unity is possible?
Because what is applicable individually
is applicable collectively –
it is only a question of scale....

I contract in fear.
But that's not all of me.
In fact,
(identified as I might be at that moment) –
the majority of me is not afraid.
So I don't act-out.

Similarly,
collectively,
because all minds are interconnected
in the species mind,
and all hearts interwoven
in the epic tale
of innocence and identity,
romance and sickness,
passion and grief and death
known to every gender,
to every skin,
to every generation
since the beginningless beginning of time –
when one man, or government, or nation contracts
we do not all contract –

the majority of us do not contract...
So we-the-world,
if adequately educated,
can say,
"no! we don't care how much authority you award yourself,
we don't care what is written where,
we don't care how red-alert you make it sound –
we are one,
and we will not be divided!
All for one,
and one for all!
As brothers we stand –
today, tomorrow, always....
We will not be divided!"

Who would have thought it?!
My living-meditation is received
as radical activism,
my activism has become
my most invigorated meditation!
Staying in my own experience
(self-educating),
I enter not-knowing,
I enter the great mystery.
I am alone,
yet one with us all –
with it all.
I feel any violence against any one of us
as a violence against us all.
I stand in defence of the unity of life.
What started off as my meditation practice
has led to me laying my life down
in loving protection of the Earth!
And all I'd wanted was a little peace of mind!

Feminist courage has stunned us,
and is waking us
from our macho arrogance
and cut-offness.
We have been stumbling, half-awake, for a century
(evolution has its pace) –
but no man can stand in-his-power
while defined by other,

however well-intentioned that feminist other...

Man's freedom and power,
and his true loving,
will only ever be discovered
in self-definition –
in man being with man
(in deep aloneness) –
in knowledge of one's underwater world,
and in learning to swim there.

Here, I believe, and only here –
in each man's standing alone
before his god,
or before his own godless truth –
alone in the rainfall of time
and the imminence of death –
silenced by the night stars –
reduced to infinity by infinite space –
here, and only here, will man find manhood –
will man find man.

Which is why,
as we stumble out of our own macho rubble,
and find our feet,
our own feet –
I sound this call to brotherhood –
seeking a resonance of alonenesses,
a resonance of commitments to self,
a call, I imagine, we will need to repeat and repeat
over the coming century,
(evolution has its pace) –
a call to a kind yet ruthless honesty,
to a freedom beyond
the arrogance of ideas,
to a power
greater than pretence to importance,
to a love
deeper than difference –
deeper than division.

May it be repeated and repeated –
so that each man can decide,

within himself, for himself ,
despite whatever any other man,
or anyone else on planet Earth,
might think, feel, or say...
whether the call to unity calls him,
whether it pulls at the core of him,
whether it jolts his remembering
and ignites the challenge in him
to take his unique life into his own hands,
to stand alone
alongside his brothers...
to be his own authority...
to trust enough
to give all...
and thus –
receive all.

BELONGING

"We seldom realise, for example, that our most private thoughts and emotions are not actually our own. For we think in terms of languages and images which we did not invent, but which were given to us by our society."

- Alan Watts

In the first part of this piece I describe the experience of belonging relative to our position on the contraction/expansion axis – from contracted isolation, fear, self-defence and self-harm to expanded belonging, oneness, and peace ‘n’ love ‘made real’.

We all contract and we all expand. We have to be very careful to not condemn contraction, otherwise we are condemning parts of ourselves – which will then become shadow and provoke havoc. Rather, by accepting them as ‘textures of the one’, and by getting to know the more expanded end of the axis, we enlarge our palette and find choice.

In the second part, I look out upon reality as I move towards the expanded end of the axis. Here I have more choice, and I choose to continue letting go. There is a much looser sense of self. Towards the contracted end I am convinced my thoughts, emotions, sensations and perceptions are mine – now I am not so sure!

Looking out from each mode I try to articulate the more expanded vista. Thought, for example, is experienced as bubbling up inside oneself as if out of some primal, collective thought-ocean – and one’s sense of ownership ("hey, that was my idea!") dissolves. One belongs. One is an-expression-of. Hopefully, with some bloody good ideas!

Then when, inevitably, I contract again, my excruciating isolation is less convincing too.

Belonging

I.

At my most contracted

I do not belong.

At the egocentric end of the axis.

I only care for me.
Reality is upon me
from all sides.
My care for you is a tactic to relax
my state of threatened isolation.
Or I might merge with you –
then we are both me,
and I seem to care for you –
but that's not care,
it's use.

Somewhere in the middle
I am ethnocentric, tribe-centric –
I care for my people –
not for yours.
But I belong.
I belong to mine.
I appreciate mine
while they appreciate me.
I follow our tribe rules
and I appreciate them
while they do, too.
Reality threatens us –
not just me...
We are afraid together.

Up towards the expanded end
(before belonging so totally that
there is no difference between
that which belongs
and what it belongs to) –
I am worldcentric, existence-centric –
my heart not only for my people,
but for your people too –
for all peoples,
for all creatures,
for the pulsing Earth –
and for the pulse itself.

The pulse in me
is in you –
in every bush and fish,
and in every atom –

everything is alive.
Everything is in resonance.
One pulse.
And yes, even if it is a cliché:
one love.

And because we are one –
although my contracted me might be
in terror –
I am in trust.
There is nothing outside of oneness
to threaten it.
Finally –
the hippies would be so pleased :) –
the marijuana dream of peace ‘n ‘ love
made real.

Meanwhile, at the contracted end
we are under siege
from that which we believe we are not.
We self harm:
better the pain we cause,
than the pain we are caused.

As a race we are cutting ourselves.
Every city is a razor blade –
every step along every street without grass
cuts us –
every chemical apple,
every put-down of every child,
every arrogant motorway,
every heartless fuck
helps us survive
the agony
of not belonging.

It's inevitable.
It's perfect.
Yes, and –
it is also perfect to not resist,
but suffer,
the pain of isolation,
and thus tip the axis and slide

towards oneness –
to know both ends –
to know choice –
to not be stuck
in tense desperation.

According to where I am on the axis:
different diameters of belonging.
Not better, not worse.
All textures of the one.

But since we tend to hang out
towards the contracted end –
let's contemplate reality
from up the expanded end...

II.

I can hardly say my body belongs to me –
I don't even know how it works.
And even if I did,
as we speak,
my liver and lungs are active,
my blood and brain are active ,
independent of my will.

When it is hungry,
I feed it.
When it is sick,
I look after it.
I am not its master –
it is mine.

I do not decide
when it dies.

I can hardly say my emotions belong to me –
they are an ocean I sail in –
with no memory
of having chosen to set sail.
Nor do I remember choosing this character
who it seems I am –
with this particular personality.
I can psychotherapise myself,

and perhaps become a skilful sailor –
but the ocean does not belong to me.

I am of it.
Its waves are my emotions.
I belong to it.

I can hardly say my mind belongs to me –
its ideas come and go,
it replays its insights and preoccupations incessantly –
like a machine you can't turn off.
If I was in charge,
surely I'd have the 'off' switch!

Shaped by the conceptual contours
of family, culture, era –
limited by their preconceptions,
defined by their concerns,
it thinks thoughts
I then think are mine.
I pride myself on my bright ideas,
I am ashamed of my dark thoughts –
as if they were mine.

My thinking is alive.
It lives in the thought-field of my time and place.
It is not limited to me...
although in me
it takes my shape,
like water takes the shape
of a bowl or jug.

I can bring my attention to a subject,
but I can't think –
I don't know how thinking works.
My mind –
even as we speak –
is in the great thought-field of this global era –
the home of these words,
coming through me.
I am of that field.
I belong to it.

Nor, in the existential mode, can I say
I belong to myself .
I have no sense of having chosen Earth or birth.
I have no sense of having created myself.
I have no sense of having chosen to exist.
I just find myself existing
within
I don't know what.

I just find myself existing
in a world of mountains, rivers and skies –
none of which I control –
all of which control me
(setting the parameters of my physical experience).

I just find myself existing
in a world of kindness and cruelty –
none of which I control,
all of which control me
(defining the emotional field I live and die in).

I just find myself existing
in a world of concepts –
in a worldwide mind web
without servers or satellites or devices,
as silent as gravity,
prior even to words.
I cannot control it,
but it controls me
(determining both the manner and content of my thought).

I just find myself existing –
in a now unrelated to time,
in a here unrelated to place –
in infinite mystery, beauty, pain, wonder, anguish and joy...
infinite possibility,
infinite creativity...

I did not birth infinity,
though it seems I am borne of it.
Nor do I control infinity.
But I do not feel controlled.
Rather, I feel

blessed
to be existing...
blessed with this opportunity...

You are no longer other –
a possible threat,
a possible ally.
I can ease up
my full-on, full-time defending and seducing.

You, like me,
are a composite expression
of the (at least) four modes –
a composition they're singing.
You are their song.
And I am another.
As is everyone.
Thus: a symphony
of inconceivable complexity,
beauty, pain, dying and becoming.

We stand like trees –
sprung from,
and drinking through,
the same underground network of roots.

Each of us is a climate.
Their seasons create
the climates we are.

CENTRE

*“When we get out of the glass bottles of our ego,
and when we escape like squirrels turning in the
cages of our personality
and get into the forests again,
we shall shiver with cold and fright
but things will happen to us
so that we don't know ourselves.*

*Cool, unlying life will rush in,
and passion will make our bodies taut with power,
we shall stamp our feet with new power
and old things will fall down,
we shall laugh, and institutions will curl up like
burnt paper.”*

- D. H. Lawrence

The concept of an ‘inner centre’ – of a place (a ‘locus of identification’), from which to negotiate one’s experience, and particularly from which to manage the more contracted conditioning in the psyche/personality – is not only supportive, it is crucial.

The cultivation of centre is absolutely critical if we want to be able to stay in our own experience – and as well as the various suggestions scattered throughout this book, in the end note on Self-Education I give a list of activities to support this cultivation.

At the same time, we need to be aware that the cultivation of centre is not an end in itself. It is not the goal of life. There may be an end, there may not, but we need centre in order to find out – for ourselves.

I conceive centre as the midpoint on the contraction/expansion axis – as the point of self-awareness we need if we are to manage our contractions (looking one way), and to let go into expansion beyond our habitual individualism (looking the other). From centre we can look upon our conditioning with compassion, and also open into the possibility of a belonging beyond our existence as individuals – that is to say, into the ‘dissolution of self’ of which so many of history’s most well-known teachers of self-knowledge have spoken.

Centre needs to be at the steering wheel. If not, ‘the children’ (our contractions) will drive the car of our life. And they are too young to drive! They are, to say the least,

dangerous drivers – and the state of our civilisation is testimony to this: it is a civilisation driven by people identified with their contractions.

Gradually though, as we learn to drive our own psyches and lives from centre, we start to notice that the car is driving itself! Whereas (on the contracted side of centre), we were lurching right and left, according to which child was at the wheel, we find we have the stability to observe in peace. We notice that our body controls us (not us it) – obliging us to eat, defecate, sleep – and manages all of its functions, from the cardiovascular, lymphatic, muscular and nervous systems, to the reproductive, respiratory and skeletal systems, not only of its own accord, but regardless of our degree of understanding of its processes.

As centre becomes increasingly stable we notice that the thoughts and emotions we experience are also not under our control. We have absorbed the thinking and feeling of our era (or a current within it), which lives within us in a unique cocktail stirred by our personal nature-nurture mix. We do not choose what we think. We do not choose what we feel. Nor, in the existential mode, do we control the fact that we exist, or experience ourselves as existing. We don't know where we came from – if, indeed, we came from anywhere. We don't even know if killing ourselves would bring an end to our existing. The car looks more and more like it's going along without our interference!

This sense of solid centre, of having folded oneself into oneself, becomes the runway for quite the opposite of solidity. As we look towards the expansion end of the axis we begin to face our death more and more head-on. Our sense of the flow of the generations becomes more acute. The brevity of our stay on Earth becomes blatant. Our inseparability from the flow of life and death of all creatures humbles us. Any sense of proprietorship over anything in this world comes to seem ridiculous. We experience appreciation, gratitude and love for everything. And in this state of trust we can let life do with us what it will (as it is already doing!). This opens us to new dimensions of experience of oneness...

The cultivation of centre is not, therefore, our goal, but rather our vantage point, our centre of operations, our home ground – the place from which we orchestrate our homecoming to ourselves as unique individuals, and also our letting go of our individuality. Centre is the director. He steers the orchestra through the intricacies of the sheet music, and as he becomes more and more confident and adept, he also provides the opportunity for it to let go into the music of the spheres.

Although there is much toing and froing – getting lost in anger, self-pity, etc., then re-finding centre – and although there are no straight lines in nature (the process is not linear) – if we were to map all of this developmentally, it might look something like this:

- First there's contraction (not experiencing, drowning)
- After contraction comes centre (a fixed point from which to experience)
- After centre comes letting go (the surrender of the experiencer)

Personally, I do not know if there is an end-point to this letting go. But that is not the subject of this book.

The Concept of Centre

A definition: centre it is the midpoint on the contraction/expansion axis, as well as the point of intersection of all modes of experiencing.

It is therefore (in all the modes), a point of balanced perception – neither too contracted in conditioned reactivity, spraying blame, "What do you mean you're not grateful... after all I have done for you!" (for example), nor too expanded in union with the cosmos, "Don't worry about it, houses burn down all the time – everything is temporary anyway!"

From the vantage point of centre we can observe and bring compassion to our contractions, without disengaging from our humanity – from our human needs and limitations, and from our self-respect.

Without centre we are either lost in mystic (or psychotic) fusion with everything, or (what is more likely the case) in the grip of our ego/wounded/conditioned pain – and inflicting it upon one and all.

By ego I simply mean 'me, me, me', by wounding I mean our limping self-worth and our hypersensitivity to engulfment and abandonment – our lame self-love – and by conditioning I mean the inherited and imposed (emotional as well as rational) concepts that we have internalised. When I lash out at you because (whether you have or not) I feel aggressed by you – is that ego? Yes. Is it wounding? That too. Is it conditioning? Also.

Although we could tease these terms apart, they're all ways of describing the more contracted end of the axis – where most of the human race spends most of its days, and most of its centuries. With the cultivation of centre we begin to slide up the axis, find some distance from the intensity of the insult we have suffered, the disrespect we have endured, the unkindness we refuse to tolerate any longer, the outrage of the injustice perpetrated upon us, and so on.

Until there is centre we reside in contraction. We live up the contracted end of the axis. It is our world. We live with the hardened tendons, the woven frown, the shard in the heart, the grating vertebrae (the endless somatisation), the feeling small, lonely,

worthless and unlovable (however much we might not show it, or show the opposite) – aching to run, to give up, to attack – and running, and giving up, and attacking.

Up the contracted end of the axis there is no awareness. Any talk of presentness or awareness, of beauty and interconnection, is just that – talk. And there is no space around our thoughts or emotions – they fill us, they take over our world, we are possessed by them – and we become their puppets. As we climb the axis towards centre we can look back upon ourselves, observe ourselves, understand why we behave the way we do and eventually bring compassion to ourselves.

As centre becomes more and more established, we come to love our contracted selves more and more unconditionally. And this love loosens their grip on us. We become able to live, more and more, from a centred place of self-respect and self-compassion – which then spills over into every relationship, and everything we relate to.

The cultivation of centre, therefore, is unequivocally necessary. If we don't want to spend our whole lives being tossed about by our childhood traumas, if we don't want relationships and communities gashed by clashing egos, and if we don't want a civilisation where our individual contractedness is writ large in inequality, war, injustice and eco-destruction – then each one of us must cultivate centre.

We don't need to give centre ontological status. We don't need to equate centre with soul or self, or proclaim that it is 'the true me'. Suffice to use it as a conceptual tool that facilitates disidentification from contraction – enabling us to free ourselves from the endless, repetitive re-enactment of the contracted patternings which, quite frankly, make a mess of our personal lives, ransack civilisation and ravage the Earth.

Centre is the place of the adult, the one who can care for his contracted 'children' – the father of the psyche, the one who can bring warmth to the little ones in us who live out in the cold, and who can give gentle courage to the ones who are afraid to come forward. Centre is the place of balance, love and respect that can honour the intention, but not the expression ("My dear angry one, I love your power, but that is not how to use it!"), the one who can hold back from retaliation to others' acting-out (contracted child: "Insult him back! Don't tolerate such humiliation! Crush him before he crushes you!"; centre-father: "Darling little one, of course you're angry, you have every right to be angry – we have been publicly demeaned. But if we hit back we'll lose our self-respect.")

Cultivation of centre is the path to personal maturity, the only hope for intimacy beyond ego in relationships, and the prerequisite for establishing an even moderately sane human presence on this Earth.

I Am Here Now

I.

What are you?

Consciousness?

What's that?

Spirit?

What's that?

The Life Force?

What's that?

Energy?

What's that?

A cell in the evolving body of humanity?

An echo in the eternal thought of God?

A note in 'The One Song –

in the Uni-verse?

A beloved Child of the Goddess?

Love?

What's that?

What's that?

What's that?

But you are.

You do exist.

Don't you?

And whatever you are –

you are here

(wherever this is).

You are here –

like it or not.

You are here

by existence's decree.

Recognizing this

you can choose

to be here –

whether you like it or not.

You can choose

to inhabit your devoted body,

and reckon with your cellular inheritance –
to be touched by your faithful emotions,
and by those who would betray you –
to collaborate with your speedy, witty mind,
and keep an eye on its trickery...

You can choose
to love your incarnation,
the one person of many faces
you are –
your fluctuating experience –
your self-defining self.
You can choose to live
in kindness to yourself,
and, therefore,
in kindness...

But there is no choice
until there is centre.
Only centre can make
this dignified choice.

II.
From centre
I can look both ways –
I can look towards my undoing
and my death
with delight.
I can look towards my need to be
more than I am –
and my need for others
to be less –
with a forgiving smile.

One way
my eyes are big,
my skin is awake –
I am touched by a well wishing
in the sunlight,
the soft caress of moonlight...
I am happy
that what is not mine
never will be,
and that what was given

will be taken...

And as I care for my children,
I feel cared for.
I father,
and I feel mysteriously fathered.
I listen to my littleness,
and I listen to the sky.
I can hear both ways.
My little ones feels heard.
So do I.

Looking the other way,
I see my little ones
tied up in contractions
just under the skin,
just under the mask,
itching in panic –
a panic so familiar
without it
they would not be at peace...

But in centre I belong,
and my children belong...
Now spinning in mind,
now turbulent with unpleasant emotion –
now carried off
like a leaf without will
in a storm without pause...
I see them
constantly manoeuvring
the self-advancing outcome,
in a world governed by others,
belonging to others –
until they look up
and see –
I am here now,
and they are at home
in me –
who am at home
in the untimable moment,
not-knowing.

CENTRE AS PERFECTION

"Nothing in the world is weaker than water, but it has no better in overcoming the hard."

- Alan Watts

I was surprised, the other day, to hear a man I consider extremely conventional tell me he thought he'd responded to a certain situation 'in a pretty centred way'. I hadn't realised just how integrated the concept of 'centre' was in mainstream culture. He was pleased with himself. He seemed confident in his use of the term, and from his demeanour it was clear he considered that 'to be centred', or 'to act in a centred way' was a good thing.

What are we to make of this? What is 'centre'? Is it something desirable – something we should aim for? Is it a useful concept? Is it a concept – or is it more than that? Does it support us in staying in our own experience? In short: what is it, and is it helpful?

In some subcultures in which I have mingled, 'centre' is a common term – one often hears comments like, "I am so sorry, I'm a bit off-centre today", and (like the man I met the other day), "He was really aggressive, but I responded in a firm, clear, centred way". On scrutinizing the use of the term I have come to believe that it is a hangover from, and echo of, the dualistic days of spirit versus matter (in which spirit was good, and matter – if not bad, at least to be transcended).

'Centre' is used synonymously with other concepts like 'soul', 'self', 'essence', and so on. When I am 'in my centre' I am considered to be 'in my true self', and when I am not, I am not. And just as spirit stood in opposition to, and usually in rejection of, matter – spirit now updated as 'centre' stands in opposition/rejection to matter, updated as 'ego'/'conditioning'/'wounding', and so on.

The upshot of this is that, just as the aim of premodern spirituality/religiosity was to liberate oneself from the 'vale of tears' of the material world, the illusion of Maya, and so on, in the modern restatement of spirituality/religiosity (as growth-work, self-development, realizing one's potential, etc.), the aim is to get a grip on one's 'wounding', not be controlled by it, and live in a more evolved, mature, balanced, connected, centred way. In summary: premodernity = matter bad/spirit good; (post)modernity = wounding and ego bad/centre good.

In this piece I am going to suggest that although without centre we crash about like drunken drivers, centre can become a fixed ideal – “the ideal of the centred individual” – and that then, rather than being the vehicle for our appreciation of the great mystery, it becomes another security corner, another Snoopy blanket, another concept to hide within.

In this piece, like in ‘Big Is Not Better’, where I bring our attention to how we preference expansion over contraction (same again: spirit/expansion/centre over matter/contraction/ego), I want to state my base line: that any concept that attempts to fix a point of perfection, an ideal way of being, a standard and a state towards which we should all strive, not only creates interference in the field of our experiencing (we can’t just experience, there’s a specific way we should be experiencing), but because it implies a rejection of other ways of being (“that’s not a very centred response, I think you might have some unresolved issues in relation to that”), it creates a split inside us. We try ‘to be centred’. We discard and disown the uncentred in us, become inauthentic, and lose touch with the mystery of our actual, immediate, unique experience.

In summary: we need to be on the lookout not to make of centre a conceptual identity posture that jangles our experiencing, creates striving, and splits the psyche.

If then – despite the fact that it has weaseled its way into psychology and psychotherapy, and the alternative world in general, and even now it seems, into mainstream culture – if the concept of centre is not the kind of radical revisioning of our approach to ourselves, each other and reality itself which we now seek (to underpin our radical revisioning of our personal and collective behaviour), but just a rehash of dualistic premodern spirituality – on what should we focus? If not centre, what?

I’d like to suggest a clear distinction between centre as perfection, and centre as a supportive concept. Centre is a way of driving, not the destination. There is nothing at centre. It is empty. It is a point on a line, on a conceptual axis. To try to ‘be centred’ leads to measuring ourselves against others, endless judgement, arrogance and fanaticism. Using centre as a tool, or vehicle, leads us to our humanity, humility, and the adventure of journeying through an ever-unexpected world.

In saying this I am addressing the contracted tendency we have to make an identity out of, well, just about anything – like in the piece ‘An Extra In The Films Of Others’ where I speak about the way in which even staying in our own experience can be hijacked by grandiosity.

In order to avoid this cul de sac, this revised sense of self-importance, I’d like to suggest cultivating an allowing – a self-acceptance of all parts of ourselves. This

facilitates flow. And by 'flow' I just mean possibility. For example: we find ourselves contracted, and rather than saying, "Oh, this is no good, I'm not very centred right now, I had better change", we interest ourselves in our contracted state. We don't judge it. We don't try to change it. We don't try to get out of it. This self-acceptance seems to let the contraction find its way – just as we all seem to work out our own answers if we can tell our stories to a kind and non-judgemental friend. Of course, we can't do this without centre. But being centred is not our aim. Our aim is to be present to the actuality of our experience. We are not fixed, we are in flow. I talk a little about how this state of flowing-centre feels in the piece 'Return, Feel, Get To Know, Flow, Reveal, Relate, Act'.

In the warmth of our self-acceptance the contractions morph – they find their next shape, and then their next. Thus the flow of possibility is re-established in the psyche – in our experiencing. We are no longer caught in the contraction – but not because we judged it as egoic and decided to be more centred, but because we loved it, and let it be, and it chose to let go of its own accord.

Self-acceptance – self-love – facilitates flow, possibility, the unexpected, the mystery. It allows us to move about our experience without preferencing any way in which it 'should be' experienced. There is no ideal way of experiencing. There is nothing to aspire to, no improved version of me to become. I can respond to, and interact with, my experience in an unprescribed, spontaneous way – sometimes more flowingly, sometimes getting stuck, and – although there is no goal – over the years of self-loving and in the absence of any regulatory concepts, I find myself becoming liquid-like, more able to access the bigs and the smalls of myself, the egoic and the altruistic, the nasty corners and the great compassions, without any need to be other than I am – and able to offer the same acceptance to others. Above all, because I am not trying to control my reality, I feel it more deeply – and because reality is astonishing, I find myself living in deeper and deeper astonishment!

Centre as Perfection

I.

To try to be centred implies that you know there's a right way to face life. I'm not so sure that this is a helpful position to take if what one is trying to do is be present to the mystery of one's experience.

If I'm interested in my experience then I want to let it impact me in whatever way it wants to. So I can't rehearse a posture with which to receive the impact. That won't allow the free flow of the impact.

I feel it is more helpful to practice loving self-acceptance – which is not passivity, as it includes acceptance of our passion and ambitions. Nor is it a monotone state of equanimity, because it includes acceptance of our irritations, intolerances and short tempers. My experience of myself in self-acceptance is that I am liquid-like – slipping in and out of thoughts, sensations and emotions like a child at a fairground.

Interestingly, Jane Bolte Taylor, the neuroscientist who suffered a stroke, when explaining what she calls her ‘stroke of insight’ (when she had the rational mode temporarily offline – literally completely non-functioning) declares, "I was like a dolphin!", and describes her energetic experience of herself as being that of a fluid.

II.

If one fully stretches out the assumptions concealed in statements like ‘one ought to be centred’, it’s easy to see they imply that one knows the true meaning of life. However, to accept that we are in the unknown, is to accept that there is no fixed point of anything. So the concept of centre, being the creation of a fixed point, in other words, of a safe spot, a point of security within the insecurity of not-knowing – a known within the unknown – is, to be blunt: artificial. And to be still more blunt: a lie.

If we are to follow the path of honesty then we have to shed the concept of a fixed and final centre as well. And I’m suggesting, since the mind does need a focus it seems, to use self-acceptance, or self-love, as a guiding principle – not because it is the way to be (and if we can be self-accepting enough then one day we’ll self-actualise, or get to the gates of nirvana), but because self-accepting means opening to what is, and what is is mystery.

III.

We could say that we are not only fluid creatures, but also creatures of earth and air – the lower chakras being more earthy, the middle chakras being more liquid, and the upper chakras being more of the air. I have wondered about this. And inspecting my state of fluidity I have asked myself, "Is it fluid, or could it equally be labelled earthy, or airy?" And I have visualised myself as earthy and airy.

At the moment, I feel fluid is more accurate, and more helpful. When I conceived of myself as ‘earthy’ I felt oddly heavy, and it didn’t facilitate easy movement through all three elements, and when I labelled my state ‘airy’ I felt ungrounded and flighty – and it also didn’t make connecting with all three elements easy.

For now I am calling the state of self-love a fluid state. In it I can let go, like steam, quite easily, and also have a loving relationship with the earth – as do the rivers with the land, the cliffs with the sea, and the fields with the rain.

IV.

In conclusion, let us report honestly and simply, to ourselves and others, the reality of our ever-evolving experience ("now I am feeling grief and loss, now I am feeling I am part of everything"), without any ambition to, or posture as, 'the perfectly centred individual'. This fixity displays all the signs of an antiquated, spiritual, heroic ideal. It is conceptual, it is rigid, and it is a way of holding oneself apart from the flow of experience – the flow of existence.

To live in liquid self-acceptance, however, is to be in the flow of existence – like baby Moses in his basket being eddied down the Nile. This aligns beautifully with the Taoist sense of existence as a river. I don't define myself as a Taoist, but I expect that's what most Taoists would say. "How can I fix and define myself as a Taoist?" Like Heraclitus said, "you can't step into the same river twice"... every time I step into myself I am someone else!

NOT EASY

"(In authentic transformation) the self is not made content, the self is made toast!"
- Ken Wilber

In this piece I acknowledge the starting point: cognition. We get it! We get it that we don't know. We get it that we live life from behind a barricade of concepts. We get it that all is mystery. We get it that (clearly) we are who we are, and yet we also get it that we're everyone, and that we're no one. All of this through cognition, through reason. Through honest introspection, and honest observation of our 'external' experience we have arrived at a cognitive understanding of the mythic journey of self-knowledge. This does not, however, equip us in any way to embark upon our unique 'quest'.

In fact, the deeper our intellectual grasp of how limited our knowing, the more frightening it can be. Suddenly there is nothing to hold onto. We've thrown away our crutches, but we haven't yet learnt to support our own weight.

In the piece 'Fists, Toes, Wings, Heart, And Brothers And Sisters At Our Sides', I go over the 'equipment' we need with us on our hero's journey. In this piece I do not go into the details of the cultivation of a sense of belonging, the management of the psyche, the honouring of any blockages we might carry within us, or the question of purpose (all of which enable us to support our own weight). Rather, I name the challenge, I acknowledge the impasse, the awkwardness of letting go of self-deception when our honesty has not yet brought us to experiential realisation.

You could compare the content of this piece with the rapprochement stage in child development – the stage in which the toddler goes further away from the mother, and then returns – negotiating the balance of his fear with his desire to explore. Of course, you and I were there once, but we have forgotten – nevertheless, we can imagine just how real these dilemmas must be for the young explorer. Behind him the warmth and security of the mothership – before him the marvels (but perhaps also the terrors) of a whole new world. He goes 100 yards. He returns to the mothership. He goes 200 yards. And so on...

In this case though, it is not mother we are detaching from, it is our own dishonesty, and the false securities we have created to survive our fear. Once we get this – how many courageous options are there?

Not Easy

I.

Words are easy....

The inspirational discourses on personal transformation,
the revolutionary rhetoric –
easy!

But to stay and feel
one's unlimited experience,
and stay and feel,
and stay and feel –
and stomach such unexpected, fantastic freedom
and return from contraction,
and return from abstraction,
and stay and feel,
and stay and feel –
is definitely, definitely
not easy.

It's a rigorous adventure –
a lifetime pilgrimage...
It's a silent discipline
that must always run, invisibly, alongside us...
It's not a once-a-week-is-Sabbath existence,
but an every-day-is-Sabbath existence –
as T. S. Eliot says:
"costing not less than everything".

Initially
there is cognition –
we get it:
"What do we know?!"
That's not so hard –
once the honesty kicks in –
but we are incapable
of living our cognition.

We recognise that
if all we have is our own experience
then: we are alone. But
we recognise that
we are stuck in a spider's web

of our own spinning,
attaching us to an array of identities –
and that not one of these identities
wants to be alone.

We recognise that we are
inseparably alone, inseparably
woven into the DNA of existence, yes,
but nonetheless
alone –
trapped inside our own perceiving
without any external authority
(all others are inside our experience,
and the only authority they wield
is the authority we award them).
Alone, therefore,
with no external absolute-truth-point,
alone, therefore,
surrounded only ever by others
as alone as us –
alone
with only ourselves,
perhaps forever...
All of this would be bliss
if we were let go in trust of life and death and time and space,
but equipped only with cognition –
it is daunting.

To 'get it', rationally, that the mind's eye lies,
bite-sizing and plastic-packing the universe –
and thus to see through the membrane of language –
does not prepare us
to walk through it,
and feel our actual experience,
and endure the symphonic moment –
our private concert of inadequacy and shame,
of glory and remembrance,
of rage, depression, innocence, joy...

To understand that time and place
are, ultimately, not there –
and not get existentially dizzy –
to understand that identity –

specifically,
one's own –
is simply a culturally conditioned construct,
and not disintegrate –
to understand there is no refuge,
that even the most fashionable objective truth
is just another collusion of subjectivities,
and not despair –
to understand that,
when all is said and done,
all one has is
one's own experience –
and give thanks
that it should be so –
and devote all of one's energy
to becoming fully, feelingly, humanly present
inside such limitless magic and magnificence –
this is a task for which we have
little or no preparation...
And even if we had –
still it would not be easy.

II.

To stay in our own experience is
to live in freedom –
not in freedom from a limitation,
but in unlimited freedom –
in a place where
anything could happen next!
Quite naturally then,
like a beggar become overnight billionaire
who decides to buy a boat and sail the seas,
we need to first do some day trips
before we can trust the seascape,
and live without land.

To stay in our own experience is
to live in power –
not in power-over others,
but in the power of a final decision
to honour our own will –
despite others' disapproval,
and regardless of their approval...

It is to live in a power that separates one
from everyone,
except oneself.
Quite naturally, then,
like a beggar become overnight billionaire,
we need to spend some money
on a few cool suits
and strut about a bit in front of the mirror,
before we can stop
apologising for others' grief
and congratulating ourselves on their pleasure,
and stand in the place
we now stand.

To stay in our own experience is
to live in love –
not in love of any one person,
or family, or race, or place,
but in quiet, intense empathy with everyone –
in an odd mix
of joyful grief and grieving joy –
a love that cries because
everything is as it is –
a love that loves others
more than most love themselves –
a love that seeks no requital.
Quite naturally, then,
like a beggar become overnight billionaire
who could now solve anyone's money worries,
it takes a while to learn
you don't have to save anyone,
or be friends with them,
or have sex with them,
or marry them –
just because the universe is in their eyes,
and you love them.

III.

Staying in our own experience
is art,
and we are the sculpted stone.
It is science,
and we are the experiment.

It is a devotion, a passion –
and the ultimate risk.

Yes,
the ultimate risk!
It is to stand absolutely empty handed,
and look eternity in the eye –
and relax.

If you are not afraid
you are at the cognitive stage.
No judgement.
Cognition is step one.
Intellectual honesty.
Then the work begins.

Everything unfurls from not-knowing...
Freedom, power, love...
Fear is gradually usurped by trust.
It has its own timing.
Grace seems to operate the clock –
nevertheless,
we must practice and practice and practice
with relentless forgiving discipline...
if we are to live
naked in the night,
naked in the sun.

TERROR

“The more you approach infinity, the deeper you penetrate terror.”
- Gustave Flaubert

Isolation is terrifying. To not belong, to feel oneself an existential orphan, to not fit anywhere, to feel isolated, to feel finite in an infinite reality beyond our control, generates terror.

(This terror is a state of being. It is not modern. But it is also the unintended consequence of the modern rational mindset – the reduction of reality to meaningless matter evolving meaninglessly. Thus: a whole culture in terror. A globalizing culture consuming the mind of humanity – terrorizing humanity.)

So we hold on. But holding on keeps us there: holding on, terrified, and terrified to let go. But the only way to alleviate the terror of isolation is to open to the terror of letting go.

If we want to know all we are and are not, then we have to travel out beyond our isolation – however comfortably adjusted we have become in our pain.

Letting go means opening in honesty to our actual experience. Of course, this takes us directly into our aloneness. More terror! But if we can stay, aloneness opens into oneness, into belonging, into infinity. Yet more terror! But as we stay, trust washes over us, and through us, and a sense of loving and being loved – and in those moments: we are no longer afraid.

This is the individual work to be done, to accompany our co-creative construction of a new civilisation. To replace the self-destructiveness of a civilisation behaving the way anyone would behave if they felt isolated and terrified, we need to find the fearlessness that is not bravado, but rooted in vulnerable belonging.

As we come to love ourselves – our fear as well as our fearlessness – and love the trees as if they, too, were our brothers and sisters – then we will naturally co-create a loving civilisation.

But pressure is pointless. In fact it is counter-productive. Each of us must find their own rhythm, and also friends who respect our rhythm, and sometimes say ‘slow down, slow down’, and sometimes give us a loving kick up the arse.

In the first part of this piece I state the reality of the situation: the choice between terror and terror! In the second, I describe what experientially this letting go might look like. And in the third and last part, I speak about our need for each other's support in this quintessential endeavour.

Terror

I.

I take joy in seeing my brothers
remembering freedom.
I know just how much we want it –
and just how much we don't.

I know just how much
we struggle
and suffer –
holding on...
to substances,
to habits,
to each other...

We want,
but we don't want...
because to be free is to be
alone
in our experience.
Fully alone.
Fully alone.
It might even mean
all we will ever-have-ever
is our own experience –
forever.
Forever!

You say you're not terrified?
I say,
probably,
you're a liar –
or more likely,
cut-off,
or unconscious.

Too terrified to be terrified.

But I could be wrong.
I have not met you yet.

II.

I take joy in seeing my brothers
remembering freedom –
in watching them ride the waves of terror,
and coming to the shore
of trust.

Fuck yes!
What an inspiration!
Talk about balls....

I take joy in seeing my brothers opening
to the trembling –
to the tension in their holding on –
and to the influx of elation
in their letting go.

I respect your waves of terror.
I consider them the symptom
of awareness swelling –
of arrival in the unknown...
of looking around...
"Where am I?"
"Have I fallen apart?"
"What is left of me?"
"Will I be eaten alive?"
Looking around –
not knowing
where one begins,
where one ends,
how far the heart can feel –
whether one is infinite,
or not.

I respect your terror.
I understand your shaking

as you get it:
that there never was
an external authority –
that your guide through eternity
was you...
that whether or not you need help
(which we all do),
the last word
will be eternally yours.

I respect you
as you break through,
and see the unfamiliar land
where you always lived,
and there,
beyond thought,
panic as it dawns on you...
that there are no limitations in sight –
that you are not obliged
to be again who you've always been –
the beggar for others' liking,
the refugee from their disliking –
as you understand,
for the first time,
the word free.

I love you
as you look around
and see no limit to you –
and realise your every next move
always depends on you –
that you are eternally responsible
for your unique signature in time.

III.

And I receive your support, brother,
in opening-into my terror.

In practice,
none of this is linear.
Sometimes I spend weeks in the bliss of belonging,
then there's a phone call or an email –
and somewhere out at sea

the ocean begins to groan.
It may take an hour, a day, a week
for the wave to hit the cliffs –
but I need you there then
as I cough and choke in my sobbing and snots.
Or sometimes I go too far out into oneness –
I am too little too soon –
and I need you to hold me
while I don't know where I am,
while the spasms subside.

Supporting each other –
letting each other suffer
what we need to suffer –
(able to allow each other's pain
because we can allow our own) –
gentle, patient, strong –
saying, “fuck ‘real men are never afraid”-
saying, “men who aren't afraid
haven't yet looked in the eye of eternity” –
being with each other
as we let go
of all we thought we knew,
of all we thought we were –
like Scarlett Johansson's Lucy –
being there for each other
as we pass through contractions of forgiveness,
acceptance, unexperienced beauty, relief...
just being there...
just being there...
we offer each other
the greatest gift of brotherhood:
loving holding as each of us
finds his own way
to dance the dance of terror and trust.

THE RED PILL

"After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill – the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill – you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes"

- Morpheus to Neo, in The Matrix

There are five parts to this piece. The first, 'The Offering', is the opening, and the last, 'May You Stay', is the closing. The second, 'The Red Pill' presents a plethora of benefits and blessings and transformations to be had by taking the red pill of staying in our own experience.

The essential message of the third piece, 'All I Have Left' (which is much shorter than the other two), is that, in my opinion, there is nothing on Earth more important than staying in our own experience. As I write this I hear a voice in my head that says "what, more important than love?" – but I think I answer that voice in the fourth piece, where I talk about relating from our own experience

The title of the fourth piece is a list: 'Return, Feel, Get To Know, Flow, Reveal, Relate, Act'. It suggests, in a loosely linear way, some general principles for staying in our own experience: if we lose ourselves, we need to 'return' to our own experience, then we need to 'feel' our own experience (it isn't possible to think our experience), then (by staying, by feeling), we gradually 'get to know' our experience, or, more accurately, we become familiar with how we experience. This self-knowledge is not static, it is continuously morphing (lava lamp-like) – so the question arises as to how to stay with it. This is the next principle on the list: 'flow' through/in/with your own experience.

All of this enables us to 'reveal' our experience and 'relate' from/in our experience – to enter relationship with others without losing the depth and beauty of living in connection with ourselves, authentically, in the moment, with everyone. It also enables us to find and fulfil our life's purpose – that is to say, what we choose to use our lives, or give our lives, for. After all, how can we get in touch with our deepest sense of 'calling' if we're not in touch with ourselves, not in our own experience?

I.

The Offering

Brother –
look, here, here is the pill..
The forbidden pill,
the pill of Eden,
the pill of knowledge...

Here, brother –
here is the antidote
for the drug of ordinariness –
the one in our drinking water,
and poisoned supermarket foods,
and TV programmes
that drug us up
until we hear political words
that mean nothing –
and agree.

We might not like it,
we might be afraid,
but the moment does scream 'mystery'.
And the more we silence it,
the louder it screams,
and the more forcefully we must silence it..
"Please, please –
up my dose!"

Brothers,
we let our cultures design our worlds –
and explain how we should feel –
ha! –
rather than feeling for ourselves
the mud between our toes,
the moonlight,
the beauty of a graceful death,
the depth of the night,
the heat of midday –
that is to say –
rather than feeling for ourselves
the garden we are already in.

Nobody is to blame.

We are all afraid,
You choose, I choose, daily, to exchange,
as Pink Floyd put it:
"a walk on part in the war
for a leading role in a cage".
We are all ordinaryed.

But here, brother –
here is the pill, the antidote,
the spell-breaker, the fingersnap –
the bucket of ice water and a good slapping –
to end the tragedy of magical children
shrinking into adult muggles :) –
to end our addiction to the drug that sucks
the colour from our cheeks,
and hearts,
and days –
and makes war,
and traffic,
and plastic toy factories,
and deforestation
and two weeks on the Costa Brava
reassuring...
"What a relief things look pretty much
as they did yesterday.
What a relief everything is still
ordinary!"

Here is the pill to shock
our dumbed-down numbness,
to restore our hearing and sight.
I wouldn't say it will change you,
but rather –
that until you take it,
you aren't yet you.

It is the pill
that reveals beauty
and releases love.
It opens the doors of perception
and show us the synchronicity that defies
our calendars and diaries –

that orchestrates our time.
It shows us the mystery that persists
despite everything running on time...
It introduces us into the mythic dimension
where everyone is in rôle,
where everyone's every action forwards the plot
of an eternal drama
played against a backdrop of stars.

Seeing this,
we see the light!
"Halleluja!" we cry aloud,
"I thought I was living in a pop song –
but no,
it's a symphony of sacred Pythagorean mathematics!
I thought I was living in a flatpack furniture assemblage manual,
but no,
I am in an infinite cosmic saga!"

II. **Red-Pilling-It**

What is this pill?
It is this:
to have the balls
to stay in our own experience.
Not to visit,
not to stay for ten minutes –
to stay.

That's it!
It might not sound much, but
believe me –
do it, and you're done.

Don't give up on yourself, brother,
don't become Mediocre Man,
and wake up every morning in your bed.
Take the red pill of your own experience –
and see how deep you go.

To red-pill-it is
to take full responsibility

for our singular birth-to-death tightropes –
to each walk alone –
giving from alone, receiving to alone –
blaming no one for our choices,
blaming no one for our pain –
for our anger, for our shame –
blaming no one for our behaviour –
merging with no one...
Each his own man.

To red-pill-it is this:
to have the balls
to stay in our own experience
and feel for ourselves
whether, for us –
for us –
the moment, when finally felt,
does feel indefinable, magical, free –
and therefore worthy of reverence...
or whether that's just an idea,
another concept for cowards.

It is to feel for ourselves
how alone aloneness feels –
(aloneness, not loneliness) –
to feel for ourselves how we feel
when we're alone with everything
everywhere
all at once –
when we're open to everything,
everywhere,
all at once.
Is it aloneness?
Is it freedom?
Is it bliss?

To red-pill-it is
to have the balls
to confront the possibility
that all we have is our own experience –
that there is nothing else to face –
nothing else to feel...

that everything else is avoidance, evasion, escape –
to nowhere.

It is to have the balls to
stay in our experience
and tremble when we're afraid,
and sob when we're grief-stricken,
and let ourselves be held,
and let ourselves be loved,
and let ourselves be judged.

It is
to stand in bold defiance
of the hard and cold
images and ideas of the manly
we have inherited
and internalised
and to have the balls to be
the soft-fleshed creatures
we are,
and be
the tender-hearted creatures
we are.

It is to have the balls
to stay in our own experience,
and renounce submission and domination –
down to the smallest everyday detail
of "That is a beautiful landscape, isn't it?",
or "This food is so delicious, isn't it?" –
to let others differ,
to let others be different.
To say, rather:
"I find this landscape beautiful,
what is your experience?"

Swallowing the pill,
liquid information pours into us –
the code-track back to ourselves.

The change is so radical
we immediately see

how our old way of being was perpetuating
all we thought and said we stood against.
We see the breadth of consequences –
social, ecological, political –
of radical commitment
to oneself.

We see the violence of our imposition
of our preferences and perspectives –
from the smallest detail of "This food is delicious, isn't it",
to the devastation of our rage attacks
and sex attacks –
and that if we say "yes"
to living in experience and equality
we are saying "yes" to everyone,
to all creatures,
to the land,
to a new civilisation –
to a new balance of being on Earth.

To red-pill-it is not
to spark yet another superficial revolution –
with new wallpaper, carpets and desks
for palaces repossessed for the people
from the previous repossessors –
the new boys skimming off the old boys' scum
only to whip up their own –
it is a spiral explosion in the belly
that flushes through the flesh –
whose reverberations are set in motion
by simplicity, not glory,
by the real, not the ideal –
not by the grand plan,
but by the power of honesty,
the power of undefendedness
that lets us let ourselves be seen in our need
and ask for help,
and really receive –
and hide nothing
from our lovers,
and tend our own most tender desires.

How can we represent non-violent revolution
if we are not in revolution within,
and in revolutionary relationships –
our own judges,
letting others self-judge...
letting others walk their birth-death ropes
their way...
Not so concerned where we're walking
as whether we're walking
in parallel,
in resonance –
alone,
together...

The red pill,
here,
for me,
writing this to you –
is to have the balls
to stay in my own experience,
and from my freedom
let you be free
and feel for myself –
(whatever any guru or genius might say,
whatever anyone other-than-me, might say) –
whether it's true
for me,
in my deepest heart,
that I am just like you,
and you are just like me.
Just like me.
Just like me.

III. All I Have Left

After half a century of unrelenting pilgrimage
through impossible mental mountain passes,
through treacherous depressive marshes,
through delirium
and delight –
I offer you all I have left –

the one impractical thing I still carry in my pilgrim's pouch –
my one treasure:
my last sacred pill.

On it
a Chinese rice carver inscribed
the guiding maxim of my mind
and heart
and body.
It is my wayfarer's amulet,
carved with the only words that have echoed on
while ambition has mocked me,
my pretensions been waylaid,
my specialness been seized,
and my heart broken into.
These, and only these, words
now whisper me my way
through this great unknown:

"Stay in your own experience."
"Stay in your own experience."
"Stay in your own experience."

IV.

Return, Feel, Get To Know, Flow, Reveal, Relate, Act

When lost in distraction,
or mental abstraction,
or ego identification,
or wandered off
inside the experiences of others,
I whisper firmly,
"Return to your own experience."
And I return, I return –
again and again –
I return.

I return, I breathe,
and I tell myself,
"Feel your experience –
feel your body –
don't think it, feel it –
stretch,

greet your muscles –
feel what you're feeling –
don't name it, feel it...
Feel the invisible air,
the textures of the atmosphere –
listen...
hear sound,
hear the shrieking silence...
Go outside,
take off your shoes,
let the sunlight shine into you,
let the rainfall wash through you,
let the wind blow you away...
let daytime arouse you,
and night-time soothe you –
and in the immensity of space
opened by the release of conceptions...
feel, feel, feel...

Lie on the ground
and let the Earth remember you...
Sit with the trees,
breathe with the trees...
and feel..."

Stay in your own experience
really means feel your experience –
better still: feel your experience of the moment –
it really means
feel, feel, feel....

Then,
by returning and returning,
and feeling and feeling,
I get to know my experience.
I get to know my personality's landscapes –
from its suffocating jungles to its open oceans –
from the pressing distress
to the comfort of trust –
from the peace-in-belonging
of experiencing the world as one –
to the insecurity and agitation
of spinning in the washing machine of my neuroses,

in the overspilling energies of others,
and tumbling inside the globalised superego,

I get to know the little characters and the big characters
who compose me –

my cast,
the inhabitants of my world,
my people –
my me.

I stay, I stay, and
I learn to flow through my experience –
to respect each and every character,
to grasp their contradictory needs –
the one who would hit out,
the one who would hit me,
the one who would rather die than hit,
the one who would run away...

I learn to let them express,
and sometimes
to not let them express...

I learn to flow about myself...

Now I am this me,
now I am that.

I choose my currents.

Sometimes I am locked in a black box.

Sometimes I am a bird in bright sky.

I don't make the black box bad,
or seek the sky.

There's no need –

it's as natural as preferring pleasure to pain:

when I need to be in a black box

because there's a black box job to be done,

the black box fits just fine –

but then it gets claustrophobic,

and I don't even have to say "time to flow" –

I have flown.

Over the years

of being so many me's,

of seeing through so many eyes –

of feeling each seeing –

they come to empathise
with each other...
The nobility of my self-love
holds the hand of my self-hatred,
the animal that fucks
respects the tender lover,
the kind, wise one protects
the impatient one
who's had enough of people's shit,
the cynic secretly admires
the man of faith...
I come home
to my world –
I accept my experience...
After all,
it is inescapable:
wherever I am, I am in it –
and it is mine.
Wherever I am, I am in it –
and it is me.

Sometimes I am one me,
sometimes two –
sometimes three, simultaneously.
There are confluences and deltas
and narrow channels through the marshes.
Water is always ready for flux.
But whoever I am,
and however many I am –
my experiencing is inescapable.

I don't pretend to understand it –
to know why I am me,
and not you –
to know why I am travelling these rivers,
and not yours –
I don't pretend to understand my beginnings
in ancestral time,
nor where the repercussions of my choices will end...
but here I am –
inescapably, unshakably me –
free
because there's nowhere not to go,

free
because there's no one not to be,
free
in me –
in the great unknown.
Free,
as Janis Joplin puts it
"because there's nothing left to lose" –
because I'm not holding on.

The freer I am,
the more fluid –
the more I can reveal my experience...
I am worthy enough to risk insult.
I am self-loving enough to risk rejection.
I am strong enough to risk attack.
I am soft enough to tend my hurt.
I can speak my truth.

I am in relationship with myself.
I am monogamous to me.

Every me is in relationship with every other me.
We are a polyamorous family.
Regardless of society's judgement –
we are happy being me.

Now I can reveal and risk
your fight and your flight –
because however you do whatever you do
all I have to flow through.
all I have ever had to flow through,
and all I will ever have to flow through,
is my own experience.
Whether my self-revelation meets
your disparaging disapproval,
or your encouraging approval –
I am in relationship with myself –
and all I need to flow through
is me.

I reveal.
Not attempt to impress –

which is a manipulation.
I reveal.
Not attempt to seduce –
which is a manipulation.

I reveal myself and risk
opening to your love –
which I never have felt before,
nor do now,
nor ever will...
All I ever feel is my own experience
in the presence of your love –
which might be of erotic, expanded joy,
or of excruciating, contracted unworthiness...
Either way:
what I am actually in relationship with
is my expansion and contraction.

I am influenced by you,
but I am not determined by you.

I can reveal my experience because
I am not responsible for your reactions.
I am not responsible for your relationship
with yourself.

I can reveal my experience
because every character in my land
lives there,
because everyone is welcome –
everyone is acknowledged for their contribution
to making me me –
everyone is valued,
every voice has been heard and, therefore,
every voice can be spoken aloud.
Not unwisely,
nor inconsiderately –
but rather: in proportion to my intuition
of your homecoming to yourself.
To the degree you can be in flow yourself,
to that degree you can receive my revealing.
If I self-censor it is not a repression,
but a choice...

As I reveal my experience,
I relate from my experience –
I let myself be seen
in the mystery of my moment...
I am naked in the unknown –
however buttoned-up you are.
But oh how I love it when
you too are naked –
also letting yourself be seen...

My primary interest is in my experience
of being with you.
Your primary interest is in your experience
of being with me.
We are both fascinated
by our own experience of intimacy,
of love.

I feel so grateful to you
for this experience of love.
I am so grateful...
But this experience of gratitude is mine.
It is in me, or I am in it –
either way,
it is mine.
I am so grateful to be in love together –
I love to be in love,
it is paradise –
but my experience of being in love is mine...
Maybe you are in love in paradise too.
Maybe our experiences are similar –
maybe so similar it is tempting to say
they are the same –
that they are one,
that we are in love,
that we are one.

But, no!
Our experiences are not the same!
They are not only different, but unique –
and flowing uniquely
through the present moment.

If we forget who is primary,
if we forget to stay primarily interested
in ourselves –
then not only does the love diminish,
but we lose ourselves –
and this could be for ten seconds, ten minutes
or ten years...

I return to and I feel my experience.
This enables me to
get to know and flow in my experience.
This enables me to
reveal and relate from my experience,
and to act creatively from my experience –
both in the moment-to-moment,
and also in asserting my will –
in manifesting my deepest dreaming,

Deep in the whispering of my world
there is a secret garden –
a garden where my dreams grow.
There I lie down,
and receive my mission –
the beauty I feel called to give shape to,
to make exist
in the world.

Deep in my own experience,
I smell the flowers of my secret garden –
and I stay close to that aroma...
I don't waft off
on the winds of others' opinions.
Over the years
my creativity shapes and re-shapes itself,
but I do not waver...

Staying in our own experience
opens the secret garden gate.
Whoever lies down there feels their calling –
though it might still be below ground –
rising, slowly –
the time for action not now, not yet,
but there, lying on the lush grass,

we hear it, we smell it...
Every mission different,
every mission the same.

V.

May You Stay

This then, beloved brother –
the staying in our own experience –
is the red pill I place before you –
for you to take,
owing nothing.
My gift to you
(with a few notes for the trip).

May it bring you
the power of authenticity.
May you be
fiercely determined
to be gentle.
And may you be
a potent presence in this world.

Sometimes people say
"he was a good lover", meaning:
he knew all the moves.
May you be a good lover, meaning:
may you love timelessly –
without abandoning yourself
for an instant.

May you return and feel and reveal and relate –
and staying in your own experience
may you love...
May you love
in wealth and in poverty, in health in sickness, for better and worse –
may you be a wonderful lover
of yourself.

And being a great lover of yourself –
may you laugh in innocence
with the loving children,
and the loving animals,

and the loving trees.

And may you live in devotion
to your deepest dream –
as the ally of every heart –
every older person one's parent,
every peer one's sibling,
every young person
one's child.

Brother...

"Stay in your own experience."

"Stay in your own experience."

"Stay in your own experience."

PATH

*"Having no way as way."
- Bruce Lee*

In 'The Red Pill' I name various facets of the self-education that enables us to remain more consistently in our own experience: returning to it, feeling it, getting to know it, flowing in it, revealing it, relating from it, and acting-out of it. But I don't list them sequentially – it's not a developmental piece.

Within this piece, however, there's a pared down developmental sequence in three phases: arrival in centre, not getting drawn into contraction, and opening to expansion.

Firstly, arrival. One returns to oneself. One notices oneself. Having been entangled in the personal woundings and social conditionings that make others our authorities, somehow – whether by tragedy, by exhaustion, by devotion and discipline, or by some magical blessing – we arrive at centre, we land in our own experience, awaken to our own life, recover freedom of choice, and take pride in taking responsibility for ourselves.

Even those people who we previously made the centre of our lives are now within our experience. We have arrived. We have found centre.

Staying in our own experience is a revelation. I exist. I feel powerful. I do not need to become powerful – my power is in staying. I do not have to become anything. In fact the more I try, the more disempowered I become. I am surprised to find that the more transparent and authentic I am, the more powerful I am – to the extent that when, from centre, I let myself be seen in my vulnerability, I am at my most powerful.

I feel powerful, free, open – connected with myself, and with others... Then comes stage two: dealing with the persistent pull of contraction. The voices that call me back don't stop. "I really don't deserve this." "S/he is so much greater than me – s/he would never be interested in me." "Help me, save me, see me, please accept me, please love me." "How do you want me to be?" And/or (like in Eddie Izzard's Death Star Canteen sketch) "Do you know who I am?" "How dare you speak to me like that!" "Who do you think you are?" "I don't need anyone." "People are such idiots!" And so on, and on, they go – tugging at our trouser leg, over and over and over.

Don't these voices – this inner crowd – have anything else to do?! No, they don't. This is their nature. You might have found centre – but they haven't. They remain true to themselves. And the grooves down which we have slid repeatedly for years – down into contracted identification – are well carved, and well worn. They're so easy to slide down! A harsh word, a dismissive look, a thwarted desire, a frustrated plan, free-floating anxiety – it can be anything – and there I am again, sliding down one or another familiar groove into contracted self-pity, loneliness, shame, violence, blame, detachment, isolation, and so on. We need to learn about the pull of contraction.

Stage three: the possibility of expansion. If I can hear my inner crowd, but not get pulled into identification, centre is sustained. And if centre is sustained it becomes stronger. So it becomes easier to stay. This opens the possibility of connecting with a larger perspective. Now I have a place from where I can let go of fixed ideas, fears, self-judgements, compensatory behaviours, and unconscious habits. I have a place from which I can open to my belonging – to the Earth, to the river of the generations, to the mind of humanity, and to the great mystery – I can open to unconditional freedom, to my personal power, to trust, to the state of love, and to oneness, awe, appreciation, and gratitude for the gift of life and death.

In real life, of course, it's not as clear cut as this, nor as linear. But the essence is this: as we connect with centre we find a vantage point from where to look both ways. This allows us to not contract into identification with the less mature members of our crowds, and also to expand – to open, to care, to want to contribute, to be more intuitive, imaginative, brave and creative.

I. Arrival In Centre

The end
of the walk of otherness begins
when you stop and notice
yourself –
you who are an experiencing creature –
experiencing only and always
the unexpected moment.

Shaking your head sharply,
as if slightly dizzy,
as if recalling something unforgettable...
you arrive
as if from nowhere –

as if the clock fixed itself,
having skipped a day, a week, your life.
And there you are:
looking
at you.

You say to yourself:
"I have this one body –
it is my body.
I have these feelings,
my feelings.
I have these thoughts,
they are mine.
I am not someone else –
I am who I am.
This is who I call me...
and I am not somewhere else,
I am here –
here, being me."

You notice you'd never noticed
yourself –
the one you are –
your character
in this Great Theatre of time.
"Fancy!" you giggle, delighted –
"I could've been anyone,
but I am me!"
As Derek Walcott says:
"The time will come
when, with elation,
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door...
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,
the photographs, the desperate notes,
peel your own image from the mirror".

You appreciate your costume,
you give thanks for your props.
You bow
before your supporting cast.
Reality is suddenly surreal –
more real than ever –

infinitely unlikely,
stranger than fact,
yet unalterably normal.
You notice what was under your nose:
that on stage
and you can choose
how your character acts.

II.

The Pull Of Contraction

The intermission over,
the audience applauds...
you enter character...
You long your character's longings,
you fear your character's fears...
The audience is with you –
and then the drama's done
for the night.
You ask yourself:
"Where have I been?"

The noticing is intermittent.
You disappear,
you reappear –
in a thousand somewheres,
in a thousand scenes.

But luckily
it's Groundhog Day
every day :) –
and where you forgot the obvious
you can pause –
you can breath.
You catch yourself at it –
the endless salesmanship –
"Choose me, choose me, choose me!"
Even the buglers and drummers
proclaiming your importance
were beggars you found on the street.

Day after day,
you notice yourself say:

"If you like me
I am likeable,
if you ignore me
I don't exist,
if you choose me
I am the one".
And you pause, and you breathe, and you reply:
"Dearest character I am,
whether others choose me or not –
I am my chosen one."

On the timeless stage of time
you notice yourself
in purgatory awaiting a phone call
of acceptance –
selling yourself willingly –
helplessly...
the next moment in some tumultuous bardo
writhing and riling against rejection –
ready to kill –
no price too high
for them to pay!
And you pause,
and you breathe,
and becoming conscious
of your unconsciousness,
you approach the one who has lain himself,
sacrificially,
on the altar of other's judgement
and you say softly:
"My darling one,
it's time to come home".

III. The Possibility Of Expansion

Choosing more consistently now –
choosing yourself,
and choosing the now –
a confidence sets in.

As others flail in identification,
reciting, night after night, the scripts

their grandparents gave them
(the scripts their grandparents were given) –
in a show that's back
by popular demand –
a stability sets in,
an autonomy,
a gravitas,
a down-coming,
a self-trust,
a ground.

Before when the theatre was done for the night
you got drunk to forget your forgetting –
but now you go for a walk
in the fields at the edge of town,
and let the moonlight play
on your neck
and the owls woo you,
and the black air kiss you –
and you dance for yourself
for hours.

Before there was no one
to let go of,
now there is someone at home –
and you go on outings into stillness,
and on holidays to everywhere –
and everyone is your lover
even if few of them ever know.

FISTS, TOES, WINGS, HEART, BRAIN AND BROTHERS AND SISTERS AT OUR SIDES

"We are stardust, we are golden – and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden."

- Neil Young, Woodstock

This piece is a kind of rucksack checklist for the hike into the unknown! Actually, like most of my writing, it's not as prescriptive as that, but more suggestive. It puts forward images that hopefully will contribute to your considerations as you pack your sack – your way.

But yes, I do feel we need to activate our various potentials. Overlaying the list of the title on the Indian Chakra Map (once again: because I find it helpful, not because I believe it fact), we might say we need to activate the lower chakras (fists to fight, and toes in the mud), the central chakras (a simple heart), and the upper chakras (wings that work). To this I also add the need for "a faithful brain" (a trained mind), and "brothers and sisters at our side" (resonant community).

None of this is black and white. It's not that we have to be "activated", have the mind on a leash, and be surrounded by cheerleaders, before we ever set out. What does it even mean 'to set out', anyway? In reality, does such a moment even exist? But yes, the Swiss army knife of a trained mind is going to come in handy. And there are going to be difficult moments when only "fists" (self-belief and a focussed will) will see you through. And so on..

All of these areas of focus are somehow interwoven into the journey. Each one essential in its own way. Contractions in any of them are going to hamper our progress. They are not mutually exclusive, they all overlap, but without "wings that work", for example, we don't experience the pleasure of not-knowing, of trusting, of belonging – and so we fall back upon other, habitual pleasures – which reinforce old identities. Without "a simple heart" (the self-love that overflows into our love of everyone), we continue to self-sabotage by acting-out from emotional contraction. Or without "brothers and sisters at our sides", without kind arms to hold us, or anywhere to evaluate our impact on others, we can become hard, compensatory, inflated, or lose ourselves in some tangle of our conditioning.

What is perhaps strangely absent from this checklist is – a map! Who would set out on a hike without a map?! But, of course, if where we're going is into deeper not-

knowing, deeper into mystery – then maps are not going to be much use. Rather, this is a ticklist for full-on, fulfilling travel...

Fists, Toes, Wings, Heart, Brain And Brothers And Sisters At Our Sides

Brother,
there are six things a man needs for this journey:
fists to fight,
toes in the mud,
wings that work,
a simple heart,
a faithful brain,
and brothers and sisters at his side.

‘Fists to fight’ means
commitment, determination, will.
It means a sense of self, individuation –
self-worth, a sense of mattering.
It means
finding your spine, standing in your space,
bowing before no man,
and accepting no man bow before you.
It means
the balls to dare to create,
and break and re-make,
and break and re-make
yourself –
and keep creating.

‘Toes in the mud’ means
an adoration of the land, of its creatures, of sex
and innocence –
a body that trusts its heaviness to the earth,
that sweats rain
and stinks gloriously.
It means
eyes that love moonlight,
and waterfalls, and grass.

It means anger where anger’s due –
agitation in the land of tarmac –
anguish that strong men and women have been tamed,
domesticated –
house-bound and house-trained –
and slowly forgotten how to sleep with lakes and trees.

It means shame where shame is due –
shame the innocence of our cocks
has rotted in our guts
and turned into wanting to have,
and to hurt.
It means caring for our splintered passion.

‘Wings that work’ means
to breath with your whole body,
to not take air for granted –
to live in it as if it were
a lover –
always, everywhere, caressing.

It means
to stretch your whole body
towards Truth –
"Is it there? is it there? is it there?" –
beyond ideas, beyond names, beyond hope –
into the textures of not-knowing,
into intimacy with not-knowing,
into the danger and delight of not-knowing –
into the joy of being
unnameable
in the unnameable.

It means
to come home to freedom...
to wake and murmur
"thank you" –
to look to the day and say:
"I have no problems, only puzzles" –
to go about the day
with a purring heart,
sensing everything has led to here, to this –
and could not be otherwise –
that where you are is your
fitting place.

It means
to dissolve death.
“What do we know?
Perhaps we’re already dead!”

It means to have faith in the sunset and the dawn,
to let the winds of the years
bless your cheeks,
to let the rain of the years
anoint you...
It means
to walk in grace.

‘A simple heart’ means
the honesty to admit
when in trust, when in terror –
when powerful, when punishing,
when humble, when snivelling,
when alone, when lonely,
when inseparable, when separate,
when belonging, when a refugee,
when blessed, when a beggar...

But such simplification
comes of great sophistication...
It is the hush after the storm
of years and years of persistent resistance,
"I wish I wasn't like this!"
"I wish I wasn't me!"
Finally...
dignified defeat.
We greet every smalltime lout
we wished wasn't loitering within –
we befriend every pretender
in whose psychic skin we have lived
like haunted shadows of ourselves:
the pervert,
the psychopath,
the slimy sycophant,
the six-foot tall tantrum-child,
the one made of glass,
the one with no skin,
the sneaky betrayer,
the coward, the thief...

The simple heart has honoured them all.
The simple heart has felt the pain inside

their roaring, their howling,
their moaning, their sobbing...

If we despise them,
and banish them,
they creep back
in through the back door,
in disguise...
They possess us more subtly (at first).
Then one day we notice
who we have become –
how far they have carried us off
from ourselves...

Rumi says, "This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!"
If we open the front door to them,
if we truly receive them with respect –
they lay fine tapestries at our feet,
they offer us their allegiance,
and they spill their treasures
into us.

The complex heart,
the self-judgemental heart,
is forever monitoring the me-show –
nudging its star centre-stage –
bolting and re-bolting the back door.

Maintaining this lie
is intensely distressing and exhausting,
and neverending.
To survive the stress of this impossible act –
this day-in day-out inauthenticity –
we are all addicts.

That addiction, brother, might be
illegal drugs,

it might be legal drugs,
it might be work,
it might be porn,
it might be meditation,
it might be tidiness and time,
it might be art.
There is nowhere we can't hide!

The upshot is this:
a false star,
the whole house rumbling
with so much bashing at the back door,
ever-higher doses of whatever it is,
ever-lower self-love,
a life littered with convenience and compromise,
and the ache of the years wasting away.

'A faithful brain' means
to not walk sleep-thinking –
a mind trained to its task
of directing and redirecting us back
to the holding of belonging,
to the physical,
and to actual, felt experience.

Don't try to stop thinking.
Take thought under your wing.
Instil your will in him.
Give him a big office.
Let him be the master of your household.
He is necessary.

'Brothers and sisters at our sides' doesn't mean
just anyone –
it means
the community of equals –
the fellowship of men and women like you:
men and women of 'the journey above all else' –
men and women of the mystery
running in everyone's blood,
of the oneness of our breathing,
of the endless question whose only answer
is tears of awe.

Each man lives and dies alone –
in his own experience now and evermore –
and yet, and yet,
paradoxically, and contradictorily,
existence pulsates with one heart,
in symphonic synchronicity –
and we feel we feel each other's feelings,
and the resonances of our meetings
soothe us,
and affirm us,
and humble us to take our place...
in the human family.

I give thanks to those men and women
who have recognised me for years –
who have, and would again,
care for me in illness,
and weariness,
and heartbreak –
men and women whose noble simplicity
returns me to my own.

Without such brothers and sisters,
who can cross the bridge
from birth-to-death?
All I have is my own experience.
And my experience is this:
that I need my brothers and sisters –
their affection is my cradle,
and their admiration is my compass –
as is their criticism.
Without them
I could not walk alone.

AN EXTRA IN THE FILMS OF OTHERS

"Our worlds are controlled hallucinations that happen with, through and because of our living bodies... when we agree about our hallucinations we call that 'reality'."

- Anil Seth (neuroscientist)

My main intention in writing this piece is to address an imbalance I have observed in some men as they begin to return to the reality of their own experience. Focusing intently on themselves they become grandiose, inflated. "There is only me" they say. "Everyone I meet – in fact, everything I meet – is within my perception. You, all of you, are within my perception", and so on.

While I feel all of these realisations are crucial, I feel a discomfort when men speak this way. My sense is that their seeing has become contaminated by contracted 'inner-characters' (aspects of the personality) that feel inadequate and insignificant, and are therefore seeking importance and power. "Yes", I say to them, "in one sense you are everything, but in another you are nothing!"

In this piece I look at the resistance to such 'nobodiness', the resistance to such passivity and insignificance... which can feel like death to the more contracted, 'egoic' aspects of the personality.

This hints at the need for self-education – the need to put ideas into practice in order to realise them more completely. Self-education is essential because it takes us from intellectual to experiential understanding. By self-directed education, by visceral exploration – letting ourselves feel the extremes of our experience (in this case: how it feels to be a somebody, and how it feels to be a nobody) – we open up the roads of the psyche, become familiar with them, get to know centre as 'home', and learn to move about ourselves with ease.

Our experience has different, apparently contradictory, textures. At one extreme is the experience of 'stardom', at the other of 'extradom'. Ultimately, I suggest in this piece, being the star of one's own experience, and being a peripheral extra in the experience of others, both take us to the same place: that they're two ways of looking in the same mirror, that they both take us to freedom and love, and that to be able to look both ways is essential for the wholeness of our humanity.

An Extra In The Films Of Others

I.

I am the star
of my life-film.

Some people have big parts
in my film.
Some are important extras.

The majority of people on Earth
are unimportant extras –
instantly replaceable extras...
Every day some are born,
and some die –
and I am unaware.

II.

Everyone is the star
of their own film.

For the majority
of people on Earth –
I am a replaceable extra –
a man with no name,
a character in a queue,
a body on a bench,
useful for crowd scenes, maybe –
if even noticed, hardly seen –
neither wanted nor unwanted,
neither liked nor disliked...
in short –
a no one.

III.

Today I sit on a park bench.
I am at rest in my experience –
land, sky, people, trees...
the whole world within my perception.

My stillness underpins

all sound –
the wind,
dogs barking,
the chatter of voices –
my well-wishing understands
the worried world.

IV.

Today I sit on a park bench,
decided to let myself be
everyone's replaceable extra –
everyone's no one.

I notice inner-characters of mine
adjusting my coat
(don't want to be judged uncared-for),
adjusting my posture
(don't want to be judged too relaxed) –
continuing their habitual defensiveness,
unaware I am utterly
unnoticed.

I decide to let myself
be judged –
or not.
To be noticed –
or not.
A full no one.

V.

The fearful characters continue resistant.
They don't want to be
everybody else's extra –
to not be pivotal –
for this moment to not revolve around me...
They want me to be a star,
a special someone,
a prime mover of something –
not an insignificant other,
if even noticed,
impossible to recall.

I take my fear –
my judgemental mind,
my posturing ego –
into my loving arms.

Letting myself be-held
by that which holds us all –
I hold them in their trembling
as they yield, as they soften –
and accept...

I allow myself to be
that unimportant extra
in films important to others...
And...
what a liberation!

What a pleasure to be a no one!
What release in anonymity!

What relief to not be impressing!
What relief to not be impressed upon!

What a delight
to be serving selflessly:
a silent extra,
silently blessing every star.

VI.

To be the star of one's life –
not the ego-star,
but the brilliant star one is –
is not easy.
It takes courage to be congruent
with one's experience,
to act in authenticity –
unconcerned with the constant, fierce, collective censorship
of any breach of convention.

Equally,
to be present as no one for so many
is not easy.
It takes courage

to be totally absent –
to be willing to blend into the backgrounds of others...

To accept I am no one
for almost everyone
is to surrender to death...
to my imminent disappearance
from this world of infinite actions, infinite scenes –
infinite overlapping films...

It is to accept that on my death day (or night)
many others unknown to me
will also be dying,
and babies unknown to me
will be being born,
and that tides of time will roll on
without pause for my departure,
and the trees and animals and insects and birds and fish
will continue in celebration –
as they did the day before,
and as they will the day after –
of the beauty of it all.

I accept because I accept my life –
my importance to many or some or none
changing nothing:
I can be an extra for others
because I do not doubt
I am a star –
shining uniquely,
in a firmament of equally unique stars.

Sitting on this bench,
I enjoy being everyone's no one
because thus
I am surrounded by stars.

Here in this park,
in this constellation,
I admire you all.
It is an honour
to be your unnoticed extra.

VII.

When I am a someone,
a subject –
'that which acts' –
when there is only seeing:
freedom and love.

When I am a no one,
an object –
'that which is acted upon' –
when there is only being-seen:
freedom and love.

In fact:
if I can't be fully me
I can't be fully no one.
And if I can't be fully no one
I can't be fully me.

Gradually,
as I become able to be either
I become able to be both –
my own man,
and no man –
a subject and an object,
both active and receptive –
simultaneously –
both the subtle, skilful sculptor
of my experience,
and that which is sculpted.

My subject's shadows,
my grandiosity and inhumanity –
and my object's shadows,
my self-negation and neediness –
are all held in kindness,
quiet,
content.

I become both extremes
of me...
Someone and no one unite
in peace, trusting

these trees, this rain, the air,
the grass, those pigeons, that dog –
trusting existence's instinct...
my mind phased by paradox,
my heart bonded with all hearts –
the encompassing moment
loving me
inseparably.

Loving and being-loved.

As both of me
I live in celebration
of this wonderland
in which the impossibility of becoming
one with each other
is surpassed only by our longing.

This tension,
sustained,
is bliss.

I meet you...
you who are brilliantly, shamelessly significant –
also shining shamelessly.
I meet you
delighting in your insignificance –
delighting in mine.

3

NOT-KNOWING



“through not-knowing
into the great mystery”

LIVING BEYOND DEFINITION

"Those people who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do."

- Isaac Asimov

Does 'living beyond definition' mean that we become immobilised by our not-knowing? Not at all. We can function as we always have. We just don't presume to know 'the laws' of the universe – only what seems to work, and not work, while we're here in this enchanted reality (this reality within which even modernity's disenchantment is an enchantment).

This piece is essentially about not-knowing, about reopening to the existential mode – to the wonder, to the magic – not only of the flowers blooming and the birds hatching, but also to the wonder of our racial in-fighting, and cruelty and ravenous terror. As I say, 'living beyond definition' excludes nothing – it's business as usual – "the office can still open on time". But as the existential is integrated, the everyday comes to glow within a humbling, heart-softening, unifying awe.

"Is not to let go of a lie to be in-truth?" we ask. No, I don't think it is. It is just to be more honestly in one's not-knowing.

"Yes, but people who think they know it all are deluded! Aren't they? Whereas you don't think you know it all – so you're not deluded. Right? You are in a far superior position! Right?!" No, but there are parts of me that are afraid, that are desperate for a knowing – for something, anything, to hold onto – even uncertainty, if that is certain. There are parts of me that so need identity and importance, that feel like they're drowning in not-knowing without it, that will turn anything into a point of view. And there are parts of me that can't bear (what they perceive as) the insignificance of equality, – that will fight tooth and nail to be just that little bit better.

These are the more contracted parts that would turn not-knowing into another knowing, that would go to battle with my brothers (and sisters) – not to win the point, or the object under dispute, or even victory for justice, but for the sake of being right – and by being the right one, and not the wrong one, of being someone of significance.

There is a tightrope to be walked by those of us who are committed to honesty, but who – in the ebb and flow of our contracting and expanding – will inevitably sometimes make of not-knowing and subjectivity and uniqueness: "The Irrefutable and Absolute Truth!"

But to live beyond definition is precisely that - to live beyond definition. It is to live beyond right and wrong, significance and insignificance, superior and inferior.

One other point I want to clarify is that where I say, “where the mind shakes our hand and says ‘this is as far as I can take you’”, I might seem to imply that ‘The Undefined Life’ is lived in a mindless state, a place where reason is no longer relevant. But this is not what I mean. In my experience, as I let go more and more of my need for definition, my mind (the rational mode) continues to serve me as faithfully as ever.

The goodbye to the mind that I refer to is a moment in our rational development when the mind changes function: from seeking to control reality, to supporting us in managing not being in control. Or perhaps more accurately – when it becomes more preoccupied with the latter (not that the former stops).

In this piece I speak about living beyond definition as a positionless position. It is not a material or a spiritual position. It questions equally “the religious believer and his fanatical challenger”. But, since it is more likely to be appropriated by ‘the spiritual’ among us, I stress it is not ‘candles and incense’, it is not some sophisticated, solipsistic spiritual position to win debates with (“aha, but how can you know that for sure?!", "or that, either, for that matter!", "aha, there, you see, you’re doing it again! But how can you really know?!") – it is not a brilliant philosophy with which to shine at parties, and win boyfriends and girlfriends, and be a star. It is not an intellectual stance, it is a return to honesty. That’s all.

I have fear. And I sense you do too. And yet I feel I have no other honest option other than to let go of my obsessive defining. I enter ‘the undefined life’ – and then I find myself defining again! So I jump again, and again. It is not a one-time leap. It is continuous.

Living Beyond Definition

Most people live
The Defined Life –
the life of limited possibility,
of fenced-in imagination...
scuttling and bumping about,
year after year –
busy, oh-so-busy, maintaining precarious value systems
and worldviews –
living and dying in reality-cages
wrought by ancestors as fearful as themselves –

blind to the gaps between the bars.

I don't just mean those who live
The Life of Worries –
of insurance policies,
of newspaper reading and common sense,
of trimmed hair and lawns and manners – no!
They are certainly Defined Lifers.
But many people pride themselves on their rebel instincts...
they are non-conformists,
outsiders...
but, yes, they are Defined Lifers, too –
locked, perhaps, in a more colourful reality-cage:
locked in their extravagant opposition.

The Undefined Life is not about for or against.
It is about letting go
into an ungraspably bigger world.

Water falls from the sky.
What is it?
Defined Lifer: "Hydrogen and Oxygen!"
What is Hydrogen?
What is Oxygen?
Defined Lifer: "Atoms."
What are atoms?
Must we go on?
The Defined Lifer just won't release his grip
on the key.

To live The Undefined Life
is to feel the space
in which all we see is suspended.
It's to snap out of the collective trance
of ordinariness,
the trance of functionality –
it is to be flabbergasted,
it is to walk in humility –
sometimes quite intoxicated with humility –
one's heart touched with amazement and gratitude,
and grief and love,
and anger and fear,
seeing so many brothers and sisters walk

in mass denial
on a fraying rope bridge of lies
over an abyss of unimaginable wonder.

When one lives The Undefined Life
the office can still open on time,
the shopping can still get done,
the children can still be fed...
it's just that
we look around,
and down,
and up,
and realise –
we've been in Wonderland
all along.

No matter if one is for or against whatever system...
The religious believer and his fanatical challenger –
the psychic and his intuitive disprover –
they're all merrily trapped,
and merrily-resentfully trapped,
inside The Defined Life of measureable worlds,
in one or another comfortable self-deception –
not looking around,
not facing the living-dying moment –
not prepared to have their breath
taken away.

Magic is not entertainment.
Magic is where we live –
here –
inside time and space clad magic.
Magic is what we are.
To feel this,
at the office, on the street, in the forest, in the car –
this is The Undefined Life.

Where the map ends
The Undefined Life begins.
Where the answers end,
where the questioning ends,
where the mind shakes our hand and says:
"this is as far as I can take you",

and we say,
"thank you for a job well done" –
there –
the Undefined Life begins.

It isn't candles and incense,
or holy books, or relics, or places of pilgrimage...
Nor is it new age workshops,
or meditation,
or even quiet time in nature.
Candles and incense are no more The Undefined Life
than keys and credit cards.

Beyond our health foods and yoga classes,
beyond our mortgages and holiday destinations,
beyond our theism and atheism,
beyond our believing and disbelieving –
here we are:
on (what we call) a planet
(apparently) floating in outer space,
not knowing how we got here,
speculating as to how it all began,
(or if it began)
asking why we're here,
(or if there is a why)...
To face this
is to look between the bars.
It is to enter The Undefined Life.

The Undefined Life
is not some moral superiority –
a holier-than-thou hiding
up in the clouds,
in a spiritual above the material,
looking down upon this world
and its materialistic inhabitants,
("so defined!") –
kindly, knowingly, condescendingly...
It is not a transcendence,
a mortal devotion
to the wonders of an immortal beyond –
to a one day better place...

Maybe that awaits,
maybe it does not.
But why wait?
Why not join the fools who have jumped
into the abyss
and landed on magical ground?
Why not join the magicians
who can walk
through walls?

I too have fear, brother.
Let's breathe it!
I have shame too, brother –
that I so need to hold on
to your kind hand.
Let's breathe it!
Let's relax the muscle of the heart,
ride the rising pulse –
and open...
to the wonder of the trees and sky and rain,
to the wonder of metal and plastic and glass –
to the wonder of fear
and the wonder of freedom –
to the wonder of ourselves,
to the wonder of each other!

THE ELECTRIC FAN IS AN IMPOSTER

"The earth laughs in flowers."

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

In this piece I am already hinting at themes I will explore in the section Political Consequence, like being 'above the law', experientially. In 'You Are A Product' I call it 'buying oneself back': the self-education, the deprogramming and reprogramming of oneself, for which each of us needs to take enthusiastic responsibility if we are to 'be the change', and not only talk about it – if we are to sacrifice ourselves upon our own innermost altars, live our lives in congruence with our own deepest, felt-seeing, and allow the energies of a new co-creativity to blow and flow through us.

The neurologists say "what fires together wires together", meaning: the vision we focus on expands, the self we see ourselves as is the self we become, and so on.

In this piece I contrast the beauty and mystery of the natural world with the synthetic environment where we live.

Not that we need to get out of it. But we do need to see where we are. And choose.

In the modern, military-industrial, all-consuming global colony, one is a product surrounded by products. One's relationship with the natural world (and one's own most natural nature) is mediated by technology. The water is not real water. The air is not real air. Women fill their breasts with silicon (or saline), and are tragically proud of their lie. Waking up in all of this, one feels like Truman in the film *The Truman Show* – as he struggles to allow the unimaginable impossibility (that everything around him is a lie) to be a possibility, and then allow the possibility to be his truth.

We are beautiful, and ugly, and brilliant, and unreasonable. We are living, dying, flickers in the flow of billions of births and deaths. We are skin and hair and nails, kidneys, lungs and spleens. We are dirty and sweaty and hilarious, and sometimes pitiful, and sometimes cruel. We are unique and unrepeatable, and forgotten in an instant. Our lives of petty importance are a waste of precious time.

We have bought into the 'life of a product' because we are afraid to come face-to-face with all of this. We have been seduced into producthood (from the moment of conception – perhaps even before), because we are seducible.

No judgement. Just recognition. And choice.

The Electric Fan Is An Imposter

Brothers, sisters, everyone...
a warning:
the electric fan is an imposter!
It looks like it is generating wind,
but it isn't –
it's mimicking the wind –
don't be fooled!

The Electric Fan Imposter is a tricky character –
take care!
It is moving the air.
So it looks like there's wind in the room.
But there isn't!
Don't be fooled!
The air is moving,
but the wind isn't doing it.
It just looks like it is.

The wind is not in the room
unless a window or door is open,
or at least a small crack –
otherwise how could it get in?

It's a bit like silicon boobs
and real ones.

And the water from my tap is not a mountain stream.
And dim lighting is not moonlight,
or even candlelight.

For most of human history women had real breasts
and the wind was a god,
now it's an energy,
and
nobody knows.
And yet –

when it was a god it thought and felt,
and now it is some sort of blind numb ghost
buffeting about in its own dead lostness,
while we are locked up with our electric fans.
Mine has three speeds,
and is multidirectional.

I wish the wind was a god again.
I wish it was noble, magnificent and mad again.
But it's so hot out
and on speed two plus multidirection I am so cool inside.

Maybe one day I will open a window on a hot day like this.
Or maybe one windy day I'll go for a walk among the trees.

Maybe one day you will say
your breasts are beautiful as they are.
It is not their shape that counts,
but how full of love they are.

Maybe one day mountain streams will flow
from my taps,
and the bamboo duck on my mantelpiece
will lay eggs,
and day by day I will slowly be surrendering my body
back to the earth where it will go,
whether as meat or ashes,
fried first. :)

Thank you for this life.
From where it came I do not know.
And where it goes,
if anywhere,
I do not know.

But, fuck –
it's a trip and a half.
It's like having taken a hallucinogenic
and stayed there sane.

I believe it was Joseph Campbell who when asked "what is the difference between psychosis and mystic awakening" replied, "the experience is the same, it's just that the mystic is able to navigate it" (that's a paraphrase).

This is the task upon me then:
to renounce all tasks,
to root in trust,
to love my fear,
to open like a mountain stream,
to lay eggs all over the place...
and above all,
to be invisible –
to sometimes be a breeze
in the moonlight,
to sometimes
spin up a storm.

THE BIG HONESTY

*"I cheat and I lie
I do what I need to do to get by"
- Leonard Cohen*

In this piece I clarify what I mean by honesty – especially, how it is not moral honesty I am calling upon to unite us.

Moral honesty, ‘the little honesty’ – as against ‘the big honesty’, existential honesty – is a tricky subject. Situations are full of variables in every mode. And is our authenticity and integrity in what we say and do, or in our motivation? Can we lie out of love? There are infinite, unique situations. How could they all fit within a finite moral framework? And anyway, to say one knows what is right and what is wrong implies, once again, an overseeing of existence and its purpose that is both presumptuous and pretentious.

Not only this, but identification with a contracted sense of self, and the daily trail of self promotion, is itself a lie. So there is no real possibility of a worthwhile honesty (i.e. of not just lists of rules), until we decontract by opening to the big honesty.

The big honesty – honesty under the sky, and in the bathroom mirror – the honesty between a man and his life, and, of course, between a man and the seeming inevitability of his death is an entirely other matter. The big honesty that lands us in a new direct experience of reality – that transports us into not-knowing, into a world of mystery, into living in the wonder of the unexpected moment, into our aloneness and uniqueness, into belonging and oneness – this honesty is not about the rights and wrongs of our interactions, it is about how we orient towards all interacting.

Small moral honesty might be important, sometimes. Probably it is. But it is not my concern. My concern is the big, existential honesty that dissolves restriction, or blockage. Through existential honesty we let go of certainty, fixed positions and opposition. We return to our own experience and, therefore, to the possibility of intimacy.

In big honesty we experience a decompression, a trust, as we come to admit we are part-of-it-all. This not only liberates us from all moral codes, but allows us to live at the loving heart of all moral intention.

The Big Honesty

I don't care
about that man's litter of lies.
I don't even care
about his grand public deceits.
I care about his innermost private deceiving...
not the lies he tells to get by,
but the one big one
he tells himself.

Nor do that man's honesties impress me.
In fact, their insidious righteousness
sickens me...
His Mr Honesty –
just another identity strategy,
another security strategy –
a way to stay up
by putting others down.
His business card might say
'The Good Man' –
but it's a lie.
Nobody is good and nobody is bad.
It's just a tactic.

We are all spinning in deceit
until we look for real.

I care about standing up.
and looking,
like an archer,
right at it –
the living moment.
I care about being pierced
by the arrow of honesty.
I care about the pain and relief of admitting
we don't know who we are,
or who others are, therefore –
and the possibility of intimacy in not-knowing.

I don't care how expensive that man's suit –
how stylishly dressed he is
in his rights and wrongs –

or how stained that once-hopeful man's shirt,
how worn out his collars and cuffs:
we are all naked
underneath.

I am interested in that underneath.
I am not ashamed
to not know,
to tremble with delight,
to be afraid,
to be needy,
to be powerful,
to be utterly alone,
to be irremovable from everything.

And I am ready to stand alongside you –
naked to this moment –
beyond the pride of rightness
and the guilt of wrongness –
in an honesty that is not moral –
an honesty that is not the opposite of dishonesty –
an honesty that is a continual opening,
not a closed book –
an honesty that is an orientation, not a location –
an honesty that is the congruent expression of our experience –
yours of yours,
and mine of mine –
an honesty within which opposite truths can meet –
an honesty within which the motivations of our dishonesties
reveal themselves shamelessly –
an honesty within which we are not afraid of each other –
within which we can see, and admire, each other's strength...
Meeting there –
why would we lie?

THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH

"Nothing is Certain, Not Even That."

- Arcesilaus (315–240 BC)

Or Can We?
We can't be certain.
Of that only can we be certain.
Or can we?

I Do Not See How

I don't see how we can be certain. It seems impossible to me because we can only receive information through the 'knowledge acquiring faculties' we have – and these faculties are all subjective, limited and, therefore, fallible. And they determine our perception. For example, if I had eyelids that blinked all the time, I would perceive the world as a flickering place. Or, if I had hearing that was a thousand times more powerful than my sight, I would perceive the world, perhaps, as a blurry but extremely noisy place.

Plus, of course, my interpretation of my perception is relative to my culture and era.

Not only this, but experiments with hypnosis even throw into question whether we perceive and then interpret, or interpret and then perceive. (Do I cry simply because I believe I'm peeling an onion? I.e. interpretation/belief preceding and determining perception.)

But if all perception of reality is subjective, limited and fallible, then even the conclusion that 'we cannot know reality absolutely, objectively' – because it is arrived at through a thinking capacity that is itself limited – might also, to be blunt, be wrong.

All I feel I can say is this: that as far as I can see, we cannot know 'The Absolute Truth' (or even know that we cannot know) because whichever faculty I might claim to access it through (mind, senses, emotion, intuition, imagination, spiritual realisation) is itself limited (not all-knowing) and could, therefore, be wrong, or partial, or distorted. However much objective authority I might want to invest in any one of them, or any combination of them, they remain nevertheless subjective

(limited) faculties of reality perception. And, echoing Arcesilaus, I have to say 'nothing is certain, not even this'.

So my conclusion is that if I am truly honest I will say, "I do not know The Absolute Truth, and because I do not know The Absolute Truth, I do not presume to know the full truth of any situation, in any given moment. All I can honestly do is communicate my very personal perception. All I can do is share my own experience".

Is There Another Honest Option?

In fact, the acceptance that I don't know The Absolute Truth (whether ultimately I can or not), is also the acceptance that all I have is my own experience. And by 'my own experience' I mean, of course, not 'everything I have been through' (i.e. my memories of the past), but my experience of the present moment: my seemingly relative (not absolute) experience of the moment, which is an experience modulated and modified by my personal conditioning (from my family of origin) in all modes, and by cultural conditioning (from the era and location of my upbringing) in all modes – via senses, emotions, reason and awareness which (even if they were not conditioned) are in and of themselves limited and therefore fallible.

In any given moment all I can reliably say is that I have my own unreliable experience. Unreliable, yet uniquely mine. My conditioning might well be the continuation of my family's and culture's conditioning (how could it not be?), but I am a unique receptor and expresser of that conditioning – experiencing existence as no ancestor ever did, nor any descendant ever will. I am uniquely unreliable! I am also – like every other person past-present-future on Earth – a uniquely textured being, a fountain of creativity; vulnerable, passionate, desperate for connection with others, afraid of others, afraid of life-and-death, ridiculously courageous and determined, in short – like everyone else, I am heartbreakingly, beautifully human...

And so... if all I can honestly do (i.e. in congruence with all of the above) by way of contribution to any interaction, is share my own experience, then (in order to be more and more informed and accurate in what I share) I need to cultivate my familiarity with my own experience. Let me become more alive in my body, more attuned to my emotional patterning, more aware of the workings of my mind and more awake to the gestalt (the whole) of the moment.

Perhaps there is a gate to knowledge, a perennial philosophy, a path of self-actualisation. Perhaps there is a call of the soul, or even a call to the soul. But I don't know how I could know. Perhaps we are all already on that path – each in their own way – whether we like it or not. But I don't know how I could know. All I can say is this: I have my own experience – so where else to begin? If I am interested in this

being-alive situation in which I find myself, do I have any other option than this: to deepen my familiarity with my own experience, to go deeper and deeper into experiencing my own experience. If I never, even for a moment, have anything else, what else is there to become familiar with?

Staying Honest Together

My own devotion to getting to know my own experience seems to be a loosening of skins, of identities, of unquestioned assumptions and conditioned emotions. By showing interest (in the way I experience), like a fish realizing it is underwater, I have a sense of both a letting go and an expansion. I find myself more able to both love myself and laugh at myself!

I don't know how it works, or why it works – because, after all, even if I am looking at my own experience, I am still in it. I cannot really get out of it. Nevertheless, this becoming familiar with my own experience feels like a letting go of being so utterly controlled by my anaesthesia, my thoughtless arrogance, my habitual defendedness, my needy loneliness, my rumbling fear – and, simultaneously, like an expansion, an opening into more of me, and into less of me; a release, a bigger breathing, an emergence into interconnection, a unification.

And according to the many men I have worked with who have done, and are doing, the same – it seems to work for them, too: (a) I am honest and admit I don't know, but accept that, (b) I do have my own experience, so (c) I get to know it, and (d) this attention to myself detonates shock waves through me that loosen up my conditioning and expand the parameters of my experiencing.

This is why this book is a call. It is a call to you, dear brothers, to check this out for yourselves. Does it work for you, too? How about we get more honest, more serious, more real – together? How about we take brutal stock of ourselves – examining our experiencing gently, yet relentlessly? Does honesty take you into not-knowing too? What does not-knowing feel like? Frightening? Liberating? Both? How about each of us confronting himself with the question, "Do I agree I do not know The Absolute Truth – that I find myself alive, here-now, inside some perhaps infinite great mystery?"

People with 'spiritual' identities tell me I am here on Earth to learn something. It is a school, or perhaps a garden I have come to grow in – implying, of course, that I have come from elsewhere, and that I existed prior to my birth here on Earth. But brothers – let's get real. Let's each of us look reality in the face and ask, "Do I know-for sure I existed before I got here? Do I even know where here is? Can I say for-sure

why I am here? Or is my certainty only proportionate to my fear? Am I, quite simply, frighteningly yet miraculously, in the complete unknown?"

Other people say this not-knowing is a dark nihilism, or a relativist dead end. My experience is quite the contrary. I experience staying in not-knowing as an awakesness, an opening to adventure, a portal of possibility, a beginning, an enticement to freedom.

Other people tell me 'all is predestined'. But does destiny even exist? Again – how could I know for sure (absolutely)? Is that even possible? I don't know! So, again – the central issue becomes: can I stay in my not-knowing? Do I dare experience my not-knowing?

Yes, I seem to be just one character in a cast of millions – a cast of dead people, alive people, people yet-to-come... and even if my species, 'we the human creature', is just one species among millions of species... even if I am, as it seems I might well be, microscopic beyond imagining – still, for me, I am everything! My experience is my universe. And in the absence of any perceivable, external absolute – and therefore of any 'one way', or any absolute right and wrong – I take full responsibility for my universe - , and I act (whether it is absolutely true or not) as-if my words and actions can impact and influence reality, as -if I am (at least to some extent) responsible for my own evolution, as -if my future is up to me. What other creative option is there? In short - – since we don't know how much free will we have, this book is a call to push the edges of not-knowing/mystery/freedom - - to see how far we can go.

Not-knowing is not a static, final intellectual arrival. Not-knowing is a dynamic state of enquiry – in every mode: intellectual, yes, but also physical, psycho-emotional, intuitive, imaginative, energetic, aesthetic, existential... Not-knowing is an endlessly present adventure.

This book is a call to every man – beyond body types, beyond beliefs, beyond personality types, beyond whatever he might think he already knows about love – to feel what he feels when he meets another in not-knowing, when his open eyes meet another's open eyes... to even question individuality and identity. When I look not at, but into, another's eyes, is there something uncannily familiar? Is it true, for me, individually, that we are bound – that we are in this not-knowing together?

To hell with overt religions that tell me 'The Truth' is beyond the perceivable world! How do they know? To the junkyard with covert religions, like scientism, that tell me there is 'No Truth' beyond the perceivable world! How do they know? Let each of us ask for himself whether whatever it is that grows as trees grow, and flies as birds fly, and burrows as worms burrow, and laughs as humans laugh... whether whatever it is that runs through our blood and brains, and keeps our hearts alive even while we

sleep... whether whatever it is that we are part of, whether whatever it is we are... is beautiful – unimaginably beautiful, inconceivable – an always-everywhere miracle unfolding infinitely, synchronistically, kaleidoscopically, mind beyond mind beyond mind...

An Uprising Of Honesty

Brothers – let's make honesty political! Let's not only be honest in our prayers and with our friends. Let's step out into the world empowered by a fierce honesty, liberated by an edge-pushing freedom, our hearts unburdened by our openness, our awareness expanding as we let go. Let's step out unified and emboldened by a sense of the rightness of our individual commitments to ourselves, to the unpretentiousness of standing in our own, unique experience – all the while smiling wryly... amused by our unrelenting pretentiousness!

And if we ourselves can only go so far – let's educate our sons to go further... our sons, our daughters, our son-daughters, our daughter-sons... the generations-to-come, however they may choose to gender, or not gender, themselves.

Why should fear, and brittle certainties, and psychopathic power-control govern our world? Why should dishonesty, division, and conflict set the agenda for our personal, community and international relations? We can do better than that! Let's be simple. Let's begin at the beginning. With honesty, which leads to freedom. With honesty, which leads to humility. With honesty, which leads to love. And in freedom and humility and love, let's shout the obvious from the rooftops, and stop the planet-trashing, and end the suffering of the animals, and green the cities, and remember what it's like to watch one's vegetables grow – reconnecting not only with freedom as a concept, but as the backbone of our right to be self-sustaining - ; enjoying 'the system' if we wish, but no longer disempowered and dependent and therefore under control.

Yes, there will be sacrifice. Yes, there will be loss. But once there is a vision – a vision that moves our hearts – then we will give everything willingly. But without a vision... well, why? Why sacrifice? 'So that things don't get worse' is not the greatest motivational slogan.

Let this be our wry banner, brothers: 'We know you don't know, but we could be wrong!' Let us stand in the power of humility. To not-know is not to not-act! Why should humility be meek?!

Has this planet ever seen a global brotherhood united in freedom from knowing and, therefore, united in the freedom of not-knowing, and therefore free to change

continuously, spontaneously, moment to moment – undefeatable because undefended, impregnable because completely vulnerable, playful not pompous – as innocent and powerful and dignified as animals?!

I am not inspired by what I see in many of my brothers. I want to push them to be more radically engaged with themselves, with honesty, with life. And I see how the dominant culture doesn't feed them the questions they need to start opening. On the contrary, it feeds us all anti-depressants, which is why we walk numb. It feeds us the fast foods of possessions and entertainment, and the glamour of voluntary, economic slavery – a diet of disempowerment and dependence. And its centralised propaganda has got us celebrating our own indoctrination!

I long to be surrounded by brothers who see through all this shit. Brothers who see the small men behind the big words. Brothers who stand with their feet upon the Earth. Brothers remembering with their feet! Brothers taking themselves seriously, taking responsibility for their lives; brothers who are shedding identity-skins and opening up, brothers who know what they are giving their lives for, what they are prepared to die for. I'm in! What I want is camaraderie. Actually, I need it.

THE UNEXPECTED LIFE

"Caminante – no hay camino, se hace camino al andar." (Traveller – there is no path, the path is created as we walk.)

- Antonio Machado

Two friends on the phone:

"So, what are you up to today?"

"I am going to take the metro and meet a friend in a plaza in the centre of town."

"Oh, that sounds lovely. Have a lovely time!"

"Thank you! What about you?"

"I have to go to court. It's painful business. I don't want to go, but I have to."

"Well I hope it's not too painful. Look after yourself!"

"Thanks, you too.... bye!"

"Bye!"

We make plans. That's what minds are for – at least in part. I need food. I make a plan to get it. Plans are about how we intend to move through the reality we anticipate encountering in order to achieve our goal. However, what EXACTLY that reality will be – as and when we actually begin to move through it – we do not know. It is impossible to predict the million-and-one details that will be in flux around us as we move through our day, on the way to our goals.

In fact, useful as our plans are, they are nothing more than abstract intentions and have no existence outside of our minds. And when we live inside them – measuring the success and failure of our days by the extent to which we have achieved them – we are in our minds, in our plans, in expectation, in fantasy; not in the unexpected, not in reality. This is why people say they're "bored" (here in the land of infinite possibility), and "fine", and "not too bad, thanks", and "oh, you know – getting by"...

He takes the train and proceeds towards his meeting with his friend in the plaza... Train stop number one. Yes, he expected that. Train stop number two. Yes, expected as well. The train always stops there after stop number one. Ah, now he's arrived at his stop. What's the time? Ten o'clock? Yes, good, that's about right – that's about the time the train usually takes... and so on. Meanwhile, unbeknown to him, existence has been morphing infinite potentials in outer space, in subatomic universes, in his own brain and nervous system, in the hearts of millions of animals and birds and trees, in the weather – all in dazzling, interconnected, cosmic synchronicity.

He goes to court and it is indeed a painful business. But within anticipated

parameters. "Yes, it was fine. Pretty much as expected. Quite a good day really." Why? Because it conformed to expectation – it went to plan. People sometimes say "let go of expectation – wherever there's expectation there's also going to be disappointment". Yes, of course. But expectation is intrinsic to planning – or at the very least, wanting to achieve our goals is only natural. Why else would we set them?

We can add "and I must remember to not expect things to go as planned" at the end of each plan, but this is just more mental activity, more planning – a plan to deal with disappointment.

How then to live in what the Bhagavad Gita calls Karma Yoga – ‘non-attachment to the outcome of our actions’ – expecting yet open to the unexpected? How to neither attempt to squeeze reality into our plans, nor be disturbed when it refuses to fit? How to live in reality – in the blissful pleasure and pain of the unfurling complexity of existence? Not by relinquishing our mind's plans, but by staying in the unexpected moment while moving along the trajectory of our mind-plan. This is what I like to call living ‘The Unexpected Life’.

The Unexpected Life

All that happens,
here,
in the unknown,
is by definition –
unpredictable,
and therefore –
unexpected.

Expectation is fantasy.
Necessary fantasy, no doubt.
But reality is unexpected.

I expected to walk down this street.
I didn't expect these exact raindrop patterns
in the puddles on the pavement...
an infinitely humble, infinitely creative, rain god,
quieter than the traffic,
dancing circles around my feet...

Here,
in the Unexpected Moment...

I expected to take the metro.
I didn't expect this feeling of belonging
to a moving body of people
composed of you,
and you,
and you...
Together we travel,
stop by stop,
in an endlessly mutating one body
of destinies lightly touching.

Here,
in the Unexpected Moment...

I expected to sit together in this plaza –
but not to hear those exact birds chatting
in those wet trees,
nor to be watching that leaf flopping
down through this fine air,
nor that fine lady dropping her umbrella –
nor any one of the hundreds and hundreds of people –
each one a unique composition,
yet walking past so ordinarily –
each one a delight,
impossible to anticipate.

Here,
in the Unexpected Moment...

I expected we'd talk.
But I didn't expect the silence
between rainfalls
to slow our words down like this –
or such eroticism in our eyes –
or such fresh joy
in sitting together,
on this bench
where thousands of people will sit –
later on today, tomorrow, in years to come –
I expect...

Here, in the Unexpected Moment...

FREEDOM

"Only what is in your experience is in the truth for you. Listen with your whole body – which is what it is to listen in your own experience."

- Barry Long

In this piece I look at freedom from the perspective of each mode of experience. But first I set the scene with some general observations on freedom and achieving and self-acceptance. (And just in case it's not clear: your "closest friend", who I refer to at the end of those introductory words, is me.)

I then talk about the 'tabla rasa' free mind in the rational mode, and, while discussing freedom in the emotional mode, I illustrate how one maintains that freedom. (And although this won't make sense until after you've read it... so come back and read this again afterwards... the aim of the way I relate to the tentacle is not to get it to let go of the woman it wants to merge with, but to arrive at its own choice.)

I use the section on freedom in the existential mode to contrast freedom and freedom-from – what we might call absolute and relative freedom. From which it then follows that freedom in the physical mode is not about tiptop health, loads of money and no work (the hedonistic dream), nor even freedom from wage slavery, or to cross borders without passports (all of which would be freedoms-from), but rather in experiencing that "everywhere is always the perfect setting for what is about to happen next".

Faith in Time

I.

If there's anything you want to achieve
except to be more true to what you already are –
to the creativity that is your life –
then you are not free.

Freedom, by definition, cannot be wanting of anything.
Not even freedom.

II.

This is my body as it is in this moment,
this is my personality as it is in this moment:
this is my me in this moment.
Billions of years of molecular evolution have conspired
to this moment, which is, therefore, perfect
because this is what time has chosen.

III.

I set myself free when I rest back down
into my aloneness –
open to the interconnected oneness
that excludes nothing –
and surrender to being
all of me –
not touting the perfected me (so-called),
not hiding the messed-up me (so-called)...
when I say
"yes, all of it –
that is me!"

IV.

From then on
I walk at my own pace.
No hurry.
(Unless I want to...)
After all,
there's nowhere to go,
and I am already out walking
with my closest friend.

Freedom In The Rational Mode

Freedom in the rational mode is
a tabula rasa mind –
an open, breezy mind,
a mind not attached to its own ideas,
always learning –
innocent and playful.

There is, however, a deep sophistication in the simple mind –
it is the scholarly mind

that knows all knowledge is makeshift...
It is therefore wise,
not just clever.

Freedom In The Emotional Mode

Freedom in the emotional mode is
being willing to be who you are –
which means giving yourself permission to be
someone new in every moment.
This is achieved through accepting every tentacle that reaches out
from deep, deep within us,
desperate for a pause in the intensity of loneliness.
No judgement there:
who wouldn't reach out?
Even this book is a reaching out.
We don't stop.
But we can say
"dear most, beloved tentacle –
Where are you going?
What do you seek?"
And we can listen,
deep, deep within.
"I felt so myself when I was with her" replies the tentacle,
"so loving and honouring of her....
It was so beautiful!
I am reaching and reaching and reaching
to be suckered up with her –
so that I will feel like that forever."

I do not answer the tentacle rationally,
but rather feel for the emotion in its words...
"Dear tentacle, I felt it so deeply too.
Yes, it was beautiful while she and I were together.
Yet, dear tentacle, are you sure you want to be bound to her forever?"
I wait gracefully, allowing the tentacle the time it needs
to make its own emotional decision.
"No, I am not sure", says the tentacle in a hushed tone,
and begins to shrink back inside me,
to rest
in itself,
having been loved

and understood
and set free
again.

This is freedom in the emotional mode.
Loving acceptance of whoever we are in any given moment.
We are perfect as we are,
like every fish, like every tree –
because it's who we are...
There's no better way to be
who you already are.
You are not perfectible...
Perfect according to who?
By what arbitrary standard?
You are who you are –
always already perfect
because always already you.

Freedom and Freedom-From (Freedom In The Existential Mode)

Freedom is not freedom-from.
Even if it's freedom-from oppression or abuse
it's still freedom-from –
not freedom.

Freedom-from is a change of situation –
an improvement.
Freedom is a state of being –
unimproveable
because there is nothing outside of it
with which to improve it.

Freedom-from is a relief, a joy...
Freedom is not emotional –
emotions happen inside it.

To struggle for freedom-from oppression –
by others,
or by oneself –
is not less than to fall into freedom –
any more than the child is less
than its mother.

But there is no struggle-for in freedom.
Everything is perfect, meaning:
it is the only way it could be –
and that includes
the struggle for freedom-from.

Freedom-from is a rearranging of the furniture.
Freedom is the house.
Freedom is in fully occupying
our experience –
in letting go of what we never had:
in letting go of others' experience –
in coming home to an aloneness
that fills the air.

"Fall toward the glassblower's breath!" says Rumi –
"let yourself be silently drawn
by the stronger pull of what you really love!"

Freedom is not freedom-from
time and space.
Time and space happen inside it.
Freedom is not freedom-from
conditioning, or ego, or contraction –
they happen inside it.

Freedom is not incarnate.
It is not embodied.
The body is inside it.

In freedom the silence is louder
than sound,
the space around things is more palpable
than things.
There is no pressure.
Freedom-from is not needed.
There is peace
within which turbulence happens.

There is love.
Not love-for (anything) –
just love.

Freedom In The Physical Mode

Freedom in the physical mode is in acceptance of your surroundings.
Everywhere is always the perfect setting
for what is about to happen next.

It is in acceptance, loving acceptance, of your situation, of your life
now –
of this you...
who is not the you you were 20, or even 5 years, ago,
who is not the you you will be if you get older –
the you you are in this precise life moment –
living there, doing that, connected with those people, feeling like, thinking about...
this you,
with those clothes on,
those belongings, those things –
your things.

It is in accepting your body,
in thanking your body
by tending your body –
and in your acceptance of illness and aging and death.

The key to freedom in the physical mode
is in “doing what you’re doing” as Barry Long puts it –
in focus and concentration
to the exclusion of all else –
(that is, of everything that you’re not doing anyway!) –
on what you’re actually doing.

It is in “not trying”, as Charles Bukowski puts it –
in being in spontaneous conversation
with the voice of the moment –
in being neither deferential,
nor deaf,
but in being both the storyteller –
the universal imagination –
and receptive to the story of your life
as it is being narrated
to you,
moment-to-moment.

*"Freedom is the will to be responsible for ourselves."
- Nietzsche*

COLLECTIVE CONSTIPATION

“The clock tells you everything and keeps you busy enough to forget that there could be another way of living your life.”

— *Malidoma Patrice Somé*

I hope you’re feeling that, page by page, you’re getting clearer and clearer about ‘The Truth!’ :)

Why am I joking like this? Because the need for ‘The Truth’, and the security of certainty, is not only persistent and insidious in most, if not all, of us – but it is the default mode of being into which we have been collectively conditioned, and therefore to which we return as soon as we take our eye off the ball. Just as a tired pet dog will go to the place where its bed has always been, we default to knowing.

More accurately perhaps: we detach 90% (let’s say) from the existential mode, perhaps 60% or 70% from the emotional mode, function more fully in the physical mode, but in a clunky robotic way – with little spontaneity, sensuality or eroticism (unlike children and animals), and therefore remain predominantly identified with the rational mode (mind), living once-removed from reality in a swirl of facts without a moment of respite from our mental-juggling to notice just how lost and empty we feel. Which is, of course, the point.

It is as if we are locked in a kind of chronic, collective, emotional constipation... What temperature is it? What time is it? Where did I leave my keys? Are the trains running on time? When do you have your vacation booked for this year? I need to check my bank account. Has the car been serviced? Haven’t prices gone up? Have you heard about the new government policy? What was the score of the football? The fact-obsession is so all-pervasive that it is almost invisible (there’s no edge to see where it ends). But this clinging to facts, this desperation for certainty, only perpetuates the meaninglessness, the loneliness and the fear. Bluntly: it doesn’t work.

The problem is that we don’t know (say I) who we are, where we are, or why we are here. And the accumulation of facts and the continuous constipated rearranging of facts, will not change this. A more potentially successful tack, therefore, would be to come to terms with not-knowing.

I know it’s tough, and I know it’s frightening – but it does seem that all of our ‘truths’ are provisional. To me, for example, it seems highly likely that one day (if we don’t

destroy ourselves) people will look back on our view of the universe in exactly the way that we look back on our ancestors gazing up from a flat Earth at a sky populated by demigods. In other words, in my opinion, it is very possible that we are not on a rock ball floating through space at all.

Yes, it works, it seems, so far, to think in terms of planets and gravity and energy and velocity, and so on. Rockets go up, satellites bounce information about, aeroplanes take off and land... it all works fine. But this is all we can honestly say: that it works fine. Working fine doesn't reveal anything about the meaning of existence, or even about the full physical design of the universe. It just means it works fine, for now.

We remain as ignorant as to the nature of the wind, for example, – as to what it is in-itself – as we have always been. We cannot see the wind. It pushes the air. We note its presence only by its effect on the things it touches (or the effect of the air it has pushed on things the air touches). The wind itself is silent! The wind itself is invisible. And it is big. Very big. And powerful. Very powerful. What is it? Shall we call it a god, the Wind God? The Vedic, Vayu? Or, Wind Gods? The Greek, Anemoi, the Roman, Venti? Or shall we call it a force of nature, an impersonal energy (i.e. having no personality) – an impersonal energy propelled by other impersonal energies in an impersonal universe? It really makes no odds what name we give it. We still don't know what it is.

In short – like a man lost in the jungle for years, obsessed with measuring the lengths of leaves in order to give himself some sort of sense of control – we default to the constipated repetition of facts, but actually all we have is some workable information about the way things work, and no knowledge whatsoever about existence in-and-of itself.

Rather than nodding in agreement with the facts presented by newscasters (facts fabricated by fact-mongering think tanks financed by couldn't-care-less corporations – they truly could not care less than they do – corporations that thrive on our collective fact-obsessed distress)... rather than nodding and nodding and nodding, night after night after night, what would happen if we turned off the TV and faced our not-knowing?

What would happen? Well, as I keep saying: not-knowing opens us to mystery and belonging, to uniqueness and equality and love, and to action in service of belonging and love. (It is the red pill!) But let's take it step by step... If you wanted to give a gift to a terrified child – how would you approach that child?

Perhaps the gentlest approach would be to begin by asking ourselves: "Why am I not facing my own not-knowing?" And, "What do I need to be able to begin to face it?"

CEILING DWELLERS

"Tell me," Wittgenstein asked a friend, "why do people always say, it was natural for man to assume that the sun went round the earth rather than that the earth was rotating?" His friend replied, "Well, obviously because it just looks as though the Sun is going round the Earth." Wittgenstein replied, "Well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as though the Earth was rotating?"

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

This is a light-hearted piece on not-knowing – drawing our attention to how little we know even of that which we take to be most obvious.

The invitation implicit in this is, of course as always, that we open into this not-knowing experientially – i.e., fully, not just cognitively/conceptually, in the rational mode. I find mind-only debates barren, exhausting and pointless.

However, the cultivation of the capacity to live at the centre of our experience is the prerequisite for a revelatory opening to the oceanic unknown. Without it, best stay out of it. Without it we have no boat.

Here I have in mind not so much the management of the contractions that continuously pull us out of centre (which is also crucial), but the cultivation of belonging (in all modes). And by 'cultivation' I simply mean giving time and attention... noting the resistances... letting things unfold their way.

Before we risk upping anchor from the shores of the known we need to love our boat. We need to have painted it and decorated it (over and again) with homages to our gods: with prayers to The God of Logic for honest thinking, for sweet kisses on the nape of the neck from The God of Trust, to the God of Will for the power to be tough when we're tough and gentle when we're gentle, and to the God of Eternity for a swashbuckling disregard for death....

Where are these high seas? Where are the seas of the great mysteries? Indeed.... That is the question!

(The first line refers back to the Wittgenstein quote.)

Ceiling Dwellers

Answer:
the way it already did.

What does that imply?
Well, for one thing:
that we could be ceiling creatures.

Not quite like flies,
because, I think, they have no up nor down.

More like bats thinking
they're sleeping standing up.

Maybe the floor's the ceiling,
and the ceiling above us more floor
than we like to think.

We could have been going about our upside-down days
(hung from the ceiling, hung from the Earth)
every day, all our lives,
for so many generations now
that we're used to it,
that it is self-evident common sense now –
in fact, absolutely, irrefutably, undeniable now,
to all of us,
that we're standing up –
when, in fact,
we're hanging down.

No?
You say no?

"Well, what would it look like if we were living upside down,
but had gotten so used to it
that we now believed we knew, for certain,
hand in fire,
that we were the right way up?"

Look, let's not argue –

let's strap magnetic boots on,
and walk about on metal ceilings for a year –
and then let's talk again...

I bet we'd get used to it!

But, yes, you're right –
so what?

Look, I've got a better idea:
let's look in this telescope for something we know
is the right way up.
Then by comparison we can know
which way up we are –
for sure.

Damn...
can someone help me operate this thing?
I can't work it out...
which way up is the Milky Way?

4

RELIGION AND HONESTY



“honesty, not-knowing, mystery”

NO TO MOTHER EARTH

(No To Spiritualized, Anti-Men, So-Called Feminism)

"The world is a very puzzling place. If you're not willing to be puzzled, you just become a replica of someone else's mind."

- Noam Chomsky

Two excerpts from psychotherapist Rick Belden's article 'Men and The Mother Wound': "Elements of the culture have amplified, and continue to amplify, the conditioning I received as a child that women (especially mothers) are inherently virtuous, self-sacrificing, and morally infallible". Think: women = good. And, "It often seems that we are inundated with an apparently infinite stream of stories about misogyny, abuse, and violence inflicted on women by men". Think: men = bad.

This idealisation of women and demonisation of men is part of the modern industrial cultural climate. It circulates like a wind, or a spell, almost telepathically, in and out of the minds and hearts of both men and women – as we lick our patriarchal wounds, and try to dream anew.

Unfortunately, we will not dream anew unless we make this cultural climate conscious. Because nothing can be healed before we are conscious of it...

I call this post-patriarchal, anti-patriarchal, anti-male breeze 'spiritualised, anti-men, so-called feminism'. By this I mean a perhaps well-intentioned, but not-thought-out tendency to conflate certain concepts, making them almost synonymous. On the one side these would include: woman, the feminine, the earth, the mother, the indigenous, peace, the heart, feeling, the victim, the saviour, goodness. On the other: man, the masculine, patriarchy, oppression, god, sky, detachment, heartlessness, war, pollution, the military-industrial complex, badness.

Nor is this tendency helped in any way by new-agey, neo-indigenous theologies that speak of Father Sky and Mother Earth. In fact, they are the bloodstream it feeds on.

This doesn't mean that we can't lie on the grass and feel, sometimes, that the Earth holds us like a loving mother. But that is different from saying the Earth IS our mother, feminine (i.e. womanly) in its very essence, and therefore not masculine (i.e. manly), and therefore somehow a place where women belong in a way that men don't – the home of women that men are just visiting.

This conflation (not made obvious as in the paragraph above), scattered innocently across endless websites and cinema screens, has a subliminal logic that goes like this: men are heartless. They are the problem. They have dishonoured Woman, Mother Earth, The Divine Mother. However, woman is the embodiment of the Divine Mother on Earth. She is heartfelt. Man would do well to turn towards woman for guidance. Woman is man's saviour. Woman is the saviour of the world.

That women would swallow this story only speaks of their anger, and fear, and that as men we would chew on it only speaks of our disempowerment, and the weight of our guilt and shame.

As I have said elsewhere, there is a certain predictability about the rise of such a swing in the direction of matriarchal dominance – but, obviously, if we want to co-create a civilisation of equality – of the experience of equality, that is to say, of love – then this is not the way.

Everyone is unique. Everyone can have qualities we cluster together as masculine, and everyone can have qualities we cluster together as feminine. Anything less than allowing this to be the case is simplistic, restrictive and oppressive.

If by Father Sky we mean all things spiritual and divine – aren't we all equally divine? Or are men made in His image, and women, well – almost? And if by Mother earth we mean the sacred, interconnected intelligence of the planet – aren't we all equally flesh and neurons and nerves and hair, breathing equally, listening equally, dying equally? Or is the Earth the Goddess, and women made in Her image, and men, well – almost?

No To Mother Earth

(No To Spiritualized, Anti-Men, So-Called Feminism)

I.

As a man

I do not want to walk on a Mother Earth.

Nor do I want to walk on a Father Earth.

As a man

I do not want to stand within an omnipresent Mother Goddess.

Nor beneath an omniscient Father God.

God, Father, Superior, Authority, Right, Man
thunders:

Woman Inferior Wrong.

Goddess, Earth, Heart, Salvation, Goodness, Woman
screams:
Man Heartless Bad.

We need to take care.

Language shapes perception,
perception shapes thought and feeling,
thought and feeling shape action.

Thus we create the worlds
we speak of.

II.

Are male oxen or giraffes or ducks
less of this world
than female oxen or giraffes or ducks?
Is the cock somehow less of this earth
than the cunt?

I do not feel silence and space and stars
are man-like –
or streams and sand and storms
woman-like.
Do you?

If not,
don't collude
with concepts that would condemn men
to the inequality
with which women are familiar.

I am a man
and I walk this Earth
in belonging.
I am a man
and I love this Earth –
every leaf, every pebble, every eye,
every brook, every tail, every kiss...

I am a man
and my male body

arose out of this world –
my male body (as we speak)
is being-breathed-by this world –
my male body obeys
the rhythms of this world...

And my dear hope is to lay my male body down
one day
in gratitude –
for the opportunity to have existed here
with my every beloved brother and sister –
each of us ripening then withering –
crawling then standing then running then falling –
generation upon generation
watched by the trees,
watched by the ocean...

As Mary Oliver says:
"I think of each life as a flower, as common as a field daisy...
and each body a lion of courage,
and something precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms".

III.

I hate it that my sister was and is made less...
I hate every rape,
I hate every kick, every punch, every put down,
every silencing, every domination, every violence
upon her by man.
I hate it.
I am ashamed of it.
And it is the collective story I am in –
whether chosen or not...

Just as every atom of me is vibrating
with every other atom on Earth –
I live in the story of man,
I am the story of man...
But, dear brother –
I am waking up inside this story –
like a lucid dreamer –
and suddenly I can choose.

I can choose how the story goes on...

Yes, I am the story of man.

Yes, I take responsibility.

But I will not live looking back.

And I will not be the target of woman's
(conscious or unconscious) vengeance –

nor will I be

the self-sacrifice of man's shame.

I am a flesh, hair, tooth, eating, shitting earth creature –

as much as my every milky, bloody, sweaty sister.

And she as much an indefinable, invisible, sacred self as me.

I am a man

I walk the earth

in belonging,

in anguish,

in disbelief,

horrified,

furious,

committed.

EARTHED

*"United we stand, divided we fall."
- Aesop's Fables*

Wherever your feet are,
you are upon the Earth –
just there,
where you are.

Wherever I stand
I too am upon the Earth –
just here,
where I am.

Here in Spain,
as I breathe out
my awareness goes down –
through my belly, cock and balls, legs and feet –
down through European soil
into the landmass of continents
around which the oceans swirl and storm and sleep.

My breath slips into every continent
passing through solid rock as silently as electricity –
and rises to meet the soil again
where my father stands
and kisses the soles of his feet –
and where my mother stands,
and kisses her feet, too –
and rises and kisses the feet of everyone I know,
of every brother and sister
wherever they stand,
however they stand –
and then the feet of everyone not yet met,
or never to be met...

Kisses that say:
"I apologise utterly

for having made where I stand
more important,
or less important,
than where you stand".

Kisses that say:
"I apologise utterly
for not having loved you –
and you and you and you and you –
as you deserve and need to be loved."

I inhale...
My breath travels back to me –
back through the one-Earth landmass,
back to Europe,
back to my town,
back to here
where I stand –
up through my feet and legs and balls and cock and belly –
back to my lungs and heart –
where I hear you say:
"But of course I forgive you –
how could I not?
Have I not also made where I stand
more important and less important,
than where you stand?"
I hear you say:
"How could I not forgive?
Have I always loved you
as you deserve and need to be loved?"

I receive this forgiveness and love
multiplied by billions –
standing as if magnetised
to the iron core of the planet –
the soles of my feet vibrating
with the soles of your feet,
with every foot –
and with every paw and root...

There must be some secret current
in our breathing!
What am I plugged into?!

As we connect
we are all galvanised!

To every one of you –
you with four feet, you with two, you with one, you with none –
to all of you, I say:
“Thank you –
a billion thank yous!
Through my trembling feet
I feel you there,
wherever you are –
I feel us all
here together –
united through the medium of the Earth.”

MONKEYS LAUGHING, BIRDS ON OUR SHOULDERS

"Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to."
— Mark Twain

I.

Sometimes the monkeys, when they're not busy being scared of us, sit around and have a good giggle at the foolishness of human pretentiousness. They roll about laughing as they picture us strutting about in our 'fashions'. Imagine a rhinoceros with high heels, or a donkey with a tie (convinced, of course, they looked fabulously chic – convinced we were impressed, or if not, envious). That's what we're like! And the monkeys see us clearly.

Sometimes the monkeys laugh at the silliness of our high heels and ties, but more often the hilarity is at our absurd arrogance, and, above all, at our obliviousness to our own absurdity.

What they don't know though is that we're even more ludicrous than they imagine. What they don't know (and I can see them now, just outside my window, sitting on the edge of their branches as I say this, listening eagerly – looking forward to falling off and hitting the ground in hysterics)... what they don't even suspect is... that we don't consider ourselves animals anymore! Whooops.... there they go!

Yes, yes, of course we can sit down and self-define, and concur that we are of mammalian origin – but in our everyday lives, and in our self-image, and in our internal sense of the order of the universe – we do not feel like we are animals.

This has gone so far that we say, "Oh look at the expression in that tiger's/pigeon's/badger's/monkey's eyes – they're just like human eyes!" What fools we are! Of course they're like human eyes! They're animal eyes, and we are animals too. Our eyes are similar because they have animal eyes – and we have animal eyes. That's why they're similar! We do those eye expressions, yes – every species does them! No wonder the monkeys can't contain themselves – every animal on planet Earth can see we are animals except us!

"No, we have abilities the animals don't", we say, adjusting our sunglasses, driving our cars. What fools we are! Don't many, if not all, animals have abilities we don't? But lo and behold! – in the hierarchy of abilities that, as it so happens, we the human species has drawn up – our abilities come out on top. They are the most important –

making us, therefore, it would seem, the most important animal. Reading over my shoulder as I write this (apart from a few who are muttering "bloody cheek!"), the monkeys are having the time of their life!

We live as if our cities were somehow of another dimension than, say, ant hills – as if we were of the heavens, here in temporary residence, while all the others (animals, fish, insects, birds, plants...) are actually indigenous to this dimension. Not us though, we are somehow apart and above. But I had better stop – otherwise there could be heart attacks – monkey deaths by hysterics... "We'll send them the ghost of your grandpa!", they're joking (apparently he was impressive), "then they'll see what dimension we're from!" Oh no – things are getting worse – now ghost grandpa has appeared and is rolling around uncontrollably, too!

II.

Wherever Saint Francis of Assisi would walk
birds would flutter and land on his shoulders.
Like them, he was at home
on this Earth.

Is it not tragic birds don't flutter and land
on everyone's shoulders?
Is it not tragic
they're afraid of us?

We have built homes that keep birds out!
Wouldn't you love sparrows pecking
on your kitchen floor?
Wouldn't you love swallow nests
crafted into the corners of your living room ceiling –
robins nesting in your bookshelves –
and fluffy blue tit nests on top of the wardrobes
in your children's bedrooms?
But the birds are afraid
of the afraid.

As this ugly era of concrete cities ends,
and we build anew –
how will we know we have built beautifully?
Because there will be feathers on our floors,
and beaks at our ears.
Have you ever looked a bird in the eye?
Their courage is daunting.
They are not stupid.

A NON-RELIGIOUS UPRISING

"Religion is a defense against the experience of God."

- Carl Gustav Jung

"Irrevocable commitment to any religion is not only intellectual suicide, it is positive unfaith because it closes the mind to any new vision of the world. Faith is, above all, openness – an act of trust in the unknown."

- Alan Watts

I was telling a friend about The Uprising of Man, and he said "all this talk of honesty – sounds to me like you're starting a religion" – which made me think about the characteristics of religions, and how I see a potential uprising and uniting of men in honesty and equality in relation to them.

In the end (so far) I have come to feel the defining characteristics of religions are: (a) they think they know 'The Truth' (about everything), i.e. they are certain; (b) they know 'The Way to get to The Truth' (standardisation); and (c) their structures are hierarchical. In relation to this, I see our potential uprising as: (a) (re: certainty) not pretending to any absolute knowledge – quite the contrary: highly suspicious of any claim to certainty and absolute knowledge, and valuing honesty and not-knowing, the mystery, the unknown, as; (b) (re: standardisation) not having A Way, other than having recognised that all we ever have is our own experience – staying in it. And if all we have is our own experience, then what else is there to stay with anyway?! And finally, as (c) (re: hierarchy) having absolutely no hierarchy. Each of us has our own experience, and is therefore unique. And all uniques are equal. They're all one of a kind.

I was therefore going to call this piece 'An Anti-Religious Uprising', but actually I don't feel anti-religious at all. I feel religion holds the existential mode in a way that modern culture doesn't, and can also offer a deep sense of community to its members (that modern culture doesn't). I do feel, however, that as we become a global family we need to revision our relationship with these traditions – and I will talk about this in the piece following this one.

Finally, in this piece I also touch on the issue of travelling together in the unknown, each in their own experience, bonded in deep equality – do we therefore let each other do absolutely anything? Do we never intervene? "After all, I don't know what is absolutely right and absolutely wrong – so who am I to judge?" As much as addressing this issue, I also try to recreate something of the flavour of travelling

“each in their own experience” together – it is not a world without challenge, or conflict.

A Non-Religious Uprising

Every religion Knows The Truth.
Every religion Has A Standard Way To Know The Truth.
And because there is A Way, inevitably,
some people are further along it than others, therefore,
every Religion has a Hierarchy.

But how can there be hierarchy
when each of us is in their own experience?
How can I say I know more (about existence) than you?
How do I know how much you know?
Is such knowledge quantifiable?

You might feel I know more than you,
but I only feel I know what I know.
Or perhaps, more accurately –
I experience what I experience,
and I have some ideas about it.

II.

Who needs the religious ticket
to journey?
Everyone is already journeying
from birth-to-death –
their days and nights flashing by...
"How did I get here?"
"Have I always been here?"
Their world their own surreal slideshow...
day/night, day/night, day/night.

All of us anaesthetized
to survive –
we reach out from inside our private viewings
for soothing from anaesthetized others –
here in this Ayahuascan madhouse,
this Ayahuascan hospital...
this world of dreams –
this dream of a world.

Drunk on fear –
(understandably),
and low on trust –
we topple in and out of ourselves,
year after year –
moved by ambitions and longings
we believe we have chosen
(which maybe we have).
We are all
already journeying –
each in their own unjudgable way.

From whom does he need advice
to find his way?
From you?
From me?
From we who are convinced of our own ways?

And yet I do intervene –
when I feel I see hatred strike,
or the effects of self-disgust.
I act because
the heart outrages –
and I just must...
That, or in-rage,
and self-betray,
and eat myself away...
And yet,
and yet,
even then –
who knows,
who knows...

III.
I don't trust religions.
I wouldn't 't trust anyone who said he knew
the meaning of life for everyone.

At most I could say:
I have given life many meanings
in my lifetime –
and now I understand it thus...

(I doubt though I will still understand it thus...
in ten or twenty years).

All meanings (including this one) are provisional.
We cannot deny our meanings –
just hold them more humbly.

I don't trust religions.
I wouldn't trust anyone who said he knew
the way everyone should think and feel and behave.
I dislike and I oppose their standardisation.

I stand in protection of the sanctity of uniqueness –
in defence of everyone's innate right
to walk alone –
flanked by alonenesses –
in the unknown,
into the unknown...
and their freedom to choose
how to walk through their death –
and, therefore, their freedom to choose
how to walk towards it.

IV.
And although, brother,
in the assembled circle of uniquenesses,
I will speak to stop you
if I feel you hurting and wanting to hurt –
it will not be out of rightness,
but because I must –
because when you are hurting and want to hurt
you hurt us all –
and I am one of us all.

Simultaneously,
I care for you.
And I am with you.

Whoever it is you see
presiding over the gates of your death –
whatever it is you two are discussing –
I wish you well in your conversation,
I wish you well on your way.

How can there can be
a rulebook for freedom?
Books begin and end,
freedom doesn't.

Everyone is already journeying.
Everyone is afraid.
Certainty, rules, standard truths, placement in a hierarchy –
I understand, I understand...

But if there was a god,
who wanted us so tucked up and safe –
surely he would've written the rules in the sky
in non-erasable clouds,
or in pine trees on mountain slopes,
or got the birds to sing them every dawn,
or the rain to tap them in Morse code on our windows?
Don't you think?
Why just write them on paper,
which is so flimsy –
and which can only be read
within one's experience?

I have my own experience,
and you have yours.
I couldn't possibly proclaim absolute certainty,
and I don't see how you could either.
But there,
there in the unknown –
there is our freedom, there is faith –
there is our surrender, and there is our love –
present precisely because
we are meeting
in the unknown.

The rest is lies!
The certainty, the standards, the hierarchies –
all lies!
That is my opinion.

Faith is not a lie.
Faith is beautiful.

Devotion is not a lie.
Devotion is beautiful, too.
The expansiveness,
the experience of the holy
everywhere –
the humility, the gratitude –
all of this is beautiful...
as true as
the certainty, the standards and hierarchies
are lies.

We are ego-intoxicated, mystical creatures –
each with the sacrosanct right to respect
for his uniqueness,
for his journeying,
for his freedom.

Still I might stand and oppose you.

TO MY RELIGIOUS BROTHER

"Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground."

- Rumi

I.

I feel a special bond with my religious brothers, because I have been a religious man myself.

If we see each religion as a specific contextualisation of the existential impulse, then I too have lived inside such a context. I have looked out at life through a religion's eyes, revered its books as 'scripture' ('the word of god'), deferred to its senior staff whom I considered 'closer to god' than me, knelt and bowed and prostrated myself, observed the rituals of its holy days, obeyed its commandments, felt exalted, and believed myself sanctified and redeemed.

After some years, though, I just had to leave. It felt like the religion that had vitalised my existential impulse was now killing it. My unique expression of my unique existential quest had evolved and no longer conformed to scripture. Nor was it condoned by the senior staff. In fact, the more intense and sincere I felt, the less welcome I was – until I came to feel like a giant Alice in a tiny wonderland, and it seemed obvious I had outgrown that religious context.

Those last two paragraphs, while accurate, in no way convey the many years of tortured self-doubt and fear that I went through – as I transformed from staunch community member to apostate, to heretic. The deeper my faith, the shallower, it seemed, the religion. Which wasn't what I had wanted.

II.

Faith begins where understanding (the rational mode) ends. Faith is trust not in the rational, but in the existential mode. It is trust in our most expanded intuition. And because each of us is within their own experience, there are potentially as many faiths as there are people. "There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground."

Religion can support our faiths – to a point. It can offer understandings to keep the mind steady, rituals to stir and thicken and mature those understandings, and a community to accompany us in our trepidation. After all, faith is a risk.

But, at the end of the day, religions are founded on other men's faiths (usually they're men's) – not on our own. Another man realised something. He spoke about it. Maybe he wrote about it. Maybe he explained how he came to his realisation. And that was it – the foundations of the religion were laid. A couple of generations later... there are symbols and signs, buildings that all look the same, ideas that are in and ideas that are out, ways 'we' do things that others don't, and above all, some distinguishing feature that makes 'us' just that little bit ahead of everyone else (if not a long, long way ahead).

But whoever that man was, and however wonderful his realisations, and whether or not he personally believed his realisations came from beyond this dimension - – he was not you. And you only have you (your experience). You can listen to him, you can learn from him. But that listening and learning is part of your unique existential journey. Even if you decide to walk within the religion he founded, or that was founded in his name, do not lose touch with your own journey. If you do, as I did, (at least for some time), you will be lost. You will be lost in him, his teachings, the precepts, the structures set up in his name - – and the whole emotional swamp of clinging and pretension that underpins every religion.

Of course, it was only because my quest continued that I came into conflict with the religion. If I'd been happy to show up for prayers once a week, and maybe for the occasional holy day, and (in some vague, basic sense) just agree – all would've been fine. I would still be there in that tiny wonderland today. It was only because I insisted on my own direct access to 'god' – and wasn't willing to do-my-life another man's way – that I had to leave.

III.

I am sharing all of this because although it is my personal story, I believe it is also illustrative of a larger point: that religions (a) can be helpful – but only to a point (to the point they inhibit the creativity of one's unique existential quest); and (b) that if one is to participate in a religion, one needs to do so with great care – without sacrificing one's autonomy and discrimination, or one's own very-very-personal listening-out for "the voice of the hidden waterfall".

My aim is to inspire you to hold true to your existential quest – not to get you to leave your religion. Whether you stay or not, or for how long, is none of my business. But I am calling to the pilgrim in you – to the one who does stand for honesty (and not doctrine), who is truly prepared to walk in the not-knowing and mystery of faith – the one who stands neither above nor below any other (who refuses hierarchy), the one who walks in equality, and deep, deep loving respect.

I am calling to that pilgrim, that holyman, that devotee, that man on his path, that existential traveller, that sacred soul you are. I am calling to him. I am calling to him in you, and to him inside every religious brother: "Brothers – wherever each of us might be in relation to his own religion – let us all restate our autonomy – and our authority over our own destinies. Let us take from our religions, and give back to them – but let's not get lost in them. Let's never, for a moment, consider them 'The Truth', or 'The Way'. Every religion is another man's faith writ large – and if he was a profound and passionate man, his faith might well be inspirational. But it is still not your faith. You might have faith in his faith – for a while. Maybe forever. I don't know. But let's all stay with our own faiths – and there are potentially as many faiths as there are people – and bond as brothers in faith, over and above any religion we might be involved in."

I am calling to the uniquely-you you – to the you who, if inside a religion, is not of that religion. I am calling to the you who listens to the silence, who prays from the belly, who wails in despair, who weeps with gratitude, and trusts in the inconceivable moment... I am calling to that you in you, and to that you in us all – so that we might, in these times of personal, social and planetary panic, unite in the freedom of our unique, indefinable faiths. And with great affection, perhaps, for our regional religions, simultaneously stand united in global brotherhood in service of this great mystery we are all part of (however each of us might wish to theologise this), and perhaps even bring back an expanded religiousness to our own religions.

I am calling: "Dearest religious brothers, brothers I feel I know so well, brothers in faith, in longing, in devotion – what would it be if we united as trans-religious men of honesty? How would it be if we created a metareligion, an overarching context that wouldn't interfere with whatever each of us got out of his religion, but which would unite us at the level of our deepest honesty and equality, and provide a sympathetic arena for the anarchy and beauty of unique enquiry?"

I have written about co-creating a metareligion in the end notes to this book, so you can read more there.

I have also written about going beyond our religions – specifically about going beyond the Secular West versus Islam mindset – in the piece called Almost Pacifism.

IV.

"Yes, but Mohammed, The Prophet, Blessed Be His Name, was not just another man – he was The Prophet! By following him, I am following the will of Allah!" Brother – are you willing to join me in honesty? If so, let me ask: "Can you be 100% certain that Mohammed was The Prophet?" And let me remind you that you believe he was, but that the majority of people born in China do not. I am saying this to invite you to

consider that maybe this belief is something you have been conditioned into – and that, if you were to be truly honest, truly a man of truth, truly a man of faith and trust, truly a religious brother – you would let go of such flimsy certainty, and say:

"I do not know for certain whether Mohammed was The Prophet or not. I do not have 'absolute knowledge' acquiring faculties, so I cannot be absolutely certain. And the regional nature of religious faith does make it seem relative. But I love my religion – it nourishes my soul, it gives meaning to my living and dying, and all of suffering I have seen – and there is nothing I love more than to be one among many in my Muslim community. That said, I appreciate that all of the above is true for you too: you cannot say for certain whether Jesus was the Son of God or not – and the regionality of conditioning does make doubt reasonable – but still you love Christianity, your Church and your Community."

To this I would add: "And the most important sentence here, for me, is 'I appreciate that all of the above is true for you too'. These words speak to me of our unity. They speak of a place that looks kindly and appreciatively upon its own religion, yet is more than its religion, and is capable of standing shoulder to shoulder with every other religious man in the world. This is the metareligion I feel we are called to co-create in this era in which the Earth is groaning and we just keep shopping.

"As I have said, I feel a special bond with religious men because I used to be one. I can even sympathise with fundamentalism, because I too was a fanatic. But above all, I value you, my religious brother, because I see many wonderful qualities in you: I see your desire to be upstanding and trustworthy, how you value love, how you try to be empathic and to respect, and how you are often generous and eager to serve.

Do, please, contemplate with me, what it might be like if millions of men with such qualities – without any obligation to sacrifice their 'regional' affiliations – united in service of life on this planet, before it's too late – at least for our species, and those we take down with us...."

MORDOR GONE MAD: PROVISIONAL VEGANISM

*"Going vegetarian may be the most effective way to fight global warming."
- Thich Nhat Hanh*

I am not saying, "If you want to be part of this brotherhood, you've got be vegan!" Not at all! But just as I am looking at other possible practical repercussions of living in not-knowing (in freedom, equality, love, honesty, dignity) – like the sexual restructuring of community, civil disobedience (like in the piece 'Above The Law'), the need for a new education system (inclusive of all modes, not just the rational), a global 'metareligion', pacifism, and so on – I want to say something about eating animals, and specifically about eating animals at this point in time.

So there are two questions here. One is this: if we were living in easy, respectful, affectionate relationship with all creatures – if we were living, as do the animals, in spontaneous flow with the ice cold winter nights, and the hot days of summer – would we eat meat? The other is this: since, at the moment, every year as a species we torture and kill billions of cattle and sheep and fish and pigs and turkeys and chickens in ways that would put Hitler's most vicious volunteers to shame, and since this 'animal agriculture' (another delightful term) emits more greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, etc. than transportation – can we become conscious (awake to our own experience), look out in love upon life and condone this ongoing, sanitized holocaust by taking a knife and fork to the steak on our plate?

The first question is about eating animals. The second is about how we treat them. Although, of course, the second question loops back to the first: if I can't condone the treating, can I partake in the eating?

To the first question let's just say "We don't know". "We don't know if people would eat meat in utopia". It is the second question that interests me. That is the here and now one. As Gandhi said, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

Since I am writing to my brothers – since I am advocating solidarity among males (boys, young adolescent men, adult men, old men) – brother: what do you feel when you read, "male chicks don't lay eggs, they are considered useless and suffocated, gassed, or minced alive, at a day old"? Or, then there's 'the dairy industry'... such wonderful terms! I think it might be more accurately named 'the inconceivably legal, suck-'em-dry-then-kill-'em in their millions, maxed-for-profit production line'. There

"the males are either shot at birth, or briefly raised for veal before having their lives drastically cut short in the slaughterhouse."

I personally feel a sense of brotherhood with them all. (And I feel myself a brother to all female animals too... of course). But I am talking to you, my brother – and I am asking – in the name of living as honest men on this Earth, as men who are returning to themselves, learning to look upon all others as equals, evolving in self-love and therefore in love of everyone – whether or not provisionally (that is to say: until we no longer treat animals in this way) we can congruently both stand in our dignity and eat meat. And by 'eat meat' I mean consume meat, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, and so on.

The obvious answer is, "No". It is not congruent. But... even if the mass slaughter of these innocent, loving creatures is Mordor Gone Mad – so is everything else! What I mean is, I might be a provisional vegan, but (for example) I drive a car – and if we tracked every detail of the manufacture of every component of my vehicle (without even considering oil/petrol use, the insurance industry, pollution, and so on), I think it would be difficult not to conclude that by driving a car I am condoning the institutionalised raping of the Earth I say I love.

As the Bhagavad Gita (18.48) says: "every endeavour is covered by some sort of fault, just as fire is covered by smoke". One of us is a provisional vegan and drives a car, another eats hamburgers and is a pioneer of Earth-friendly transportation. Each must make his choices.

There are statistics to back up Thich Nhat Hanh's assertion that "going vegetarian may be the most effective way to fight global warming" (and vegetarian, he says, "also means we do not consume dairy and egg products"). So there's a good eco-argument. But then again, a pretty good eco-case could be made for no more petrol or diesel cars. So why focus on veganism, or provisional-veganism, then? Because it is one way, one way among many, that we can contribute to the midwifing, or midhusbanding, of a new civilisation.

It is a compassionate way. It is a way that extends the sense of equality a man in-himself comes to feel towards other people, to include other creatures too. Which is not a great leap – as when I look in your eyes I see your essential beauty, and when I look into the eyes of a cow or pig or duck, I see beings as innocent and pure as babies, as unselfconsciously enlightened as great spiritual teachers, and as devoted and kind as the most intimate friend or lover.

In my opinion, the only difference between 'the meat trade' and the Nazi concentration camps is that the meat trade is more streamlined, more sophisticated, and more efficient – and that it sells the dead bodies.

And also that it emblemizes our global racial domination in a way Hitler could only have dreamed of.

For me then, it doesn't exactly feel like a dignified choice to eat the dead bodies of these beautiful beings – some with wings, some who move about on four legs, some with gills... presented in packaging printed with smiley cows and pigs at the Mordor Supermarket!

I know it is a sacrifice to 'go vegan' – but as Martín Prechtel says, "there is no growth without loss". And accustomed as we are to over-consumption, cutting-back, one way or another, is going to be unavoidable if we wish to survive.

But I am not arguing a clear-cut case. Each man must make his own choices as to how he contributes, and his own choices as to how he compromises.

I feel for these other species brothers and sisters so deeply. I love them so much. Maybe because I have lived alongside them. Maybe those of us who hardly leave the city would feel as I do if they looked into the eyes of cows, if they rested their cheeks against cows' cheeks, if they whispered, as I do, their regret and pain and sorrow.

The proposal of mass provisional veganism is probably not going to be the most popular rallying call. It might not even be the most potent eco-call. But for me, this 'animal agriculture' is Mordor in our midst, a surreal, horrific Disneyland, a blaring symbol of our disdain for the Earth and all that lives. Do we hate animals? Then why do we treat them this way?

The return to our own experience will engender a return to connection with the Earth. Just as we discard the priest as intermediary between ourselves and the unknown, our honesty takes us through the layers of plastic, glass and concrete that separate us from the Earth. I am not talking about setting up camp in yurts. I mean that honesty takes us down and down, stripping us, simplifying us – it embeds us, not in the fashions of men, but in the unchanging, ever-changing fashion show of the seasons and stars.

Each man must make his own decision. But if enough of us said "no", we could shut this Mordor down.

*"The assumption that animals are without rights and the illusion that our treatment of them has no moral significance is a positively outrageous example of Western crudity and barbarity."
- Arthur Schopenhauer*

5

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCE



“there is no external authority,
I am my own authority”

ABOVE THE LAW

"Never forget that everything Hitler did in Germany was legal."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

In this piece, and in this section as a whole, I look at some of the political consequences of staying in our own experience.

At first glance it might seem that anarchism is its natural political shape. But to forward one political system for all people at all times would be presumptuous and superficial, I feel – to say the least. Yes, to advocate staying in our own experience is to stand for the dignity of the individual, which is the core value of anarchism – but it is also the core value of democracy...

The political consequence of staying in our own experience that I am exploring here is not organisational, but rather the reformation of our self-image as ‘citizens’, of our disempowerment in the face of authority: "You might wear a crown, or a wig, or a helmet. For me, you are a brother with a hat". It is about our indoctrinated obedience to the laws of a murderous, mindless culture... the chemicals that killed all the fish were legally compliant... our invasion of that country was in accord with international law... I'm sorry, but when you took out that loan you should've read the smallprint... and so on, and on, and on...

This revisioning of ourselves in relation to nation state, government and the law, is one of empowerment, autonomous authority, freedom, and no particular political position other than the expression of our own unique, changing perspective. Then nobody is above us. Each man becomes his own king. The laws of society are to be followed at one's discretion. One is above the law, not against it. There is a wisdom within each of us, and we can hear it more and more loudly as the pull of our conditioning quietsens – it is our own personal wisdom, and to ignore it is to cut ourselves off from all that sustains us. It is our direct, one-on-one connection with reality, with the mystery, and with life and death. To renounce our personal wisdom in favour of a law simply because it has been written is existential suicide. It is to be uprooted. Instead, our task is to live “beneath the sky”, with an ear to the winds of our own intuition.

Then we are neither necessarily obedient nor disobedient, just individually congruent with ourselves. However, we are perceived as a threat to law and order because we have no agenda, no problem that can be resolved, or demand that can be fulfilled – we do not cower before our brothers – however impressive the hat – we see the

smallness of so much thinking, and (whatever regimes might come and go) we remain independent, free and in love.

We could say that this (r)evolution is not so much of politics as of the polis, the people. After all, it is naïve to imagine that a populace of terrified people would manifest anything other than a repressive regime. However, neither is this about some kind of new division between church and state – an invitation to meditate on the beach with our backs to the rising tide. No. Not only do action and education need to go hand in hand, but by ‘standing tall – feet on the earth, head in the sky’, we co-create the space within which a new civilisation can emerge.

And it's not a question of: "The bastards in power, look what they are doing to us!" We need to admit that our own fears are also holding these institutions in place, and that, therefore, if we want to live free, ‘Above The Law’ and co-create anew, then we all need to care for our fears.

Above The Law

I.

To stay in my own experience
is a political act
because:
in my own experience
there is no king over me.
I am my king.
I have no president.
I am my president.
There is no morality to which I bow,
no legal structure I obey.

In my own experience
I walk free –
I walk beneath the sky.
Even if my society is a maze
of narrow mental lanes –
even if I am prodded and pushed along...
I walk beneath the sky.

I should obey?
Whose ‘should’ should I obey?
Laws are cultural ideas.

Laws are relative.
Laws are provisional.
Enthroned in a Palace of Justice,
if you will,
with ornate domes and spires...
Enshrine them, sanctify them, glorify them...
I will not look down!
Do you want me to feel small?
You have no idea how small
I already feel
beneath the lawless sky.

You might wear a crown, or a wig, or a helmet.
For me, you are a brother
with a hat.
I am not against you –
you are my brother –
I am for me.
And in being for me,
I am for us both.

I am not anti-legal –
I am alegal.
Now you say I am illegal
(who likes to be pushed along?),
now you say I am legal.
But, for me, I am consistent –
responding in congruence
with my experience
of the climate of the moment.

I am a nightmare
for law and order,
because I am unappeasable.
No new law will shut me up.
No new regime.
You call it mutiny,
I call it dignity.
I am unappeasable because
I am not in opposition –
just a lover of the sky.

II.

We do not need to obey,
or disobey.
We just need to remember
we are free –
and stand in freedom,
and speak from freedom...
Then a new society could shape itself
inside our spaciousness.
If we stand tall –
feet on the earth,
head in the open air –
in fierce faithfulness
to our own unique experience of this world –
a new society could rise up between us –
a collective art piece
we could live in together,
with all other creatures
who love to be free.

Brother –
you are above the nation state,
above the government,
above the law,
free to choose to obey –
or not obey.

The government is society's servant.
We are not servants of the government.
The law is society's servant.
We are not servants of the law.

Walk boldly through the crowd.
Walk gently.
Walk by other laws.
Walk by the laws of the sunshine and the rain.
Walk by the laws of the night.
Take counsel from the birds.
Question your every assumption.
Trust the discomfort of the heart.
The laws of men and women are optional,
not obligatory.

Let people laugh!
One hundred billion people have lived and died,
here on Earth.
In a second
we will be gone.
Let the small mind laugh!
Today's law –
so obvious, so ordinary –
was once a dream.
Breathe,
and feel for the laws of the Earth –
the laws that lead to the gates
of this paradise of pleasure and pain.

The power of institutions resides
in our belief in their power.
It is an illusion, trickery, deceit...
Propaganda-backed,
police-backed, army-backed –
backed by our need for control,
backed by our need to be-controlled.

Take care of these needs, brother –
they are the ones
propping up the power
that would prod and push you
into obedience.

*"To live outside the law, you must be honest."
- Bob Dylan*

US AND THEM

"The propagandist's purpose is to make one set of people forget that certain other sets of people are human."

- Aldous Huxley

It is so easy to fall into the us-and-them trap – with ‘them’ the baddies, and ‘us’ the goodies (of course). But is it as simple as that? Even if we put aside the dubiousness of these categories (who exactly is included in ‘us’, etc.), are we really so opposite to our leaders? Or, are we fiddling our taxes (just a little) while they are involved in public embezzlement scandals? Are we too busy with ourselves to be concerned with the wellbeing of the people next door, while they ruin other nations for the wealth of their own? Are we bad-mouthing ex-partners or friends, while they plan propaganda campaigns to defame and discredit other leaders? Perhaps the difference is just one of scale. Or, to put it slightly differently – in their position (based on how we conduct our existing everyday lives), might we not be and do much the same?

Do we, ‘the led’, live in so much deeper connection with the mystery of existence than our leaders? Is it likely that, once in a position of power, we would suddenly have a vision of the staggering inconceivability and miraculousness of existence – and facilitate such public awareness? I don’t think so.

Or are we ‘the led’ so much more emotionally mature than our leaders? Is it likely then that, once in a position of power, we would suddenly find ourselves released from our petty spite and self-pity, able to ride our fear and face what is with curiosity and become champions of mass emotional education? I really don’t think so.

It is easy to demonise our leaders. And even if it is not a language I’d use, I understand when genocides are described as ‘demonic’. But that doesn’t make us angels.

Is it possible that we – and that includes both ‘us’ and ‘them’ – are one human family (however fragmented) – and that our leaders (whether elected or not, or fairly elected or not), are the natural expression of our collective consciousness? I think that’s a bit simplistic, but not entirely.

What I do feel though is that if we dedicated ourselves, top speed, to our own education in the art of experiencing, and to the education of those who will take over our responsibilities when we’re older (and when we’re dead), then there’s a damn

good chance that dignity, like a forest fire leaping from tree to tree, could get out of control – and that dignified decisions could replace devious diplomacy.

Neither most of our leaders nor most of us, ‘we, the led’, are currently very freed-up in the rational mode. This disables our capacity for radical, original thought, and leaves us circling endlessly in the habitual – however dysfunctional. Nor, collectively, are we very freed-up physically (relishing the sensuality of the now) – making us dry and brittle and distant from each other. In the emotional mode we are collectively inept, at best – which severely restricts our compassion. And in the existential mode we are increasingly collectively dead – making unity and largeness of vision less than unlikely. This, brother, is the situation. And no amount of leader-swapping is going to even begin to scratch the surface of it.

Of course, this does not mean all of us retreating to ashrams, or therapy, and letting the careening juggernaut of global civilisation run its suicidal course. It does mean that we (‘us’ and ‘them’), have to up our game: that the implementation of the longer-term vision of our own re-education needs to progress with the same urgency and intensity as our shorter-term resistance to the objectification and abuse of the Earth, the animals, and any human being.

And yes, there are subcultures where people are more open, more fluid, more alive. In *Blessed Unrest*, Paul Hawken merges many of them under the epithet ‘cultural creatives’. I consider myself a cultural creative, and there are millions of us. But these are subcultures – not cultures in themselves. And most of each subculture’s members, like me, have laptops and mobiles and cars (thus maintaining the global infrastructure in incalculable ways), have been pummelled in their sense of self-worth, struggle in their committed relationships or tumble traumatically between relationships, struggle with impotence before our quite-probable impending eco-doom, and – like the rest of the global culture – are wage-slaves being continuously worn down by the most ludicrous, normalised banality.

I would say the reliability of the division both ‘us’ and ‘them’ – although it might be convenient for identity and security – is actually a little precarious...

Us And Them

I.

The world is not governed by the devious and cruel.
The world is not governed
by the bad.

Their ecological and humanitarian atrocities –

even their corruption –
is our own smalltime selfishness
enlarged to fit the world.

It is our daily drizzle of hurt and rage
turned global storm,
pounding landscapes and populations
in the same way you and I
snap at our children,
slyly semi-cheat our clients,
forget the land lives,
and have sex on others.

Devious and cruel,
these black-suited, black-limousined caricatures
of our own double-dealing
are driving us where the most primal and fearful and scheming
in us
drives us
when it takes possession of our will.

Yes, there are men who would be honest among them –
but governments meet in a place
where an ease of inhumanity
has been normalised –
where it is almost impossible to be honest,
to be human.

Their political, industrial, military strategies are ugly –
not fashion ugly, not art ugly,
but existentially ugly.
Their shameless cruelty
brings shame upon our species.
It will be forgiven only because,
with the passing of the centuries,
all is eventually forgiven.

Three million children under five die
every year
of hunger and undernutrition.
Military budgets could feed us all.
We all know that.
Everybody knows...

It will be forgiven only because,
with the passing of the centuries,
all is eventually forgiven.
But that's not yet.

You and I are the ones who stood by.
You and I are the ones
who stood by knowing
millions of people are homeless,
and millions of homes are empty.

How different are we
from the self-serving, word-spinning, conniving politicians
purporting to serve us,
the people?
How much less cynical? How much less hardened?
How much less ugly? How much less shameful?
How much less afraid?

II.

Rather than blame them –
though they are blameworthy –
let's softly embrace
our own stuck deviousness and cruelty.
Let's not negate it.
But let's not indulge it.
Let's love it until it softens,
and we can move about ourselves
more fluidly again –
so that we can say to those who govern:
"You are no longer me writ large.
You are not a caricature of me any longer.
I have chosen to be more of me than that.
I have chosen how I want to be
remembered."

This is self-education,
and this is the education our children need...
Thus is the multigenerational plan.
But let there also be
a this-generation-now plan –
a plan of immediate action –
of action by the self-educating –

a plan of beautiful action,
a plan of beauty.
"I have ugliness in me.
But I also have beauty."
By beautiful action
we remember
our beauty.

III.

Humanity's atrocities –
from our genocides,
to our poisoned plastic foods –
are the products of our stuckness
in our contractions.
Our atrocities are not inevitable.

They are only inevitable
if it is impossible to befriend the deviousness and cruelty
that wanders and haunts the psyche
seeking worth –
seeking love...
And it is not.
It is not impossible.

It is possible to befriend even the most twisted inside us –
to meet the harsh, embittered ghosts inside us,
and love them all –
and by loving them
inside us,
come to love them
in everyone –
and come to love everyone.

How could society not change
as we change?
It is always today,
and today is always perfectly today –
to the detail...
Society is perfect.
It is the perfect fit.
It is the only possible expression of who we've been.
It is our mirror.
In it we are revealed – what's inside is out.

99.999% PACIFISM

"Undisputed UN figures show that 1.7 million Iraqi civilians died due to the West's brutal sanctions regime, half of whom were children."

- Nafeez Ahmed

And some more information: "total deaths from Western interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan since the 1990s – from direct killings and the longer-term impact of war-imposed deprivation – likely constitute around 4 million (2 million in Iraq from 1991-2003, plus 2 million from the "war on terror"), and could be as high as 6-8 million people when accounting for higher avoidable death estimates in Afghanistan."

I don't usually quote statistics but quote these because, as Nafeez concludes in the article from which both of the above quotes are taken, "Thanks to the silence of the wider media, most people have no idea of the true scale of protracted terror wrought in their name by US and UK tyranny in Iraq and Afghanistan."

The piece that follows though, is not about Iraq or Afghanistan or the US or the UK. It is about another political consequence of staying in our own experience: pacifism. Or 99.999% pacifism, as I will later explain.

It is about the return to our own authority, and the realisation that we have been divided – or that we have divided ourselves. Once we come to feel that each of us is 'a nation of one', we also come to feel that 'every man is a brother' – and we see how we have been at war with our brothers, and we say, "No, no more!"

I argue that if we truly understand and empathise with each other, then not only does enmity end but brotherhood begins. Then 'the voice of doubt' interjects, "Yes, this is true to a point, but surely you wouldn't include our avowed enemies in this? Surely this doesn't apply to the suicide bomber?" In other words, the voice of doubt doesn't believe that, as a race, one day, maybe, there need be no war.

So I take the example of the suicide bomber – and because, luckily, I happen to have the personal diary of a suicide bomber in my keeping, a document I have read and re-read many times, I am able to let us look inside his mind and heart – inviting the voice of doubt to reconsider... maybe peace is possible with anyone – even with the so-called suicide bomber.

Say "No"

I met this old hippy. He was in his eighties. "Was it really such a difficult choice", he asked me, "between love and war?"

Or perhaps you want war? Brother – put your hand up if you want your house bombed, women you love raped, your children maimed...

Well, that's clear... So just stop it! Just say, "No!" Say, "I take back my mind!" Say, "I have let my mind be manipulated!" Be honest. Say, "I have let my mind be turned against my brother – who is just like me".

Say, "I don't care what anyone says –
I don't care if everyone says
I must obey
that man
who says he knows
better than me
the feeling of fine sand between my toes,
the meaning of the wind in my hair,
the sensation of my penis entering
slowly –
our eyes trembling together...
I don't care if he has the uniform or the authorisation –
nobody knows better than me
how this warm air touches my brow,
how my daughter's smile pierces my heart
with joy,
how I feel when I pick fruit from a tree...

Nobody stands between me and my experience!
Nobody can stand between me and my experience!
And from my experience
of this moment and this –
I decide.
I decide.

Say, "I stand in my authority again! Where have I been?! Let us sit and talk and grieve and rage, brother. What have we done?!" Say, "Brother, had I been born in your town, raised in your town, I would've done the same!" Say, "From this moment on, I will stand in brotherhood with every man on Earth."

Through courageous honesty I re-enter the mystery of not-knowing, of equality, of intimacy. Through courageous honesty I enter the global family. Instantly I know what I stand for... Real power is in honesty. All other powers are unstable.

Stand up in your autonomy – as an honest man... for no other reason than: it is your choice. Say, "I am a nation of one! And my country will not attack any other nation!" Say, "No, I will not battle my brother." By choosing yourself, choose him. By choosing yourself, choose everyone and everything.

No To Division

I say '99.999%' because to take a 100% stand behind any concept is not only sure to provoke conflict with others as to 'the right' way to live, it is incompatible with staying in and responding, ever-fresh, from our own experience.

Nevertheless, I do see what would be called 'pacifism' as being the natural consequence of living in our own experience. Living the unique adventure of one's own experience, one naturally intuits the uniqueness of the experience of others. From self-respect there is respect for everyone. Thus one outcome of living each in their own experience is peace.

However, we do go to war with each other – and this is the natural consequence of not living in our experience. By not being in touch with my own experience – not valuing my own experience – I cannot value your experience, I cannot value you. It is therefore more likely I will disrespect you, or abuse you in some way. By not valuing my own experience – not feeling my own experience – I am guided by some rational or abstract-existential ideal which is always one or another attempt to impose control upon an uncontrollable world, and this includes controlling you. Thus, my being out of my experience is dangerous us all.

Staying in our experience we experience unity with everyone. When we're out of our experience – that's to say not present to it – we experience difference and division, and conflict eventually ensues.

Division is dangerous. We are one human family. All men are brothers. This is the way to peace on earth, not to 'let ourselves be divided'. I put these words in speech marks because they carry 'us and them' style blame. Ultimately, whatever brain-filthyng, normalised insanity I might have imbibed, it is nobody's fault but mine if I have lost sight of my brother's dignity.

So without blaming politicians or industrialists or bankers, it is my responsibility to respect my own experience, to respect myself, and to offer respect to all living creatures.

Nevertheless, influences are upon us. They put pressure upon us to think and feel in terms of our country, gender, class, race, religion, etc. – and theirs. We the good, and they the bad. To that message, the message of division, I say, “No”. It is a lie! When I meet my brother face-to-face, when I really meet him, I find out he’s just like me. A me in another guise – me being another guy.

So when I hear ‘they’ are bad I just refuse to believe it. I don’t care how articulately argued the case, or how fiery and convinced the rhetoric – I refuse. I refuse because I believe in the dignity of all men. In fact, it is more than a belief, it is my perception. I see it in us all – whether we recognise it or not (which mostly, of course, we don’t). But recognise it or not – I refuse to be divided from you.

And the ultimate division would be to go to war with you. How could I go to war with you unless I had fully understood and felt your perspective – and concluded that you, and all who stood with you, were utterly, irredeemably, collectively insane?! But no – 99.999% of the time, when I understand you, and feel your heart, the result is peace, not war. More than peace – empathy with each others’ ideas and feelings bonds us in brotherhood.

There are of course those 0.001% instances in which one has heard and felt the other’s perspective, and come to feel that some pathology of a disturbingly violent kind had possessed them, and that they are now gleefully determined to wreak bloody mayhem upon the world. That might well justify war. 0.001% of the time. That’s another reason I say ‘99.999% pacifism’.

Light-heartedly: in my experience – based mainly on arguments I have had in coffee shops with friends – sometimes there have been edgy moments, yes – but we’ve always managed to kiss and make up in the end. I feel I can truly say, after all these years, that never have I felt that any one of them was pathologically possessed. It really is not usually the case...

Even The Suicide Bomber?

We do have different perspectives. This is understandable. Why? Because we’re different. In fact, I know this makes it much more inconveniently complex, but every single living creature has a unique perspective.

"So what are you saying?" I am asked, "that the perspective of the suicide bomber is equal to mine?" No, I’m not evaluating, I’m validating. I’m saying he has a perspective. And I’m also saying that if we hear and feel that perspective – truly, deeply, from heart to heart – not only is it 99.999% unlikely to end in conflict, but it is 99.999% likely to end in brotherhood.

"Even with a suicide bomber?!" he blurts out – in anger, in shock, in panic... OK, let's take 'the suicide bomber' (so-called), 'the terrorist' as he is most commonly called. Perhaps 'the lone lunatic suicide bomber terrorist' would be his full name. Surely he is bad, right? If anyone is bad, surely it is him? (And by default, we are good.)

Well, I happen, as it happens, by happenstance, to have in my keeping the diary, the personal diary, of a suicide bomber. But before I share some extracts with you – a little background on the situation: we have bombed the fuck out of his country and killed and maimed everything that breathes – leaving nothing but cinders and smoke and bombed-out buildings in our wake. Suddenly his peaceful life with his uncles and aunties, the patio where they gathered and told their news, the vineyard where he would lie in the sun, his worries, his ambitions, his questions, his affections – for no reason that makes any sense whatsoever (much as he might try), has been – out of the blue – calculatedly exploded in his face – killing his father, his grandmother, his sister, and many of his closest friends.

(A little background on the man himself... Although I am about to cite an extremely confidential document, I can tell you that when he was a little boy he went through all of the above. He was there. Somehow he ended up in England, and grew up there, where he went on to become a suicide bomber.) Here are a few short extracts from his diary:

"So bitter I have become, having lost so many family members and having been maimed myself, thus carrying the memory and pain of those awful times forever engraved in my flesh."

"Living my daily life amidst the hypnotized ignorance of the perpetrators of such evil, the desire for them to feel what I felt has begun to burn like a fire in my chest – like a fire in my heart."

"As I pursue my studies of Islam, I feel I myself transcending the limitations of the religion itself. I feel a sense of union with every human being. The fire in my heart has begun to speak to me. I say this metaphorically, my diary – I am in no way unstable. Poetically put then: my heart is telling me that the greatest service I could offer these people would be to let them feel what we have felt – that the problem isn't what they have done, but that they don't know it, and even worse – that they don't feel it."

"I now know I will one day sacrifice my life so that the whole of humanity might feel. I don't know when that day will come, or to be fully honest with you, my diary, if it ever will come. But know this, that I am now the one they will one day call 'the lone lunatic suicide bomber terrorist', and that I do not

feel alone, that I am sane by any standard, and that I do not see myself as a suicide bomber, or a terrorist! No, I see myself as a soul in service of all souls – yes, not just the souls of my people, but in service of all souls!"

When I read his diary (and, of course, there is a lot more), I feel the presence of a profound though heart-torn man. Not a man with an unintelligible perspective. Not at all. Not only do I feel it is an intelligible perspective, but I feel it is an almost buddhisatvic perspective. A perspective, I feel, of tremendous, tremendous dignity.

I feel a greatness in this man – “a greatness of soul”, as he would've put it. Had he been able to feel his pain, perhaps the tear in his heart would've healed – or at least, become liveable. And perhaps rather than blowing people up, he would've communicated the tragedy of his childhood before audiences who would've wept with compassion. Soldiers might have said, "No more". Who knows... As it is, he ended his life as a suicide bomber.

Yes, had this man been accompanied in his pain, perhaps the bombing would've been averted. But let's not get sanctimonious. Had the US and UK governments, arms traders, industrialists (ying for contracts to rebuild the country their buddies had just obliterated), and, of course, militaries, all been accompanied in their pain, perhaps they wouldn't have murdered (at least) a million children. Let's keep things in proportion...

Dear deceased, disturbed, dignified brother – I am so, so sorry for all you went through as a child. I can't imagine how such horror must've impacted your innocent, young heart. Having read your diary at least twenty times, I feel 'compassion' – I suffer with you. I feel a deep sense of brotherhood with you. And I feel less judgemental of you than I do of the US and UK coalition, not only because of the scale of what you call “their evil-doing”, but because their mass murder was feelingless – it could've been anywhere, it wasn't personal to Iraq – they would've been equally happy, detached and efficient murdering a million Mexican children, for example. Your action, however, although preconceived and planned, was more of a 'crime of passion' – you were burning up inside, and that fire overtook you...

But what I really want to say to you, dear brother (and to any other brothers who might want to do the same), is this: I understand, I really, really do – but it doesn't work. As I read your diary I feel that, at the deepest level, your suicide and sacrifice, your murdering and your revenge, was all an expression of your desire to be felt in your pain. The day you did it you were screaming to the sky: "Feel this! Feel this! Feel this – you cold-hearted murdering bastards – this is what it feels like to suffer! Suffer as we have suffered! Suffer as I have suffered! Do you feel it now? Do you feel anything at all? Do you feel my pain? Now do you understand?"

Revenge so often has this motive: to elicit empathy – by trying to make the other suffer what we have suffered. "You had sex with another man? I'll show you..." But murdering yet more innocents doesn't elicit empathy. It doesn't work. It only perpetuates the trauma, and foments more rage.

What do I suggest? I suggest the elders of your communities sit together and contemplate how they can best elicit empathy from the people who have wronged them. Here, for example, is an idea: offer free tours through devastated villages, towns and cities. Invite people to come and look into the eyes of those whose lives have been wrecked. I imagine people would go. They would be interested. Then they would be horrified. They would understand. And they would not forget. I don't mean to do this in the accusatory mood of, "Look what you have done", but more neutrally, more humbly, saying simply, "Look – feel this for yourselves".

This, of course, is just one among myriad creative possibilities that would be more productive than an eye for an eye, which – as Gandhi said – just ends up making the whole world blind. Perhaps the countering of US and UK 'evil' should be under the guidance of your older, wiser men and women – otherwise, for sure, there are going to be lots more bombs than guided tours...

In conclusion, I am not saying I agree with suicide bombing. I am saying that everyone is unique, everyone has their perspective, and that if we can listen to each other, and truly feel each others' perspectives, we will become friends not enemies. I have taken the example of 'the suicide bomber' because he is currently portrayed in the Western media as 'the lunatic terrorist' – the embodiment of crazed evil itself. Yet I hope I have shown that "even he" has a respect worthy perspective, "even he" (like you) has feelings that long to be felt. That, "even with him", peace could be possible.

Actually, I imagine you already know all this from your own experience, in things big and small – that when your point of view is understood and validated and respected, well, you feel much better... don't you? Perhaps you're even ready to let go of your anger... Perhaps even not go to war...

So, brother – let's not divide ourselves, let's remain united – a global brotherhood of honest men. Each man true to his own experience. Each man his own authority. There will be conflict, of course there will – but every man has his reasons for feeling the way he feels – so let's hear him, and walk a mile in his shoes, and tell him not how we judge him, but what we feel when we hear his story. And as the blameless honesty goes back and forth, the respect and fraternal love grows, and the conflict dissipates. I have witnessed this again and again.

Brother – let me just ask you this: is it possible that one day the human race will look back at war as a thing of the past?

“It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.”
- Voltaire

SOLDIER DAY

"Manliness consists not in bluff, bravado or loneliness. It consists in daring to do the right thing and facing consequences whether it is in matters social, political or other. It consists in deeds not words."

— Mahatma Gandhi

This might well sound like a bit of an off-the-wall proposal, but hey! Maybe it is. But much more interestingly – maybe it isn't! The proposal is not disarmament, but dis-soldierment. It's self-explanatory, so I won't say more – other than that one thing I like about it is that it could solve the stand-off situation where nobody is willing to put their arms down first, leaving themselves pregnable, which is often given as an objection to disarmament.

This is not an end to war by international treaties, it is an end to war by individual dignity.

Soldier Day

This is my proposal. That we end war. How? By stopping fighting. How? By soldiers leaving armies. By soldiers not putting on the uniform again. By soldiers walking out, saying, "This is stupid. There's no need to be fighting. Why am I doing this? I'm killing people I don't even know! That can't be right. No. I'd prefer to think of men in other countries as brothers. I'd prefer to stand in the brotherhood of man".

I say, "Yes, brother, yes! Good for you. It's a massive decision. I can imagine you must've gone to the core of your life before you made it. And I want you to know I applaud it with my whole being, with everything I am. And that everything I am stands alongside you in your decision. May whatever you now turn your attention to bring you the greatest fulfilment. My respect and heartfelt well wishes go with you."

Not easy for a soldier to quit. Good soldiers don't quit. Yes, but this isn't quitting. If you have truly taken time out to contemplate – and decided to say "no" to the institutionalised immaturity of war, that "no" is also a massive "yes" to yourself, to your self-respect, to your being the best man you can be, to solidarity with your brothers, to joining the global family, to respect itself, to dignity, and to love. It is to commit – not to what some squabbling psychopaths are happy for you to die for – but to what you choose to give your life for. It is to say, "I will die for peace".

Not only would it not be easy for a soldier, at this profoundly personal level, to say “no” to war, but for each soldier there would be social challenges – not least of all with the army itself. So this is what my proposal looks like – a shape we might give it: that instead of individual soldiers leaving randomly, we create two days a year when, if you are going to leave, you leave. And, of course, the more men leave, the safer they will be.

Can you imagine thousands of men, in different countries around the world, on the same day, twice a year, year after year, all leaving their own countries’ armies? That would be a revolution – not people like me, liberal intellectual types who haven’t ever held a gun, taking up office in some new, reformed governing structure – but the men who were ready to lay down their lives for their country, or team, or club, or whatever we like to call it, saying, “No, I am not willing to be a killing instrument of my government. I don’t see why it’s necessary for countries to fight any more than it is for individual men. Once we see each other’s point of view, 99.999% of the time we can talk it out. And the so-called collateral actually means the devastation of countless brothers’ and sisters’ property, and way of life, and bodies. No. When I die I will be proud of having come to love the man I thought was my enemy, not of having killed him. And when I die, I choose to be proud of who I’ve been.”

THE WARRIOR'S PEACE: A REDEMPTION SONG

"Let us forgive each other – only then will we live in peace."

- Leo Tolstoy

I.

Once upon a time there was an American soldier who killed many people in Afghanistan. He wasn't particular in that way. So had many others. But this is a story about him.

His name was Jim. He was a Christian boy, and a good one. He was a nice boy, a kind boy... a little bit shy. When he went into the military it was as a job. But as I said, he ended up killing a lot of people in Afghanistan.

When Jim got back from Afghanistan he was in shock, in his own quiet way. He got a job at a grocery store, and functioned okay – but inside he had stopped breathing.

II.

When Jim disappeared no one was worried. They assumed he was somewhere doing something sensible. Actually Jim had suffered from a rare condition, a bit like sleepwalking, but that overtakes one while one is awake. One is sort of 'possessed', and goes about one's tasks in a zombie-like fashion, although not without intelligence.

And so it was that Jim found himself walking down the stairway of an airplane, back onto Afghani soil. Awaking from this lapse in his ordinary state of consciousness, he looked around in disbelief. Yet something deep inside him told him he had been guided to come here, and he stepped forward... step by step, step by step... towards wherever it was he was being guided to go.

Jim wandered through the streets. There was money in his pocket, so he was able to eat and drink, but he never said a word. He wasn't in uniform. He was wearing the clothes he wore to the grocery store – jeans and a t-shirt, and sneakers on his feet. The Afghani people didn't know what to make of him.

Jim wandered on like this for days, for weeks, for months, passing through towns and villages. Always exposed to the tremendous heat. Sometimes he would sleep on dirty, dusty street corners, sometimes next to a bush in the moonlight. He now looked ragged and wild – and by any clinical definition, one could safely say he was mad.

III.

It was after exactly nine months of silence that Jim said the words he would come to repeat at least a million times. Standing alone, on a dusty country trail, surrounded by the silence of the land, Jim said: "I'm sorry".

Jim said, "I'm sorry" – and cried there, on that very spot, for a week. His whole body became wet, as if he was crying through every pore in his skin – but this made him cold, and he began to shiver in the fierce Afghani sun.

Jim somehow wandered on, trembling and muttering, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry..." As if released from the burden of carrying a huge iron weight, in his heart Jim felt as if he was flying. He felt a love like no other he had ever felt before. This also made him lightheaded, and sometimes he would faint.

Eventually Jim was taken in by a compassionate family, who could see he was at death's door. They nursed him as best they could, with cold flannels on his forehead, good water to drink, broths, warmth and rest. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" Jim would sometimes scream these words in agony, sometimes sob them with the most heartbreaking authenticity and humility. Sometimes he would wake from sleep and exclaim, "I'm sorry", more naturally than he would open his eyes.

IV.

There was a young man in the family who spoke English and translated Jim's phrase for everyone. So now when the young women would change the hot flannels on his forehead for cold new ones, they would say to him, "We forgive you", "You are forgiven", "Find peace, we forgive you" – as if sending healing from their gentle hearts to his tormented soul.

Then one day the young man who spoke English witnessed the conversation. Jim would say, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry", and the young women would say, "We forgive you, you are forgiven, we forgive you, you're forgiven" – and he translated the young women's words from Afghani to English – so that Jim understood for the first time. He wailed with pain as if someone had reached inside his chest, gripped his heart, and squeezed it viciously. But the pain subsided, and after some days, for the first time since his return from Afghanistan, Jim started breathing again.

"No – unforgivable! Unforgivable, unforgivable!" Jim would insist. The young women would reply gently, "We forgive you, you are forgiven, we forgive you, you're forgiven." And so a new conversation ensued. This new conversation went on for a month – and every day a little more, Jim received the love in the young women's eyes into his heart.

After one month, Jim stopped speaking again. But now, though weak, he was physically recovered. He left his bed, and started to make himself useful around the village. The Silent American, as they called him, was accepted by everyone. After two years Jim spoke again – in Afghani!

And so began a very happy phase of Jim's life. After four more years he was wed to one of the young women who had cared for him through the fires of his fever, and the delirium of his soul. They had children. They were in love. Jim became the village Mr Fix It, and life was good.

V.

Until now, Jim had stayed discreetly out of the way whenever anyone but the villagers were around. In the first years (even though he'd been honourably discharged from the army), he'd had a recurring nightmare of being dragged before a military tribunal, accused of being a deserter, and shot. He just kept his head down. Nor in these ten years or more, had Jim made contact with his family. He was strictly a village man.

But something strange was moving inside him. It was an awful urge. He really didn't like it. It felt like being seasick on a dark, oily sea. It was an urge to connect with everyone and say, "Look – it's possible we can live in peace!" Jim would be repairing a fence, or laying a floor, and the urge would begin to rock him – it was horrible. Until one day, he had this thought: "Something put me on that airplane that brought me here. If I don't heed this urge, it's going to take matters into its own hands again". So he decided to act, without being forced to – and the awful urge vanished overnight.

Over the next few months Jim, Fatima his wife and their extended family, talked intimately and profoundly about what they called 'Jim's calling'. What would he say? Jim imagined himself being taunted, "look, there's one who went native!" He knew he would have to buy a suit.

They came up with a plan: Jim would take photographs of everyday life in the village, and they would team up with an Afghani living in America who they would ask to take photos parallel to Jim's. For example, if Jim took a photograph of a man being nursed on his deathbed, then the Afghani in America would take a photograph of the same situation over there. Or, if the picture was of the village children playing in delight, then the Afghani photographer would take a picture of American children in the same state of delight.

VI.

And that, my friend, is what happened. The Afghani in America they connected with was named Abdul. He had just completed a PhD in underwater engineering, and had

excellent career prospects. He gave it all up when he heard about the project. After two years of working together, the two photographers were like brothers.

They toured the world with their show. Jim would narrate the story of his photos in Afghani, and Abdul would narrate the story of his photos in English. Many, many people were touched by the beauty of these two men, and moved by the resounding love alchemized by the juxtaposition of their two sets of photos.

When Jim was reunited with family and friends, the photos also enabled him to communicate his love of his life in the village. Then he showed them some more personal photos – of his wife and children, his extended family and friends – and he began to tell them about his wanderings, his silence, his “sorry”, and how Fatima and her sisters had nursed him, and how he had been healed by their forgiveness... It wasn't easy: he would say two words, then sob for two minutes, then say two more words...

As Jim cried, his mother and father and brother and sister also began to cry. It was quite loud and the neighbours heard. They came over, and soon they were crying, too. In fact, soon the whole street was crying, and then the whole town, then the whole county – and soon the whole of America was crying.

Well, obviously – if just Jim's family's crying had been loud – you can imagine the volume of the crying of all of America. I would say it probably could've been heard around the whole world. I don't know. But it could certainly be heard in Afghanistan – where Fatima began to weep inconsolably in resonance with the repentance of America. Soon the whole village was crying, and soon the whole of Afghanistan.

Some people say the whole world cried that day. I have no way of telling. But I have seen the satellite images taken of the Earth that day, and it's true what people say, there are no others like them – the Earth almost looks like the Sun.

“Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.”
- Mark Twain

COSMIC STUMPEDNESS & THE WMD

"The evangelists of science and technology have succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of the missionaries of Christianity."

- Rupert Sheldrake

This piece looks at the relationship between the Cartesian worldview of modernity (billiard ball universe, meaninglessness), and social and political apathy.

Despite the fact that the world-consuming dominant culture is the greatest Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) on Earth, and that it is 'full steam ahead' – we lie about like hippos in the sun rolling in the mud, hypnotised by our mobiles, giggling at silly jokes, with little – if any solidarity – and little if any sense of what might return colour to the world.

The radical nature of our self-abuse and abuse of the planet needs a radical response, but stuck in modernity's ontological bog, we are persuaded that meanings are just wishful thinking – comforts, crutches – and that passionate direct action and civil disobedience are the preserve of fringe fanatics and extremists.

Wow – what a bind we have got ourselves in!

In this piece I propose not opposing this situation, but taking it all the way: "You can't find meaning in the universe, therefore you say there isn't any. But hold on – how do you know? Do you know? Before we conclude there isn't any meaning – since, after all, that's a conclusion with gargantuan consequences – let's go a little deeper into this not-knowing."

As I say in this piece, I feel there is no point in opposing the apathy (and need for soothing) that is the natural concomitant of a meaningless universe. Rather we need to step out of the whole double bind, and call each other into an unprecedented unity of honest dignity, and dignified action.

At the moment, we have garbage mountains, cocktails in the sun, billion dollar arms deals, fab new fashions, accelerating (non-human) species extinction, and some great new fiddle tunes (for when Rome burns). Except this time it won't just be Rome.

Cosmic Stumpedness & The WMD (Weapon Of Mass Destruction)

The other day I saw a video clip that opens with a woman lying on the grass, looking up. The camera then goes up, and up, and up – leaving the Earth below, passing through the Milky Way.... Finally, I'm looking down from a billion light years away. Then it rewinds, but instead of ending back with the woman on the grass, the camera goes in through her eyes, then her blood cells, in and in and in – through spaces measurable only in nanometres, then picometres, then femtometres – as deep into 'inner space' as it has already taken us into 'outer space' – creating the impression of infinity, and infinite mystery, whichever way you go....

I appreciated it, but it didn't shock me. If anything, it confirmed me in the cosmic vision I have already internalised.

If I had been living anywhere in the world, let's say, more than two or three thousand years ago – I would've been bewildered by that video clip. I don't mean by the technology (that too), but by the content. Where were the gods? Perhaps I would have panicked. Was this what the homes of the gods looked like to mortal eyes? Did the gods live inside us too? At the very least, I would have been dumbstruck.

Even if I had seen that video clip just a hundred years ago, as a man living within a limited, cosy, ordered, so-called scientific universe, I'd still have been blown away. Perhaps I would have pompously pronounced it fantasy, or perhaps I would have minimised it as that-yet-to-be-subsumed within science's comforting understanding.

But today I live within a world in which science tells us that the further we go, the less we know – echoing the words of the mystics that the more we know, the less we know. The difference being that the not-knowing of the mystics is synonymous with mystery, and the not-knowing of science is synonymous with meaninglessness.

If anyone you knew was reduced to inaction by an all-pervading sense of meaninglessness you would probably say they were depressed, or in crisis. Because this cosmic stumpedness prevails in the world-dominating culture, we could say we're in a situation of global existential crisis. The gods are gone, God's gone, the mind of man didn't make it... we don't know who, or where, or why, or what, we are.

Meanwhile (you remember how America began its invasion of Iraq on the pretext of its weapons of mass destruction) – the inexorably world-dominating culture (essentially the ever-self-updating American dream) is itself a weapon of mass destruction, a frenzied virus of competition and consumption – championed by double-dealing, warmongering, emotional-zombie leaders, oblivious it seems to the fact that the holocaust of 'nature', in which we are all willingly and unwillingly involved, is also the suicide of humanity – since, clearly, we too are creatures of the Earth.

I would say that by pretty much any standards this situation calls for a radical response. But a radical response to such intoxicated unconsciousness would not be a new regime, or new policies, or even a new political philosophy (I believe we've tried that once or twice before. No – not so radical.) Rather, a radical response would be the result of profound, unified personal preparation – clear-headed (honesty/not-knowing), clear-hearted (humility/equality/love), and conscious (mystery/presentness/awareness/belonging) – in short: a dignified response – a response arising from the dignity of belonging, of caring, of knowing what one is ready to die for...

The difficulty is the stumpedness. Without clarity as to how to situate ourselves in a creative, life-giving relationship with the cosmos (with reality), and without education as to how to live that relationship, we don't come to know what we're ready to die for. Hence our lives are of little dignity. Hence the difficulty of a dignified response. We are on pause. We are in a state of mass impasse.

But do we need to get unstumped to act? What about getting more stumped? What about taking stumpedness all the way? What about not being immobilised by a hyper-rational stumpedness, but entering the not-knowing with our hearts and awareness – and opening to the beauty of the mystery of the moment? What about (as I will suggest in the next piece) turning this rational defeat into a (r)evolutionary, existential victory?

What about saying, “I do not know where I am, or what I am, or why I exist, but I am ready to feel the mystery of this, and not short circuit the enquiry with the quick, easy answer, ‘There is no meaning.’ I am willing to live the mystery, to appreciate it – to live in appreciation of this world, and of us all. And I will stand for this appreciation – I will live in it and I will die for it, if need be.” After all, what could be more beautiful than to die with appreciation on our lips? As Meister Eckhart says: “If the only prayer you said in your whole life was ‘thank you’, that would be sufficient.”

Convinced by the successes of science, of the radical meaninglessness of life itself, the existential mode reduced to irrelevance, and the emotional mode disabled by the dominance of logic, mundane reason and ‘common sense’ – we live in small-minded survival mode: juggling economic slavery, the housework, tax returns, insurance policies and mortgages with (phew, finally) that luxury cruise for two.

The point is not that the newspapers are full of consumer propaganda, titillation, heinously motivated reporting, and just plain rubbish, and that that needs to stop. That will not stop. We have to survive meaninglessness somehow. This ‘news’ is just the kind of nonsense we spout when we're down and out – wandering the cruise ship looking for the cabin that won't look like it did in the photos.

There is no point in debating with a depressive. He'll have an answer for everything. The more intellectual, the more elaborately he'll explain that death is not a dead end, life is a dead end. Better to care for him, clear up the debris of his disdain, and let him see, out of the corner of his eye, the beauty of how you relate to everyone in equality – that is to say, with eye-to-eye love and respect.

We do not need to be victims of our era's so-called scientific pointlessness. Each of us remains an authority-of-one. Each of us can look upon life for himself, and enter not the idea of not-knowing (which leads to depressive emptiness), but the experience of not-knowing (which leads to wonder and well-wishing).

Then, by embracing our not-knowing, rather than being disabled by it – and by consciously appreciating, rather than unconsciously consuming – the dignity enters our bloodstream. Then we know what we stand for, and what we would die for – and how to act. And through dignified action we are further dignified.

But we don't want to get up and unite. We live in glazed, media-induced stupefaction. We are committed couch individualists. We love our video clips. Our stumpedness fits nicely with our resolve to never sell our souls to religion again, to never surrender again – except at concerts and football matches. But what then do we intend to live and die for? Because live we will, and die we will, and unless we choose, we will be consumed. And that by which we will be consumed, for all of its slickness and sophistication, is still a WMD. Right now, slouching stumped is suicidal.

THE TRIUMPH OF DEFEAT

"Whether we know it or not, our lives are acts of imagination and the world is continually re-imagined through us."

— Michael Meade

Like the last piece, this piece addresses the repercussions of the philosophical underpinnings of our era. In the last piece I looked at the danger of the hedonistic apathy that is an understandable consequence of modern reductionist meaninglessness. In this piece I look at the so-called postmodern trends of subjectivism and relativism – which, like meaninglessness, also seem to be condemning us to the couch.

In the last piece, I look at how we might not oppose our depressive descent into meaninglessness, but transform it into mystery and appreciation. In this piece I look at how subjectivity and relativism need not paralyze us in impotence, but become the bedrock of the new civilisation we are now obliged to co-create – not only if we want to live beautifully together on this Earth, but if we wish our species to survive.

Is it the only possible outcome, if all points of view are equally subjective and all beholding relative to the beholder – no seeing superior to any other – that we are pulled in every direction simultaneously, and therefore can go in none? "Yeah, he's got a point you know, but so has he, and actually what he's saying is valid, too, and I know that fourth guy sees it differently, but I feel we should listen to him, too, and that fifth guy.... cup of tea?"

Or might, just as subjectivism is the victory of honesty, relativism be the victory of equality? Might relativism itself be a provisional truth that transcends itself – embodying a unitive recognition of the fallible humanity of every individual and, therefore, an honouring of our sameness and the commonality of our existential situation?

Relativism might seem like chaos for those parts of us that want 'The One Truth' behind which to all line up, but as I say, even if it is not immediately obvious, even if relativism is not as clearly 'The Truth' for us as Christianity, say, or Science, it nevertheless holds within itself a hidden 'metatruth': it is not only respectful of every point on the circle, but it respects the circle itself.

The difficulty is that in our devotion to the dead universe theory, we have amputated the existential and emotional modes and, therefore, even if we agree "yes, you're right – subjectivism and relativism need not be seen as the murderers of truth, but could be seen as the midwives of a whole new relationship with reality", this understanding does not move us to tears of realisation. We just nod in agreement. We don't sob, "Oh my god, yes! Just beneath our pretentiousness we are all so fragile! Generation after generation persuades itself of its truth. We are so afraid! Is it possible that we are becoming courageous enough to not have 'The One Truth'? Perhaps, despite it all, we are actually evolving!" To get off the couch we are going to need not only to revise our outlook, but education that revitalises our awareness, and our hearts.

The Triumph Of Defeat

I.

Cultures are held together by their 'truth' –
their intellectual idolatry,
their collusion in certainty,
their collective co-dependency –
their unanimous lie.

Subjectivism is a fatal disease
that eats at 'truth'.

Relativism is chronic subjectivism.
Once relativism has spread,
cultural life expectancy is limited.

A culture it consumes
writhes then withers...
The end of an era is imminent.

Or maybe not.

II.

Maybe on its deathbed
a culture is visited by ghosts
beckoning both ways –
to depression, to decadence, to degradation –
to release, to realisation, to rebirth...

Maybe we stand in our millions
at a threshold –
a threshold in earthly time –

paused in mid-Near Death Experience.
Maybe we stand at a time of choice –
the dead and the unborn watching, waiting...

III.

Perhaps the subjectivist virus
only eats at the lie of 'truth'
that needs all understood,
under reason, under mind...
Perhaps subjectivism is benevolent,
a healing organism –
infecting only fear and pride and fake logic....
Perhaps subjectivism is liberation
for the life-force knotted-up
in organs and muscles,
and skin and bones,
and gestures and expressions –
clogged and choking
because restrained from spontaneous response
to the overstanding moment.

IV.

You say, "All truths are relative."
I ask, "Including this one?"
You answer honestly:
"Yes –
it is the way things seem to us
in our times."

I ask, "Are all truths, therefore, equally valid?"
You say, "Yes –
one might know more about car engines,
another more about tennis –
one be more rational
another more existential –
one more contracted, another less –
but all voices are equally existentially valid
because all are equally themselves."

Relativism affirms equality.
But there is a choice:
to be crippled
by relativist partiality –

(wherever you sit in the circle
your view is partial –
not least of all,
you can't see your face) –
or, to be set alive
by relativist equality
(by the beauty of humble partiality
spoken from every seat in the circle).

Relativism affirms –
not the circle as the absolute truth,
as the sum truth of many partial truths –
but as a place of community and compassion,
of meeting and seeing of each other,
of egalitarian warmth and respect –
as a place of beauty.

V.

But relativist impotence prevails.
The couches are piled high
with the politically lazy,
the existentially anaesthetized,
the mentally cluttered,
and the emotionally dull...

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear", moans the man of 'truth',
and quoting Yeats:
"The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world".

"Sir", I reply, "I agree...
how much longer can we delay
slouched here at the threshold?!
If not now,
when will we choose
to step up –
to educate ourselves
in the beauty of the circle –
in speaking from experience?
Did not Yeats continue:
'Surely some revelation is at hand!?'"
The falcon hears the falconer
when it hears its own experience.

YOU ARE A PRODUCT

"Peace in the world can only come as a natural consequence of universal illumination."

- Nikola Tesla

In this piece I elaborate on the state of awareness of being 'above the law'. To be above the law is not a political or intellectual decision. It is not a place, or way of being, at which one can arrive via the rational mode (mind). It is an awakening, a felt-sense, an all-encompassing realisation that we are 'products' – that we are somehow employed at the production line of a civilisation, whether we agree with, or even know, its precepts – bewildered as to how we got here, not remembering ever having made a conscious decision to take the job.

We come to see that this civilisation has taken us over, that it has infiltrated every avenue of our being, that it controls us, that we belong to it – that we are thinking, feeling and seeing according to its mechanics. As we come around, as we regain consciousness, we see this civilisation has defined our existential horizons, our 'common sense', our desires and disappointments, even our daily physical movements. We realise we are made of it – that it runs our veins.

We see that – just as people toss about the word 'equality' without feeling ashamed of the degree to which we inferiorise and superiorise each other continuously – to be 'above the law' is also not a philosophical or even existential concept, but an experience of oneself as no longer limited by the design or decrees of one's culture. One no longer sees oneself as a product of the various 'factories' (physical, attitudinal, and social environments) within which one has been culturally manufactured, but rather as 'that which has been commodified' and thus become a productive unit acting on behalf of the civilisation/culture/colony.

The one who is waking up – reconnecting with the land, with the sky, with his own heart – the one who is not just politically 'above the law', but experientially – understands that we are not just 'wage slaves', but 'soul slaves' of our civilisation. It is then that he can make a choice as to how to belong, or whether to belong.

One sees that one has been a product, and one resolves to 'buy oneself back'. But stabilising in one's awakening, in 'life above the law', can take time. We are creatures of habit, and if we were formed in our most formative years (in our mothers' wombs, from birth to seven, then in 'education' for productive employment), it is only natural that it should take time to re-educate ourselves – to reconfigure our neurological

synapses, to become what we were, pre-product. Perhaps it is not even completely possible.

But waking up to “the primacy of our own experience” (as Terrance McKenna puts it) is possible. And some degree of ‘buying ourselves back’ is also possible (as we see in the many healing, therapeutic, spiritual, and self-developmental modalities now available to us). And at the end of this piece, I share my intuition that the more of us move towards becoming our own authorities, the easier and quicker this ‘buying ourselves back’ will be.

Finally, I want to mention another theme that runs through this piece: that ‘the culture’ has not turned us into products, but that there is some sort of primeval instinct that drives every species. Ants don’t decide to behave as ants, they just do. Similarly it is natural and inevitable that we become ‘products’ – useful, productive agents working on behalf of the collective.

Unfortunately though, the collective we are working for has its ‘compass set to suicide’ (possibly because it is still rolling along tracks laid during the industrial revolution, and in a mood of blind faith in unlimited economic ‘growth’). This elicits questions like, “Well, has this great primeval instinct lost the scent?”, “How could this evolutionary imperative be letting us destroy ourselves?” To which I reply: perhaps it’s trying to act through those of us who do see the writing on the wall, and who do care. Perhaps the question is not, “Why isn’t it guiding us now?”, but rather, “Why isn’t our action aligned with our seeing?”

You Are A Product

I.

In ant colonies
there are queens, workers, soldiers, drones...
each with a body designed for its function.
Wow!

Women have wombs,
men have testicles with the racial seed.
Wow!

Clarity seems crucial to us...
At every birth the spirit of the species roars:
"It's a boy!" or, "It's a girl!" –
"I am a species, and I shall survive!"

From the biological womb the baby is transferred
to the neurological womb (family),
where lack of love could damage production,
so we say,
"Congratulations –
you have a baby girl/boy! A baby of your own!"
"But is it?"
Or does it belong to the colony,
as you do,
and deny so vehemently precisely because
your elders did such a loving job?

Basic neurological programming takes approximately seven years. With meticulous devotion we fortify certain synapses, and let others die. This might be called 'colony reality adaptation': the adaptation of the new member to the colony's collective reality. For maximum functionality, every tiny creature must be mentally and emotionally aligned with the colony's heart and mind.

After this every young child will say it knows –
of its own free will and free opinion and free feeling –
what reality is,
and what isn't real –
what lives and what doesn't,
where it ends and others begin,
what's possible, and what's not,
what's good, and what isn't,
what it likes and dislikes,
what it desires,
what it longs for,
and what is really important.

We could discuss the details, but basically:
that's the way it is.
We are produced
by a blind and brilliant cellular intelligence –
a primeval species instinct.
It is amoral.
It is survival.
We do not control it.
It controls us.

II.

On this production line
you have been produced.
You are a product
of modern Western civilisation.
You are its.

We all are.
We all know for a fact
that the moon doesn't breathe,
that the stars are not angels...
We all know the boundaries of human capacities –
that no one can see through walls,
or time...
We worship the laws of physics casually,
thinking we are freethinkers –
feeling we feel what we choose to feel...
We are sure we are a sophisticated and evolved species –
unlike, say, the ants.

It's not your fault you're a product.
You haven't 'sold out'...
That would imply you once owned yourself...
(although in some deep, deep, deep, despite it all,
diehard, determined, irreducible way
you did own yourself,
and always did,
and do, even now) –
but that's unfair –
the odds were impossible:
you were a commodity-to-be before you were born,
you were commodified in your mother's womb.

III.
But it is to that irreducible you I am speaking –
call it spirit, call it soul,
call it the illusion of individuality,
call it the will to live, or to not die,
call it the evolutionary impulse,
call it consciousness, or the self –
I really don't care!
I speak because I feel there is a me in me
who is more than a product,
who has not been manufactured,

who cannot be commodified –
a genderless me who is the prima materia –
the raw material of the production line –
the sensing, feeling, thinking, experiencing stuff
out of which all products are made.

And it is to that me,
who I see in you,
that I am speaking.
I am speaking to you who, even now, despite it all,
remains, inalienably, your own authority.
It is to you who, somehow, heroically,
despite the lobotomies, despite the electric shock treatment,
despite the wrong drugs,
and all the wrongdoings,
still stands on Earth as an equal to all –
still stands humbly proud
alongside others who stand the same –
spines straight
 chests soft –
every single one of us, as William Ernest Henley put it:
"the master of (his) fate:
the captain of (his) soul".

IV.

What has happened?
How is it possible we are poisoning ourselves?
How is it possible we are poisoning the world?
Where is the primeval species intelligence
that has orchestrated us since the beginning?

Have we become deaf to the collective instinct?
Have we lived too long under ceilings?
Have we become unable to walk without shoes?
Can we no longer hear our own fears?
Are we no longer able to see at night without streetlights?
Have we bought too much food wrapped in plastic?
What have we done to ourselves?

In the great web of colonies
we call human civilisation on Earth
we continue to produce product-consuming products

like you,
and me –
as if there was no tomorrow –
as if tomorrow never comes,
as if doomsday was not looming,
as if our compass was not set to suicide.

Or maybe we are it,
you and I –
we who are worried and afraid –
we who care
for the beauty we breathe,
we who will not battle with our brothers –
we who are ready to be reborn.

Perhaps the spectacular intelligence
that controls our species
is shaking some of us awake.

V.
Is it obvious?
Can you see the commodification of you?
Can you see you have been possessed
by a horrific culture now out of control?
Is that OK for you?
Are you happy to be a product?
Are you willing to be possessed?
Are you prepared to work for destruction?

No?
Then buy yourself back!
Make up some ritual,
and do it!
Buy yourself out of producthood –
out of your conviction of the rightness
of being a law-adoring citizen
in a man-made, mind-made, mini-world.
Rise up!
Become the man who stands
at the centre of his experience,
of his living and dying,
of his 3-D dream,
of his not-knowing, and trusting, and letting go.

Let's each of us say to himself:
"My life is mine,
I decide what's important to me, and what's not.
We are all are equal –
therefore no one is above me.
No one.
I am my own authority –
and I welcome all others
in their authority.
I will not sit through anyone's lecture
on the meaning of existence.
I will gather close and listen to anyone share
their unique experience of existing.

My feet have their own, direct relationship
with the sand, with the mud –
my skin has its own way with the wind,
my tongue knows the taste of the rain,
my penis does not only desire what it ought.
I have my own direct relationship
with this moment, my 3-D experience –
my own existential dream".

VI.

As we live these words we come to understand
there is nothing simpler than freedom and love...
We shed skins:
no longer products of society
with clever ideas about the relativity of the law,
but inhabitants of a vaster world –
a more earthy, real and magical world –
'above the law' not by choice,
but by perception –
we become the people we've been waiting for...
they who could co-create
a civilisation of simplicity.

Yes,
'buying ourselves back' takes time.
but I intuit it will speed up
proportionately to our increase in numbers.

The path of simplicity
leads us to, as Plotinus puts it:
“the flight of the alone to the alone” –
but this does not preclude a great power
being released by the resonance
of men in their own authority –
men not for sale,
men ready to serve the colony
by not serving it
the way it wants to be served.

Postscript: The Pre-Productified Self

I want to add a note on the “irreducible you” I speak of from part III onwards. I want to say that I am not concerned here with whether this is fact or fiction.

Whether fact or fiction – everyone has a sense of themselves. And by the “irreducible you” I simply mean that sense of self.

Let’s keep it relevant. The garbage mountains are getting higher, the Arctic and Antarctic ice is disintegrating, there are wars, still, all over the planet... Let’s not get entangled in too much mental wrangling. We all have a sense of existing. And we have all been – however and whyever – modified for cultural productivity.

Whether that sense of ourselves is (as say the spiritualists) a prior core-of-us – upon which ‘productification’ was imposed, or whether (as say the materialists) we always were and will be ‘products that feel conscious’ but that just happen, right now, to be in a phase of re-evaluating the way we’ve been ‘productified’ – either way: we have a sense of self.

Whatever philosophical notions you, or I, or anyone, might be attached to – we all have a sense of ourselves.

As Isaac Bashevis Singer comments in relation to free will and predestination: "We have to believe in free-will. We've got no choice"!

What can we do? Even if we are all illusions, who else can we be?!

The question then is not whether, metaphysically, we exist, but what, physically, we choose to do with our existing.

"The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum – even encourage the more critical and dissident views. That gives people the sense that there's free thinking going on, while all the time the presuppositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of the debate."

- Noam Chomsky

THE CIRCUS OF LIES!

"The best way to keep a prisoner from escaping is to make sure he never knows he's in prison."

- Fyodor Dostoevsky

This is essentially a piece about judgement – about the internalisation of societal values and the way we then impose them upon each other.

We thus become (however non-conformist, or alternative, or revolutionary we might consider ourselves), the agents of societal control – an all-in, unpaid, police force, enforcing societal norms which are so ridiculous ("big tits are best") that they would be hilarious if they weren't the ropes with which we bind ourselves, and each other, and restrain ourselves from breathing the mystery of existence.

Perhaps the saddest and most concerning aspect of all this is not that we live as day-in, day-out little judgement machines – reinforcing and enforcing the most absurd cultural values – but that, like animals born 'in captivity', i.e. in prison, it's all we know. And even if we are troubled by some vague existential malaise in adolescence, we soon settle down to making money and a comfy life of judgement.

The Circus Of Lies

Lies, lies, lies, lies,
lies, lies, lies, lies –
and more lies!

We are choking on fed lies
and spewing them back out –
as judgement.

Thus the sick cycle spins...

Some sample lies:

big tits and bums are best.

Big dicks and big muscles are best.

Big money is best.

Big houses, big cars, big TVs...

Big fan clubs, big influence...

Big experiences, big awakenings...

Basically – just about big anything...

And the bigger the better,
the more the merrier...

Judging, judging, judging, judging –
day in, day out –
judging, judging, judging, judging...
(Have you not been listening
to your own secret monologue?)

"Her tits are too small!
Oh, but hers – hers are perfect!
Look at him – is he anorexic?
But him, wow, I'd better be careful around him!"
Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera –
all day, every day, day after day,
a lifetime of judgement days.

Who needs a government, police, an army?!
We are self-regulating –
mutually self-regulating –
mutually controlling,
mutually torturing...

Thus we all perform
like dancing bears
in the circus of lies,
while the planets and stars circle the sky,
the seasons circle the land,
and the wild bear fish in mountain streams.

Do you want a guru
to get really enlightened?
Go to the mountains –
go find a bear!
Who could be more noble,
more pure, more tender, more fierce,
more innocent, more wise?
And cry, cry for the dancing bear –
who has never seen a river
or smelt the mountain air,
or met another bear –
his will shattered,
his heart broken –

a symbol
of Nobility on Earth
in such pain
it doesn't hurt anymore.

What is The Truth?
The truth is the sky,
the truth is the mountain breeze,
the truth is salmon.
The truth is the smell of the pine,
the truth is the pebbles in the river,
the truth is powder white bones,
the truth is every day's dawn.
I know that's not very helpful –
but that's as far as I've got...

"But hey – haven't you heard –
circus bears have been banned!"
"Oh, OK – well, let's go to the zoo then!"
And so off we trot to the zoo...
where there are bears,
and just so much more variety
of torture –
trot trot trot
(let's take the children
for an educational experience)
trot trot trot
bizarrely unbothered
by the ropes on our wrists and angles,
(well, after a while
you get used to them) –
bizarrely unaware
we are the dancing bears
in the circus of lies...
Bizarrely docile
(we rarely bite),
bizarrely unaware
we could kill our trainer
with one swipe of the claw...

We are the dancing judgement bears –
trot trot trot
trot trot trot

"Look he's a good trotter!"
"Oh, but look at him,
ha ha ha –
no, that's not how you trot –
look this is how it's done".

We carry our own ropes.
Our own minds a tangled mess –
we keep each other all tied up
in neat and tidy knots.

In some science fiction films
future governments warn not to go out
beyond the authorised zone, into the forbidden zone –
because there we might breathe
the mountain breeze again,
and remember
how to smell.
No need!
We are all each others' little governments!

Who needs prisons?!
We work all day for money to eat –
and control each other
with a glance,
with a smile,
with a frown.

But, hey, this is all getting a bit heavy...
Haven't you heard –
there's a party tonight?
Surely you heard –
you sent out the invitations!
We're going to dance all night!
And no alcohol needed...
You only need alcohol
to numb the pain
while you can still feel
the pain.
After that – who needs alcohol
to numb numbness?
Come on –
let's dance!

AN UPRISING OF ONE

*"In the name of woman. In the name of Man. In the name of the children. In the name of the land.
Here comes The Man! Here comes The Man!"*

- traditional chant

This is a piece written in the mythopoetic style of the first wave men's movement that I spoke about at the very beginning. It remains a style – a texture of perspective – that moves me profoundly.

Among its various influences there was a respect for indigenous traditions, like those of the Native Americans – thus (in this piece) terms like 'All Our Relations', and 'Great Mystery' – and for Archetypal Psychology (James Hillman was one figurehead of the movement).

The King is one of the four 'Male Archetypes', as we used to call them, inspired by the Jungian analysts Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette's book *King, Warrior, Magician, Lover*. The concept was that the male psyche had these four primordial components. Whether this is true or not, it was a deep, soulful, poetic, often epic, dignified manner of enquiry.

As I have explained elsewhere, Archetypes are a Platonic concept, revisited by Jung. The idea is that there exist, beyond this world, energetic repositories – of which the energies of this world partake. So for example, there exists somewhere a repository of Warrior energy – upon which the warrior draws, by which he is surcharged, and within whose sunshine he moves alongside all other warriors.

King, Warrior, Magician and Lover energies could arise and fall within any man at any time. This was the general idea. And each Archetype had its light and shadow – so one could examine the quality of each energy within oneself.

When I facilitated men's groups in this mythopoetic mode I used the Archetype of the King slightly differently. I would use it as a symbol of 'the whole man'. Not a concept I am aligned with anymore. But at the time I spoke of the four archetypes as Father, Warrior, Magician, Lover – and of the King as the integration and synthesis of them all.

I wouldn't use the term 'the whole man' to describe "The King" of the piece that follows (thus implying an ideal of perfection, setting up effort in the psyche, splitting, and so on) – I would say he's more (to use the archetypal language) the Archetypal Man – not someone to aspire to become, but rather the repository itself – Man in the

abstract, the pure, timeless essence of Man – at a level deeper than whatever evolutionary moment he might be in.

May he arise within us all!
May he arise here on our planet!

An Uprising Of One

He comes in the name of our Fathers,
and our fathers' fathers, and
of names forgotten...
names like ours.
He comes in the name of the male –
of ancestors from days before walls.
He comes as them.
He is them –
born anew.

They walk behind him.
How could he judge such men –
knowing himself to also be
a creature of his age –
less evolved
than those to come –
making dreadful errors, perhaps,
even now as he rises up
in honesty?

Look! In the name of the Fathers – look:
here comes The King!

He comes in the name of Woman –
in the name of the blood of the womb,
in the name of the milk of love....
He loves to rest his head
upon her belly,
to slide his penis inside her,
to meet her eyes
with his eyes –
to help her uncut her ropes,
as she helps him with his.
Look! In the name of Woman – look:

here comes The King!

He comes in the name of all Peoples –
fuck categories of woman and man!
Nobody is who they were told they were.
Nobody.
Nobody is who they say they are.
Nobody.
Look! In the name of People – look:
here comes The King!

He comes in the name of the Children –
as fresh as the dawn earth,
every day.
They are newborn –
innocent lambs –
so open
to the loving guidance
they need.
Look! In the name of the Children – look:
here comes The King!

He comes in the name of the Species:
animals, birds, fish, insects, trees, plants, vegetables and grass.
With them he shares this world.
Teachers in patience, and forgiveness, and joy –
in presentness and surrender.
Look! In the name of All Our Relations – look:
here comes The King!

He comes in the name of the Elements:
fire, earth, water, air.
They are his body.
To them it belongs.
It is theirs.
He shall return it...
well used –
well loved.
Look! In the name of the forest fire,
in the name of the ocean storm,
in the name of the desert sky,
in the name of the jungle night – look:
here comes The King!

He comes in the name of the Planets,
of the stars
and dark space.
They are his mind, his intelligence,
his sense of self –
all belong to them.
He is one of them –
a radiant being –
infinite –
gone in a flash.
Look! In the name of the Cosmos – look:
here comes The King!

He comes in the name of The Mystery,
home to us all.
The home we're in now.
This home.

He comes in trust –
that others may trust.
He comes in courage
that others may be Kings.
He comes in love,
helplessly.
He comes in honesty:
not knowing who or what or where or why he is –
informed of the limits of mind,
feeling
his way...
no authority over him –
he comes in freedom –
indefinable –
Mystery in service of Mystery.
Look! In the name of Great Mystery – look:
here comes The King!

He comes in the name of his Brothers
tormented
by the same demons,
blessed
by the same gods –
brothers impossible to honour

enough.

He comes in the name of the Brotherhood of Man –
the ever-arising Brotherhood of Kings.

Look! He comes flanked by his Brothers – look:
here comes 'The King!

He comes in honour of eternity
in every grain of sand.

Before death takes,
giving –
in the name of himself –
in his own name –
giving of himself,
of 'The King.

Look! In the name of 'The King – look:
here comes 'The King!

He comes in the name of his Name –
in the name of who he is,
in the name of
who he will have been.

He comes in the name of his Father.
He comes in his name –
as his son.
He comes in the name of the Moon.
He comes in the name of the Sun.

Look! Here comes 'The King!
Look! Here comes 'The King!

He comes in the name of his Father.
He comes in his name –
as his son.
He comes in the name of the Moon.
He comes in the name of the Sun.

Look! Here comes 'The King!
Look! Here comes 'The King!

SCRIBBLED SERVIETTES: GLOBAL CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

"We stole countries with the cunning use of flags! Just sail halfway around the world, stick a flag in. "I claim India for Britain." And they're going, "You can't claim us. We live here! There's five hundred million of us." "Do you have a flag?" "We don't need a bloody flag, this is our country, you bastard!" "No flag, no country! You can't have one. That's the rules... that... I've just made up! And I'm backing it up with this gun..."

- Eddie Izzard

Or as Robert Anton Wilson puts it: "The land monopoly always starts with conquest. Shot and shell are the coins of purchase, as Herbert Spencer said. Except by force of arms, nobody 'owns' the earth, anymore than the moon, the planets, the stars themselves".

This piece is a call to global civil disobedience. This doesn't mean that I am shouting down creative and purposeful action that is within the law. Why would I be against that? I am just waving both flags. But I want it to be clear that civil obedience and civil disobedience are two equally valid options for collective change – and that although civil disobedience many times has the moral high ground, we do tend to follow the law like a faithful congregation.

We need to open our political minds. We need to open our imaginations beyond the established order and established ways of change – particularly in these times when the global leaders of civilisation are not addressing the ecological emergency with anything even remotely like an appropriate sense of urgency, and are even less interested in the state of the collective consciousness of humanity that has caused the emergency (and that needs, therefore, to be addressed with equal urgency, if we are not to inevitably re-arrive, sooner or later, at this same situation).

This piece touches on our subservience to centralised authority and its propagation of the most awful assessment of human nature as justification of the need of Law and Order, and obedience.

This piece also touches on our fear of standing up.

I want to add that safety is in numbers. One person can be shot. Sixty thousand can be imprisoned (like in Gandhi's salt march). Hundreds of thousands can be discredited. But a million? That's another matter... A million peaceful men – of all

nations, ages, colours and creeds – standing up, united, saying, "No! enough! We can't, and won't, follow any more!" That would be another matter entirely.

We need to stop believing, and focus on being. We need to stop giving credence to utterly arbitrary, entirely superficial claims to authority. If a child clung to a lamp post, saying, "Daddy, this lamppost is mine", you might say, "Darling, why do you say that?" But you wouldn't take his assertion of his proprietorship as a serious legal claim.

Our authorities are so ludicrous they're hilarious, but they're also ripping the fabric of life to shreds – and that's not funny at all.

How far are you and I, the men alive today, the men of our generations, going to let ourselves be dragged along by the balls –(among a million other things) working for wages to buy poisoned food?

Vandana Shiva says: "Globalised industrialised food is not cheap: it is too costly for the Earth, for the farmers, for our health. The Earth can no longer carry the burden of groundwater mining, pesticide pollution, disappearance of species and destabilisation of the climate. Farmers can no longer carry the burden of debt, which is inevitable in industrial farming with its high costs of production. It is incapable of producing safe, culturally appropriate, tasty, quality food. And it is incapable of producing enough food for all because it is wasteful of land, water and energy. Industrial agriculture uses ten times more energy than it produces. It is thus ten times less efficient."

How much longer before we break the concrete and plant our own organic veg.? When will we come to feel we have followed the path to the wasteland far enough, and turn back towards beauty?

Gandhi's salt march (protesting the utterly outrageous British appropriation of Indian salt in exactly the way of Eddie Izzard's sketch (above) – and in exactly the way transnational corporations have now declared their control of the seed market) was, perhaps above all, a march of empowerment (with national and international consequences).

We will become empowered too, once we own that each of us has a unique perspective – and that we're all seeing the same.

Scribbled Serviettes: Global Civil Disobedience

Governments and corporations scribble words
on five star serviettes
and fancy hotel headed notepaper,
then wave them in front of cameras
and say:
"It is written!
It is law!"

Are we stupid?
Apparently.

"Do we need to remind you
that human beings are bad –
and that to disobey the law
will unleash the bats of hell?!
Only obedience
can protect you!"

Not stupid, maybe –
just afraid.

But haven't we all seen the poster
with the dignified warrior warning:
"When the last tree has been cut down,
the last fish caught,
the last river poisoned,
only then will we realise
that one cannot eat money."

Turn away, turn away, brother!
Switch it off!
Don't take the serviettes seriously.
To debate is to validate
the lunatic logic.

When The Important Man,
standing before the cameras –
an angry five year old in his daddy's shoes,
coughing to deepen his voice
scowling to look more serious –
reads from his serviette scrap:

"This Amazonian plant has value.
We have patented it.
Now it is ours."
fall about laughing!
Crack up!
And when you can't bear it anymore,
look in each others' eyes –
that'll start you off again!
Have a great time!

And then go outside
and kiss the Earth,
and say,
"We will protect you!
We love you more than anything!
You are beauty beyond beauty,
mystery beyond mystery.
We love everything about you!
We love every leaf,
every gust of wind,
every ant parade,
every crab.
We love you,
and we are yours,
and we are not the bats of hell –
we are the same
as every tree and every fish –
each of us is a song –
a song of flesh and bone,
of love and pain,
of birth and death –
a song sung from your beauty."

That should do the trick!
After all,
The Important Man is hilarious,
but he is also a stab in the heart of life.
And we are life.
And so it hurts.
And we need to rub our palms on our chests,
and not only laugh,
but sob.

Brother –
if not now when?
When, for you, would be
the moment
to rise up,
and walk out?
What for you would justify
global civil disobedience?
How far do you intend to let this go?
Or isn't it up to you?

Brother –
what will our descendants say?
As they chop up bank notes
and grind up coins
to make their money soup?

Fuck it!
We're going to die anyway.
Let's risk it –
let's unite
outside the serviette law.
Outside,
where the air is not conditioned,
where the heating is not centralised,
where beauty shocks and teases us at every turn.
Let's claim the power
of the tidal waves and thunder –
the power rushing in our blood –
the one power.

We can do better than obedience.
We can do dignity.
We can stand up
for beauty.
We can stand up
as the beauty we are.
Brother, do we share a seeing –
or don't we?

*"Man should not be in the service of society, society should be in the service of man. When man is in
the service of society, you have a monster state,
and that's what is threatening the world at this minute."
— Joseph Campbell*

6

MANHOOD



“vulnerability is the proof of power”

THE ASHES OF SHAME

"When our instinctual life is shamed, the natural core of our life is bound up. It's like an acorn going through excruciating agony for becoming an oak, or a flower feeling ashamed for blossoming."
- John Bradshaw

In the introductory piece 'A Men's Liberation Movement' I mention that the first wave men's movement lacked vision, but also that it walked under a cloud of shame.

That shame continues to hang in the air – like some sort of psychic pollution – over the head of modern man. It is evident in media portrayals of male practical and emotional incompetence, the ease with which women infantilise men, and the swing of the pendulum away from all things previously the pride of men: reason ("oh don't be so heady!"), organisation ("please don't be so controlling!"), sobriety ("can't you be a bit more spontaneous?"), and so on. But this is just the tip of the iceberg – or the tip of the tip.

Underneath this undermining is a deeper current that runs like this: man is a violent, sex addicted, emotionally cut-off, arrogant fool responsible for leading the world through endless, pointless wars, massacres and genocides – a hideous creature who has led the rape of the Earth, and is now leading us to self-destruction.

Consciously, and mostly unconsciously, most men and women who have had contact with modern Western culture (almost everyone on Earth), have some sort of connection with this shame cloud.

I call this anti-man rant 'pseudo-feminist' because, as far as I am concerned, actual feminism is utterly and totally egalitarian. Nevertheless, as we have discussed repeatedly, there is an unruly crowd within each of us, writhing with contradictions and conflicts. Thus, within many women and men who are (in their most centred place) actual feminists, there also lurks a shame cloud spraying, anti-man pseudo-feminist.

Crippled by these anti-man shame mantras, as men at the time of the first wave Men's Movement, we moved along as best we could – which wasn't very ably. No doubt we were unaware just how much self-hatred we had absorbed.

The thing is: we couldn't open to such self-hatred because we didn't really know what to do with it. We needed (and still need) to acknowledge our capacity as men to act

psychopathically (in ways devoid of emotional connection) – which can be terrifying, and catastrophic. But we also needed and need to relate to that ‘psychopathic’ part of ourselves from centre. We cannot become identified with it – as if it was/is who we were. And without centre it would be wise not to attempt to relate to it (we will just merge and get confused). But if we can (perhaps with support), then as that internal relationship evolves, healing happens – in its own way, at its own pace.

‘Healing’ doesn’t mean ‘getting rid of’ this aspect of ourselves. In those terms, we will never heal. But once acknowledged as a very real energy within us – yes, we can (a) cease to be controlled by this dark archetypal male, this ‘devil’; and (b) allow him to understand himself, and orchestrate his own transformation.

We must, however, acknowledge him. On reading the piece that follows you might feel some resistance – “no, this might apply to other men, but not to me”. I would invite you to relate to this resistance from centre – gently, peacefully – to treat it as another ‘internal character’, and ask yourself what you need to be able to read on in openness.

“What we resist persists” – and only once we have the spaciousness to be able to acknowledge that we are cells within the collective body of Man, and therefore share in all of the challenges as well as the gifts of Man, can we loosen our identification with “the shame-boy”, and can the healing begin. Until then we’re too busy saying “no, not me, that’s not me, I am different, I have no such beast inside me”, to be able to enter the healing relationship.

Clearly, we were not able to rise up in unity at the time of the first wave men’s movement. How could Man rise up if he wished he wasn’t himself?

But now we have all sorts of ‘technologies’ and healing modalities at our fingertips, as well as a more resilient sense of what centre means. Not only this, but many of us have entered relationship with this killer-rapist energy inside ourselves – have discovered his essence is innocent, sexual, wild, potent, instinctive, fierce... and been invigorated by integrating him back into our personalities, rather than repressing him. We have come to appreciate how impoverished we were without him in his wholeness within us – and how tight-arsed is a society that excludes him!

We need him! It is he – the passionate earth man – the man who runs naked in the sun, and rolls about in the riverbed like a hippo, and meets the deer eye to eye in stillness, and hears the moon’s prayers, and rocks to the rhythm of the rain – it is he who (if we are to arise in humble dignity) will be the roar of our arising.

It is he, the tips of his horns attuned to the life buzz that fills the air – the buzz we do not breathe, but that breathes us all – it is he whose wild love will get us off the

couch, out from under our roofs, back to all that is obvious. He has the scent. It is he who has no patience with political theories, or theology, or psychology. He can hardly speak! It is he who can see in the dark. Centre is our adviser, but he is our tracker.

Brother, he lives deep in the forest, on the other side of the burnt out fire, grinding his teeth and pacing. Approach with care. Do not love him patronisingly. Do not secretly wish to be rid of him. Bow before him, and he will pledge himself to you forever. Then your only problem will be so much blood in your veins!

Brothers, this is work we need to do together. The pseudo-feminist, man-blaming, man-shaming cloud that hangs around modern culture is an energy field, and it is impacting us daily. But meeting him – each alone, all together – all for one, and one for all – we can co-create another energy field, one that will rain remembrance upon us, and reignite the fire in our eyes.

The Ashes Of Shame

I.

And well you should be ashamed, she moaned –
for man has done dreadful deeds.

Man has been evil,
a puppet of the devil –
power hungry and mad for war.

Well you should be ashamed!

For man has raped for fun,
laughed in the face of his victim,
and gone on and raped again!

Well you should be ashamed,
even though you are only six years old –
for man is the root of all rottenness

on this planet –
look at what he has done!

He has spread concrete over the fields,
mined minerals and metals for his caprices
and flicked his toxic waste to the wind
like cigarette butts.

It is man, my son,
(and soon you will be one)
who has engineered the ecological downfall of the world.

Man is killing the animals and the trees.

Man is killing us all.

But mother,
what should I do?
Every day I am growing,
and becoming more like my father.

Who was a lout, my son, a philanderer!
Who betrayed me for another woman.
Who drank like a camel,
and sexed like a bull.
He gambled his wages,
I never saw a cent.
How we survived I do not know.
Even so I was sad when he died.
I am forgiving, you see –
for that is the nature of woman.

Mother, perhaps I can be
more like you?

No, my son, that is not possible.
You have a cock.
And therefore, I am sorry –
maybe it is biological
or maybe neurological –
but man is bad by design,
just look at what he has done!

I will try to be different mother,
I will try to be good.
I could be gay, mother –
would that help?
Or a monk, mother,
free of desire?
Or maybe I should kill myself before I am seven,
and then I can do nothing wrong?

No, my son –
live in repentance,
heed the wisdom of women,
seek healing for the evil seed inside you –
the evil seed you are –
and be as kind as you can,
even if that's not very much.

II.

Thus my mother told me the truth about man.
Now I am eighty eight, nearly eighty nine.
I have spent my life repenting
(as she said I should)
the evil of man,
the disgrace of his-story,
the madness of men's wars,
his rape of the earth,
his abusive cock,
his emotional numbness...

I have spent my life hiding
the demon 'inside me'...
(maybe I say it that way
because I am afraid I am one).
I know of these emotional subtleties because
I have spent my life healing
(as my mother said I should),
but the demon in me
(or who I am),
won't be got rid of.
I have seen shamans and psychics, rabbis and priests,
psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists...
I have tried meditation and medication
and every therapy under the sun –
but nothing works –
I am still a man.

Throughout my life I have dreamt one dream:
I wander the city streets at night naked,
smeared with ashes,
like a Hindu sadhu....
In every dream I wash off the ash,
then I look in the mirror
and I am covered in ash again.

Soon I will be dead,
like my father,
and even though I have tried
(as my mother said I should)
to be kind,

I fear man is a demon –
perhaps impossible to redeem.
His appetite for power
through money and strength and sex
insatiable,
his ruthlessness and cruelty
insatiable...
his unfeeling arrogance
insatiable....

I will soon be dead.
These last years I have turned to god.
I have prayed for forgiveness
for being a man.
I think I believe in reincarnation now,
and I am hopeful
in my next life
I can be like my mother.

BIG IS NOT BETTER

*"The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection."
— George Orwell*

The next pieces explore questions around how we focus ourselves – once we've stayed in our experience, then left it, then returned again... enough times to see that it's totally fulfilling to stay, but that we've been educated in absence, and that the culture as a whole encourages absence – in short: that it's not easy.

At this point two related tendencies can arise. One is the 'developmental' tendency, the other the 'perfectionist' tendency towards an end-goal: the perfected human being, the perfect me. By the developmental tendency I mean that we say to ourselves, "I am not very good at this, but my god, John's really got it. If I could be more like John I'd be much happier. He's so in his own experience. I really need to devote myself to my self-development with more determination."

In this you can no doubt already hear the perfectionist tendency too – to create 'an arrival' – something to aim for, a final version of oneself to which to aspire. Clearly the message one is shouting at oneself (via the combination of the two tendencies) is that, as one is, one is inadequate. But how can that be true? How can we be inadequate if we are unique? We can only be inadequate by comparison. And if we are unique we are incomparable.

Rather, let's be clear that both inadequacy and adequacy are concoctions of more contracted parts of ourselves, and that staying in our own experience means self-acceptance – acceptance of ourselves as we are. And if, one day, we find we have become the kind of person our previous self admired then we self-accept that too. We don't become life-affirming adults by being self-negating adolescents – "I am nothing now, but I will be something once I am an adult" – no. We become life-affirming adults by being life-affirming adolescents.

But developmentalism and perfectionism are deep in us. When we are out of our own experience – not valuing our unique perceptions, our unique personalities, our unique lives; fixated on what others think of us, on impressing others, on avoiding others, on realizing other peoples' ambitions, on fitting in with others, and so on ad nauseam, thus continuously pouring water on the fire of our self-worth – predictably, we feel shit. Yes, we have an 'up' every time we get a smile of approval – and we might get a few a day, so on we go. In fact, we might have approval-on-tap from, say, a lover

who is surviving being out-of-themselves by being adoring – but on the inside we know. We know how ‘out’, how off-balance and disempowered, we really are.

The root cause is being out of our own experience, so nothing other than returning to our own experience is going to make any real difference. We can fixate – as many spiritual people, and therapy people, and human potential people do – on the modification of the personality we have formulated in order to impress others, or be loved by others, but this only takes us closer to crisis – to the inevitability of burn out and breakdown.

There is nowhere to go. Except into the experience we’re already in. There is nobody to become. Except the person we already are. And then, over the years (and don’t ask me how it happens, because I don’t know) – over the years of self-acceptance, self-kindness, self-forgiveness – whether because of our self-loving, or by grace, or because it was predestined, or a mix of the above, or some other factor or factors of whose existence we have no knowledge... gradually, we become comfortable in ourselves, and let go of our dependence upon the approval of uncomfortable, dependent others. And we come to sense exactly how it is that we belong.

Big Is Not Better

The size of the universe fluctuates.

When we see (don’t just look at) the trees, the animals –
the world gets bigger...

perception opens the physical,
mystery interconnects the everyday...

Then – there’s a car
coming right at us!

Mystery?

What mystery?

Where?

Everywhereness shrinks

to a pinpoint world

where all that is

is us and that car.

Yeats was in a café...

"While on the shop and street I gazed

My body of a sudden blazed;

And twenty minutes more or less

It seemed, so great my happiness,

That I was blessed and could bless.”
Why no poem
about how pissed-off he got
when that clumsy waitress
spilt the coffee on him?
Yes, because the moment was rare.
But also perhaps because
spirit is glorious and grand,
and matter is detailed and irritating –
and to be overcome.

All the gurus say
we’re here to expand
from me to us to all –
but I see no writing in the sky –
and while oneness is wonderful
at the ashram,
it’s really dangerous at high speeds
on a five-lane highway.

Yes, my smallness can be astonishing...
Just watch me:
tripping-off on trivia,
felled by some mini-inconvenience,
obsessed with a lover’s carelessly tossed word,
grumpy, moaning, judging...
The mystery sucked out of the air –
just watch
my very busy life
of nitpicking, small-minded self-obsession!

But without small me
where would I be
in the jostling queue?
At the back, probably! :)
Who will defend my place
if not me?

In the jostle of smallnesses –
in the finite –
we meet the infinite textures
of the mystery.
I drive my child to school

because she is my child –
not yours
(even if we are all one)...
And then I drive her to her friend's house,
and then I am angry with her,
and then she with me,
and then we laugh,
and then we play....

And whether I offer my life
on the battlefield,
or for my art,
or for social reform,
or for my family,
or my religion:
it is only because
my small life is everything
to me,
and yours to you,
that my sacrifice of me
sunders your heart,
humbles and shames you,
dignifies you –
and unites us
in the symphonic pathos
of human limitation...

Small is not bad,
and big is not good.
Once I was walking with a guru in India –
(been there, done that) :) –
when we came upon a beggar.
I was about to give him a rupee
when the guru touched my wrist.
"No", he said sternly,
"it is his karma".
I should've said, "Fuck off,
it's my karma to give him a rupee!",
but at the time
I was too busy grovelling
before the vastness of his consciousness.
Vast indeed, dear guru –
oh so vast...

"Ah!" exclaims the mind
(it cannot conceive
that this is not a mental puzzle)
"then we must find a balance,
a midpoint between big and small,
between contraction and expansion,
between the particular and the totality –
we must respect both pulls –
we must live from our centres –
yes!
That is The Way!"

But that would be
to be held still,
to be pinned down...
That would be
to live without breathing
in and out,
in and out...

How then could we contract?!
Where would be the confusion,
and the regret,
and the humour,
and the pain?
How then could we expand?
Where would be the becoming,
the risking –
the moment-to-moment
reincarnating –
the letting go?

A STYLE OF MANHOOD

"I detest the masculine point of view. I am bored by his heroism, virtue, and honour. I think the best these men can do is not talk about themselves anymore."

- Virginia Woolf

In this piece I challenge the mega-star style of manhood presented by many trainers and coaches and guides.

While I acknowledge their individual integrity, and recognise the benefits they offer to so many people in this nothing-is-black-and-white world – because we are looking here at co-creating an open, global brotherhood that is not limited by traditional/patriarchal male conditioning (the masculinity package) – I feel I need to say that in my opinion they're selling an updated package. It might well be a 'new improved' package, but it is another heroic package nonetheless – perpetuating the heroic posture and, therefore simultaneously, the repression of the authentic man.

And of course, with the repression of the authentic man comes inauthentic relationships with each other, with women – with everyone and everything. And we are already inauthentic enough.

We don't need another package for men. What we need is that these mentors and guides promote a brotherhood that can bubble with contradiction, that can accommodate confusion, that has no set style of manhood, that welcomes all styles, that can be with what-is, and let what-is find its way – trusting we will grow as we need to.

We don't need another ideal to strive for, to measure ourselves against, to crumble before. We need brotherhood that is not only in favour of competence and clarity, but that can also make room for our ineptitude and unconsciousness – a brotherhood within which we can be heroes, but also men: perfect not because we have identified with some new ideal, but because we have the balls and openness and soft-enough hearts to be who we already are.

A Style Of Manhood

Within every message
there's a style.

Most stylists propose a heroic style.
Appealing consciously,
and unconsciously,
to the prevailing, flailing I'm-Always-OK style of manhood,
even the very best of stylists model
the powerful, energised, emotionally masterful man –
the Even-More-OK Man.

I admire such stylists
as they charge on stage
before audiences of thousands.
They are passionate, gigantic men.
If we are to be heroes –
let us be daring, caring heroes,
like them.

But heroes are heroes
in the eyes of others.
Heroes impress.
They are mythic men –
riders of unicorns, riders of black stallions –
sacrificial men.
But the hero is not the man.

The man also gets ill.
The man also doubts.
The man is overcome.
The man needs a thigh to cry on,
and the right to feel weak...

As well as to lead,
the man likes to be led...
as well as to ride –
to be ridden.

The man wanders off in the night
and howls
for no good reason –

for no reason he knows...
A creature of instinct,
an animal of the Earth –
he is howled-through, like a hollow bamboo –
a bamboo hollowed-out by seasons
of humbling –
of loss, of letting go, and the beauty of aging –
by years of ego-erosion,
and the gradual appreciation of simplicity.

I don't want to be a reconditioned man –
restyled, remodelled, remade...
When I was an Always-OK Hero
my manhood was Not-OK.
The more fabulously OK I was,
(the more sparkling my hero's sword) –
the more resentful my manhood of his exile,
the more pathetic his whining,
the more menacing his growl.
I dread what he might become
in the shadow of Even-More-OK Man.

I seek out the stylist
whose invitation is to authenticity –
to both OKness and Not-OKness –
to the Sometimes-Energised-Sometimes-Not Man.
(Indeed,
it is a clumsier title!)

The wind has let up.
The ocean is still.
Pine trees, birdsong, wild boar, me...
Time is having an off-day –
missing a minute here, an hour there –
freedom is in the air...
Here in the gentle sunshine
sciatica is searing through my leg
like splintered bones grating...
Within the freedom,
pain.

My brother, sitting alongside me, remembers his father
on his deathbed –

and cries not for the loss,
but for the exquisiteness of his father's resistance –
which was also his love for this world.
Within the freedom,
grief.

In freedom there is room for it all.
As Rumi says:
"The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond".
Every emotion has a message.

But if we are caught up in heroism,
if we are sold on wearing the cape of the ideal man –
the cape of the sungod –
then we can't greet all of ourselves,
the non-heroic is left out on the street –
and, eventually, there is
dictatorship,
or revolution.

Read the style,
not the spoken message –
listen not to what,
but to how.
It's nonverbal.
We imitate.
Take care....

It's all advertising.
Do not be persuaded you are not man enough,
not ideal enough –
and that you need a new style.
Love your sense of inadequacy...

You already have
your own style.
This is your heroism:
to refuse to be someone else.

GREATNESS

"Nothing is more simple than greatness; indeed, to be simple is to be great."

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

This piece continues the theme of the previous piece, 'A Style of Manhood'. What is the style of manhood that some of the most potent and successful trainers in the world are propagating? It is 'The Great Man'. He is fit and focussed, fast and funny, a dazzling wizard of a man – heartfelt and powerful, material and spiritual – frankly: what he isn't, isn't worth being. He is the Great Man – and you, sir, by following the Great Man (for a very reasonable cost, I might add), can also be great. Which would be so much better than being who you are – right?

As well as reiterating and elaborating some of the themes of the previous piece, I go on to open an enquiry into what greatness might be. If it is not the imposition of some charismatic ideal of greatness, then what is it? The enquiry thread I suggest links self-love to aloneness to greatness: by loving ourselves we find our aloneness, and by living openly in this self-loving aloneness, our unique, innate greatness is revealed.

Greatness

I.

What is it

to be great?

To radiate brilliantly?

To be magnificent?

To influence the multitude?

To be glorious?

To be better, bigger, more, special, outstanding?

What is it

to be great?

My head turns when I hear

the call to greatness:

"Do not limit yourself!" it encourages,

"even you do not know your potential!"

Wow!
My back straightens...
Then sometimes, almost mystically:
"Release the greatness within!
You are a gift to the world!
Be the gift you are!"
Am I?
Maybe I am....

My head turns because I intuit
we are all unique,
all equal –
and, therefore, somehow...
equally great.

But I turn away again –
disappointed...
this call to greatness, it seems,
is only for people who want to do great things –
big things, very big things...
It is for people with big dreams,
people racked with creative passion,
blessed by the dove from above,
with huge offerings to place at the feet of history...
This brand of greatness, it seems,
is for people ready to be lifted on high
by the billowing winds of an enormous destiny –
each one will become an extraordinary innovator,
an eccentrically original billionaire entrepreneur,
a football star, a music star, a political star –
a star of some sort –
a leader, an inspirer, a wayfinder,
a giant among men.

(I think –
a little cynically –
"Lucky there's enough of us –
we, the not-so-great –
otherwise there'd be only leaders,
and no one to lead!"
I laugh –
"There won't be enough Nobel prizes to go round!")

It irks me.
I am restless.
My intuition says, "No".
Too much is placed here
on results...
Am I still great
if I don't get very far?
Too much is placed
(not on how one is impacted),
but on how one impacts.
What if I don't want to be a champion?
What if I want to be me?

I feel assaulted by a rebranded alpha manhood –
fast-moving, fast-talking, forward-charging,
powered-up, penetrating –
oozing sincerity –
an ascending, super-dick greatness –
a rich, slick, seductive promise of success
for men with bright-teeth –
a manhood polished to appear,
it has heard the feminist critique –
yet not vulnerable, not penetrable...
never gutted, never broken,
never stumbling, never shy, never unsure,
never a mess...
It is a reconditioned masculinity concept –
a production line for the reinvented hero –
a new formula for a new brand of champions –
a new batch of Mr Perfects –
a new Mr Ideal Man.

II.

I want Man to be equally great
when the muse is within him
and when he is unmoved.
I want Man to be equally great
when he is inspiring thousands
and when he is a no one on the train.
I want him to be equally great
when his dreams are showering down upon humanity
and when he is out with the dog –
saving the world and washing up –

curing cancer and brushing his teeth
patching up the hole in the ozone layer
and flicking the slugs off the cabbages –
in ecstasy and in grief,
in action and in waiting.

By the Mr Perfect, Mr Ideal Man yardstick,
what is a baby supposed to do
to be great?
Isn't he great already?
What has the very old man to do –
the one who can't lift his own body?
Isn't there greatness in his exquisite humility?
Isn't there greatness as, despite it all,
he smiles with tenderness
upon his harried carer?

Does anything need to be done
to be great?
What is it
to be great?
Do we need to be outstanding
to be great?
Can we live and die unnoticed –
in some inaccessible hamlet,
or some overpopulated slum –
and be great.
What is it
to be great?

Not to be great relative to others –
(greater than him,
not as great as him), but –
what is greatness itself?

III.

In my opinion,
it is this:
to eat when we are hungry,
and not when we were told we should,
to sleep when we're tired
and not at the appointed hour.

To love the voice that says
"I can't, I am not enough",
as well as the one that says, "I can".
Neither know.
Both need love.
To be happy to be great
and happy to not be –
that is greatness.

To love our cowardice
as much as our courage.
To love entropy
as much as creativity,
our apathy as much as our energy,
winter as much as summer,
fear as much as trust,
our ugliness as much as our beauty,
confusion as much as clarity –
to know nothing matters
and everything matters
to taste, to smell, to lick, to bite –
and taste and smell when we're tasting and smelling,
and lick and bite when we're licking and biting...

To break down and give up,
to rise up and break through –
to be where we are,
to be as we are,
to take our time,
to not miss our lives.

To know there's nobody to become –
that the person I was yesterday was perfect
yesterday.
Just as –
whatever I do or don't do today,
however much I do or don't self-improve –
the person I will be tomorrow will be
perfect tomorrow.
My perfection is inescapable.
I do not have to become better.
I do not have to become great.
I am already great.

As we all are.
I am great
when I am me.
Even when I am inauthentic –
when I am not me –
that too is me...
I am inescapably perfectly great!

IV.
The more I accept myself
the more of me exists.
The more I am of me –
the more of my greatness on Earth.
And the more me I am,
the more I see
all I have is me.

The more I see me
the more alone I am...
the more I see
that only I can be my Buddha –
that if all is predestined
the only destiny I have
is my own –
and that if nothing is predestined –
the destiny I dream
is up to me
alone.

The more self-acceptance,
(the more love) –
the more aloneness,
(the more power).
I am already as great as anyone else.
In fact, I am greater
at being myself –
at being the particular texture of the mystery I am –
than anyone else anywhere ever.
But the more aloneness,
the more power,
the more me –
the more of my greatness on Earth.

LIFE PURPOSE

"The hardest thing in life may be to learn to truly trust that there is something noble and generative in ourselves."

— Michael Meade

To indoctrinate boys into being 'masculine, and not equip them with the wherewithal to come upon, and give themselves to, their 'life purpose' will not only become a torment for them as men, it will also make them dangerously easy prey.

To fill boys with 'masculine' values such as focus, action, direction, power, determination, and discipline – but to forget to mention that this 'masculine' thrust will always be in service of something, to give no sense of what that might be, or even of how to find out – is to set young men up as easy pickings for army recruitment, cult-like sectarianism (however big the cult), obsessive materialism, and any other narrow minded cause that promises a channel through which their eager, raw energy might be expressed.

In pieces like 'A Style of Manhood' and 'Greatness' I have explored the possibility that the most authentic style of manhood might be to give up imitating the styles of others, and that true greatness might be in giving up trying to be great. It would follow on from this, as we reach into the theme of purpose, that one's life purpose might be to express one's uniqueness. Fine. But that's, to say the least, a bit vague.

Nevertheless, that's where it begins. After all, if I am not in touch with my unique experience, moment-to-moment – how will I feel what moves me, and what calls me?

Not only this, but to connect with our life purpose we need to be in touch with our experience in all four modes... Let's say, for example, that I am looking at a picture of the postmortem carcass of a marine creature killed by ingestion of plastic debris – an albatross, say, or a gull, or a turtle, or a seal, or a whale – a carcass full of random plastic bits, netting, happy-coloured party straws, bottle tops of delicious fizzy drinks, and so on...

In the physical mode: how is this impacting my body? What do I feel in my gut?

In the emotional mode: what do I feel? Grief? Rage? Indifference?

In the rational mode: what do I think about this? What is my opinion?

In the existential mode: how does this impact me at the level of my belonging to all of life? At the level of my love for all of life?

So this is step one in connecting with our life purpose: being in our own experience – and thus in our uniqueness.

But, as Joseph Campbell's maxim "follow your bliss" suggests, our purpose is only indirectly revealed by what repels us. Our purpose is woven into what most makes our very souls sing.

Purpose isn't discovered, in my experience at least, by listing one's talents and deciding which one to 'go for', and budgets, and timelines. These may lead to success, but not to purpose.

Perhaps above all, purpose is resonant in the existential mode. Yes, it needs to resonate physically, emotionally and rationally, but I have defined purpose previously as "the expression of our uniqueness in service of existence", and as "creativity charged by meaning" – and from both of these phrases it follows that in order to 'be in one's purpose' one needs to first have a sense of connection with 'existence' and 'meaning'. In other words, one needs to be open in the existential mode. One needs to know what one stands for, what one is willing to sacrifice for, what one is willing to dedicate his energy to... ultimately: what one chooses to give his life to.

So this is the beginning – to open up in the existential mode. Without this there is no dignity, or sense of service, only targeted action, and perhaps success... But the fulfilment that comes from serving that which most deeply matters to one's own heart will be lacking.

As one connects existentially, and in the other modes too, and recognises one's 'bliss', one sets out to live one's purpose – and the journey begins! Our alignment with our purpose, our dedication, our capacities, our motivations – everything will be tested, over and over. And in this 'testing', we will be lifted up to new heights of self-knowledge and surrender.

It is important (as per 'A Style of Manhood' and 'Greatness'), not to think of personal purpose as something big – as some mega-contribution one must make towards the evolution of life on Earth – and that anything less is not purpose... No. If one is most deeply fulfilled growing tomatoes, so be it. If one feels that everything makes sense, and one is where one is meant to be, out on the vegetable plot, then so be it. Perhaps that will develop into something 'big' on behalf of the local community (and, by the way, for the most part, nowadays, we have no idea even how to poke a seed in the soil), or perhaps it will remain a very private joy to plant and reap and share the vegetables one has tended with one's lovers and friends. No matter. No better, no worse. Purpose has no size.

But if the thought that your purpose might not be ‘big’ disturbs you, then (apart from engaging in self-education to bring love to that more contracted need) consider that (to use the same example) as you work in your garden and kitchen, your simplicity and love and joy – the joy of being in your purpose – is radiating out from you, and that you are effortlessly confronting some people with their lack of purpose, and perhaps inspiring them to introspection, and that perhaps some of them will ‘do big things’ – thanks to you.

That said, we are never in control of the repercussions of our actions, so all we can do is align with our purpose, let it test us, re-shape us and repercuss as it will. But as I said at the beginning, to be programmed into directionality, and not have a sense of one’s own personal purpose, is a torture (from which we will seek relief, which will be unsatisfactory, and so on – a downward spiral).

Purpose is essential for those of us who (whether through nature or nurture or both), feel the ‘masculine’ impulse to achievement, and who gather a sense of self-worth from making and doing things well.

And finally – linking this piece with the ‘Archetype of Man’, and with the whole thrust of this book and its call to unity, brotherhood and mission – when our personal purpose resonates with the personal purpose of others, well... then there are fireworks! Sparks fly! Something invisible is ignited! Something that then inspires us both, or us all... We become more than the sum of us.

Purpose, mission, cause – whatever we might like to call it – carries us all to new heights. In fact, it can be quite intoxicating, and there is a danger of loss of self (so we need to each stay close to ourselves) – but this almost ecstatic unity is extremely potent.

We have been taught we need to rely on ourselves. But what would it be to rely on each other? We have been taught we need to be separate. But what would it be to unite energies? We have been taught that we need to pursue our individual ambitions. But what would it be to unite in service of that which most deeply matters to us all?

My experience of many, many years of working on the theme of purpose with groups of men has led me to believe that there is only one purpose – and that each man’s personal purpose is his unique expression of that universal, perhaps timeless, purpose.

Purpose is not what one does, it is why one does it. It is not the tomatoes, it is the sense of rightness of being aligned with the fertility of the Earth. One man names his purpose as ‘alignment with the fertility of the Earth’ (and then seeks a way to do that), another as ‘being with the joy of children in their discovering’ (and then seeks a

way to do that), another as 'living in the comfort and security of a co-operative, and not a competitive, community' (and seeks a way to do that), and so on... And although they might look very different on the outside, on the inside I sense they are very similar – all beams bouncing uniquely off the same prism of some indefinable, universal purpose.

Can you imagine a world of men united in brotherhood, sharing one infinitely-faceted purpose? I don't mean a mono-purpose, a 'one size fits all' purpose to which we should all conform. I don't mean let's become purpose robots, under the command of some new centralised dogma. No. I mean each man connecting with his personal life purpose, in his own unique, locally relevant, decentralised, uncontrollable, creative way, and there being a resonance between these purposes – and us finding out, perhaps, that we are more deeply united than we ever imagined, and that, perhaps, our many purposes are one.

Life Purpose

A man asks, "What is my gift?
What do I have to offer?
What is special about me?"
I reply:
"You are what is special about you.
You are the gift
to be given."

A man asks, "What is my purpose
here on Earth?
What am I here to do?"
I reply:
"Can anyone say?!
But you are you –
so be you...
Strut your uniqueness!
Laugh at yourself –
yet mean who you are,
this time.
Be the you
you have been blessed to be,
or cursed to be,
or are by chance,
or are by cosmic design..."

Dare to blossom and fruit
and go to seed...
Return yourself to the mystery
out of which you have grown,
out of which
you are.
Like the Brahman who stands in the Ganges
offering handfuls of water to the water –
this is purpose:
to gather oneself in,
and give oneself back."

Freeing ourselves up
from the limitations of the resistant crowd –
the clamour of the embittered, the petrified, and the depressed –
purpose is heard in the half-remembered sweet music,
in stepping out
to both dance and be-danced –
in becoming both the water
and the water.

I have heard many men
speak of their purpose.
Each one unique.
Each one the same.
One is a farmer, one is a nurse –
but all are water to water.

Here is the paradox of purpose:
each man's path
is both an act of will
and a letting go –
a becoming of all he can be,
and a releasing of all he is –
both the assertion of his truth,
and a slow and deliberate ego suicide:
an offering to eternity –
a release of pretension,
year by year –
a joyous and arduous homecoming –
the gate of a good death approaching,
year by year...
"I chose.

I have lived my choice.
I stand both humble and proud!"

The greater my determination
to be all I can be –
to give all I have been given
before it is taken –
the greater the sweet joy,
the slow release,
of slipping into the arms
of The Great Unknown.

Purpose is the unifier.
Purpose is the boudoir.
Ego and surrender make love in purpose.
Separation and belonging make love in purpose.
Attachment and non-attachment make love in purpose.
All we call masculine and all we call feminine
make love in purpose.
All we call individual and all we call collective
make love in purpose.
All we call material and all we call spiritual
make love in purpose.
Without purpose life has no libido.
Without purpose life is pointless.
Without purpose life is dry and shallow.
Without purpose we pass through this world
like shadows.

THE ARCHETYPE OF MAN

*"We need myths that will identify the individual not with his local group but with the planet."
— Joseph Campbell*

I.

When I talk about Man with a capital M (like in the title of this book) I mean the Archetype of Man.

I don't know if this archetype is a reality or a fantasy. I do not know whether it exists outside of us – and we draw upon it – or whether it is a collective imagining, and we draw upon it. Either way, though, we draw upon it.

II.

And I do not see it as something static. I see it as something living – evolving through the ages. In this modern age I see it in turmoil.

In ages past he has been a demigod, he has been a man of god, he has been a selfless soldier, he has been a philosopher king... today I see him, like some outcast mythological being, alone on an island at the end of the world – some days downcast, depressed, kicking his heels through the sand; some days wretched, self-hating, tumultuous in his lonely cave; some days hurling rocks into the endless ocean, furious, blameless, with nobody to blame.

To him modern man prays in his sleep. From him modern man draws his manhood. But from this tormented nowhere-everywhere being, man can only draw torment. From his depression, depression. From his fury, fury.

III.

Let us visit his island in our dreams, and let us be good company. Let us sit with him until his depression yields into sorrow, and his fury into power, and let us remind him we need him.

Let us visit him in our longing, and sit alongside him in the ever-forgiving moment. Let us walk with him to the ocean's edge, and watch him bathe in understanding of the inevitable, and emerge onto the beach reincarnated.

Let us watch him build a pyre, and burn the body of the Man he has been, with gratitude for all he has learnt from lying.

And as he strokes his new arms and legs and heart and penis and face in disbelief and amazement and joy – let us tell him how much we need his dignity, that without it we too are stuck in the past, that we do not know what to aspire to – that without his self-love we live in apology, or violence – that without his courage to return to civilisation and stand tall, we too are downcast outcasts at the end of the world.

IV.

And then, on a landing pad somewhere on this ancient, magical, ancestral isle (because this is a story, and in stories anything can happen) let's send a state of the art helicopter to pilot Man back to us – recovered, revived, remembered – ready for us to draw upon him – ready for us to reimagine ourselves in the sunshine of his renewal.

FOR MEN & NOT AGAINST NON-MEN

"Show me a movement that doesn't hate somebody and I will join it at once."

- Robert Anton Wilson

For Men

People have asked me whether 'staying in one's own experience' is something specifically for men – whether it's not something that would also be of service to 'non-men' (a make-do catchall for anyone who doesn't consider themselves a man). When I reply that, "I believe we all need to learn to stay in our own experience", they then ask, "Well, why is this book written to men then?" Here are my basic reasons:

1. The more men have opened to the now obviousness of the feminist critique, and disavowed (on the surface, at least), their machismo, the more I sense a state of loss of identity. Things were clearer when we were on top. Abusive, but clear. And since 'Western' culture (into which feminism has been most integrated) is the dominant global culture, we are talking about a collective loss of identity among men.

Although *The Uprising of Man* doesn't prescribe a way to be as a man (offering a replacement identity), it does describe a path of honesty through which each man can arrive at his own authentic post-feminist manhood.

2. As has been said, "horror vacui" – "nature abhors a vacuum". In other words, where there is emptiness, something will rush in to fill it. It is not just that millions of men are identityless – inert frames waiting for an identity-refill – no... The space left by the removal of the delusion of male superiority has been filled by self-judgement, guilt and shame, the idolatry of woman, self-doubt, depression, undifferentiated frustration (and all of their ensuing compensations/addictions) – in short: the empty identity space has been filled by low self-worth.

This then is my second motive in writing to men: to not only recognise this state of collective low self-worth, but to offer a vision of the innate dignity of man – and realistic suggestions to how to align with that.

3. For whatever reasons, as men we tend to isolate when we're in pain. We don't tend to seek comfort from other men, or from anyone. The 'go it alone', 'I need no help' macho indoctrination is hundreds of generations old (at least). It will take more than a century or two to fizzle out. We continue to pay for it physically and emotionally.

And it's not just that we keep our pain to ourselves. We might bond with other men playing football, but we rarely reveal even our most joyful depths – let alone our existential longings and crises. We go through life in emotional isolation. I find that really sad.

In this book there are two threads that address this issue. One is the call for unity, for travelling through life together, for learning to be supported as well as to support, for interdependence; in short – for brotherhood. It is a call to brotherhood – not just as the formation of some sort of gender club, but in recognition of the fact that we already are, and always have been, brothers.

The other is the redefinition of power as not being based on one's bank balance, or the number of one's admirers, or one's physical or even intellectual prowess, but rather on one's capacity to live honestly from centre, revealing the truth of one's unique experience – unpretentiously. That is to say, vulnerably.

The possibility then opens of men meeting as brothers – being powerful enough to disregard the outdated taboos against vulnerability and emotional intimacy that tormented generations past; being powerful enough (precisely because they are concerned with their own opinions of themselves, and not with the opinions of others) to reveal their brokenness, their exhaustion, their self-deceit, their excitements, their unusual dreams – and being honoured by their brothers for their courage to stand and be seen in their uniqueness.

This is not new age, touchy-feely 'sharing' – this is brothers standing boldly in their own experience, in what's-real, and in mutual respect.

4. This book is also addressed to men because I believe that not only do we need emotional education but that we need it to be offered in a specific way – which is not easily available. In terms of the four modes of experience we might say that as a civilisation we are especially crippled in the emotional mode. However, whatever emotional conditioning we all get as children, men in general get the intense course, with extreme warnings as to the dangers of unmanliness (and god help us – effeminacy), of allowing too much emotionality to stir within, or (worst of all) of being seen being emotional! This is, largely speaking, well recognised. But what then is the specific nature and structure of the education we need? What approach might we, men in general, be receptive to? What would work for us?

Firstly, from my experience of working with men, I feel it is easy to underestimate the degree of centre that needs to be in place within the psyche before a man can open up his heart in a way that will ultimately serve him. We need to be firmly identified with belonging to the Earth, to our lineages and thus to humanity, and to the great

mystery itself, before we can reveal our shames and fears and (all we judge as) 'bad' in us – without getting lost in it all. And this deeper identification with belonging may take years to root.

The journey is not a straight line. It is not 'first belonging, then you can open up'. No. But we do need to be aware of the amount of openness we ask of each other, or that we ask of ourselves. It can only be proportionate to the degree of centre we have arrived at. Collectively, we have not been emotionally open, and this is a multi-generational endeavour. It is urgent and, simultaneously, it can only go at its own pace. But if we bare our hearts and are not in centre – in our own experience, in belonging – then we are doing so under social pressure, and this only results in inner splits, disempowerment and (later on), resentment and a backlash of anger.

The other adjustment that I have made in this men's educational programme is that it is a 'self-educational' programme. This reinstates each man as his own authority and establishes us all as equals. Which is our actual, existential situation. We are all our own authorities, and we are all equals. This is an educational format that empowers the individual, circumvents hierarchy, and rather than throwing more wood on the fire of our collective low self-worth (no. 2, above) by saying "you don't know, but we do, so we will educate you", it invites each man to embark upon his own journey of self-enquiry alongside others doing the same.

Here the attitude towards 'the teacher' is also different. Firstly, since every man is being constantly encouraged to stay in his own experience, to discriminate centre, to reveal his moment, and so on, he is therefore being constantly discouraged from a position of inferiority, or disempowerment, or institutionalised respect (respect offered simply because someone 'has the position'). Not only this, but if the teacher is truly engaged with the subject, he will be self-revealing (not holding a sense of being 'above and apart'), and aware of himself as being as much involved in his own moment-to-moment learning as anyone else in the programme.

My fourth aim, then, in presenting this book, which is largely an educational programme for men (we need to 'become the change'), is to present a programme with a structure and tone suited to the modern male psyche.

5. Finally, I am specifically addressing my brothers because I feel we need more than courses on emotional intelligence, or weekend workshops on relationship skills. I believe we need ongoing, lifelong brotherhood – and the texture of brotherhood is thickened by doing things together. So my aim is to inspire brotherhoods of doing – brotherhoods of purpose. Throughout this book I speak of brotherhood and purposeful, united action, as essential aspects of the self-educational programme.

Familiarity grows by seeing each other at the same pub, year after year. But a deeper bonding can often take place by, say, playing a sport together – very likely by going on an expedition, or adventure of some sort, together. Above all, we really get to know each other by striving together for that which we all believe in, and care about deeply. How could we be more deeply united than by working together for that which we all feel deeply?

Not Against Non-Men

The fact that I am writing for men does not mean that I am in any way rejecting of non-men....

I believe this book is on the money! I believe it hits the spot! :) We shall see.... But if the kind of brotherhood it inspired was in any way not respectful and supportive of women, and people of all genders, I would be the first to leave.

I don't see how that could happen, but you never know.... From where I stand it would seem impossible – not only that a brotherhood inspired by the content of this book could be disrespectful of anyone – but that any open-minded person who didn't consider themselves a man would not be with us – an endorser, if not a collaborator....

How could any open person not want to see a brother at the centre of his experience, present to himself in the moment, confident in his body, at peace in himself, a genuine equal to all, a great surfer of energies and emotions – authentic, strong, vulnerable, open? Come on! Who would not say, "Fuck, yes!" to such a man?!

But a fear I have heard is of brotherhood becoming exclusive – excluding of non-men: "my deepest connections are with my brothers", "only other men really understand me", and so on – and worse: "non-men (especially women) have eroded men's self-worth, and every one of them has a man-hater in them somewhere, so it's not helpful for my self-development to confide in them, or be too intimate with them", and so on...

These are, of course, ridiculous distortions. There are some experiences that only men have – yes... so? That would be like a woman saying she couldn't be close to men because they don't menstruate, or give birth.

And we ALL have a man-hater in us (perhaps especially men) – and a woman-hater, and a racist, and a part that doesn't give a shit about the Earth (or about anything), and an age-ist, and a part that thinks it's somehow better than people with disabilities... we all have it all (in different shades and combinations) – so let's own

those parts, and practice relating to them from centre – rather than fantasising that all non-men are identified and acting-out from the man-hater in them and therefore feeling justified in keeping our distance.

Why, brother, do you want to keep a distance? What is your experience as you get close to anyone other than a man? Who emerges in your psyche? The fearful one? What is your experience? Get to know that character, and care for him – otherwise he will control you.

The images that come to me when people speak of their fears of a separatist brotherhood are of religious congregations in which the men and women are separated, and of pre-modern ways of life in general. Let me be clear: I am not advocating a return to pre-modern sexist separatism – any more than a class on menstruation for young girls would instruct them in female superiority. I am speaking out for male self-education, brotherhood and deep, united purpose – so that we can become proud of what we are, and of what we contribute to the human family, and to the greater one-family of us all.

*"All humanity is one undivided and indivisible family."
- Mahatma Gandhi*

7

GENDER



“the experience of equality is love”

THE HISTORY OF NIPPLES

“The world could be anything, you know. It could be a dream. I mean it really could be a dream.”

- Terence McKenna

In this short, light-hearted Indiana Jones-style adventure I throw another question into our enquiry arena....

Nowadays the differentiation between sex and gender is commonplace. That women can be more masculine, and men more feminine, and so on, is the generally accepted understanding among most educated, modern people of all genders.

This does not mean there is no correlation at all between male biology and so-called ‘masculinity’, say. But it does mean that we consider it a crippling repression of the human spirit to impose a specific, narrow, limiting set of values upon half of the human race, just because they have a penis.

Let me add: the only way we’ll ever find out how masculine men are, will be to stop imposing masculinity upon them. That’s how we’ll find out!

But this sex/gender dualism leaves us with some questionable, Cartesian assumptions: (a) that biology (sex) and conditioning (gender) are essentially independent of each other, and (b) that biology (sex) is basically fixed, whereas conditioning (gender) is more malleable, tractable and variable. Are these valid assumptions – evidentially-confirmed, provisionally-true, workable hypotheses? Or are they wobblier than that?

I would say that many fields of enquiry – from the study of psychosomatic illness, to psychotherapeutic observation of the interactivity of the modes of experience (the rational impacts the emotional impacts the physical, etc.), questions in philosophy and physics as to the possibility of our inhabiting a co-creative, participatory universe, entheogenic explorations, and so on... all invite us to question (among other things), the true history of nipples....

The History Of Nipples

Don't tell anyone I told you this – my professors would kill me! Well, most of them are dead now – but I might be stripped of my own professorship.

What happened was this: when I was an anthropology undergraduate I went into the Time Space Travel Machine Room (the TSTMR), and having travelled so often to so many specific destinations – I decided to just spin the dial!

I won't say I found myself in a tribal situation in which the men's and women's characters and roles were reversed, because they weren't men and women as we know them. The men had breasts, and the women didn't.

I stored the Time Space Travel Return Module (the TSTRM) as per protocol, and signalled my presence to one of the breastless women, who was coming towards me on horseback along a sandy path through the tropical undergrowth. Suddenly – she was beating and whipping me with some sort of almost wooden vine. She only stopped when I stopped protesting, or even murmuring, and showed that I had no intention of looking up at her.

After that I don't know what happened, I suppose she struck me unconscious, but I awoke in a cave-hewn prison. In the cell next to mine I could see a man without breasts. I looked at him in puzzlement. He smiled.

He said, "Did you just spin the dial?"

"Professor Blitz?" I exclaimed, "But it must be... almost... seven years! Is there no way out of here then? Is it hopeless?"

"No, there might be a way", whispered Professor Blitz. "There's a rumour that the Empress's son has looked her in the eye and invoked the justice of their Goddesses to substantiate his claim to the throne – despite his being a boy. Not only this, but there are rumours of a great male revolt against the breastless horsewomen."

"But why do they have no breasts?" I asked. "And how come the men do?"

"Ah!" swooned Professor Blitz. "That is so interesting!"

"Tell me," I said, hurrying him along with an eagerness that surprised me, making me wonder if I was keen to have breasts of my own.

"You see," intoned Professor Blitz, "it was considered the act of utmost bravery to charge into battle while fully pregnant. It was seen as a sign of total commitment to the warrior code. Not only was one prepared to die for the tribe, but one was ready to sacrifice one's unborn child."

"Wow!" I said.

"And when the women gave birth they would just toss the newborn into the care of the men. Sometimes the women would come home from battle barely alive, and the men would struggle to save the life of the child. Over the centuries the men became experts in childbirth. But most interesting of all – by far, by far, by far – is that over thousands of years the men evolved breasts that gave milk to feed the babies, and all that came to remain of the women's breasts were nipples!"

I was just about to say, "Wow", again when pandemonium broke loose. Everywhere

there resounded the one chant of thousands of breasted men. "We can look at you, and you can look at us!" they chanted, like one great drum.

I couldn't possibly convey the fear and excitement with which Professor Blitz and I made haste to the place we had both stored our TST Return Modules. Then, just as we were about to press the button marked "home", we heard the most bloodcurdling, horrendous sobbing.... There, in the next clearing along in the jungle we could see a woman on her knees before a man with very big breasts. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so, so sorry", she sobbed.

"Oh no," I thought, "here we go again."

ANTI-GAY

"Truth is stranger than fiction, because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; truth isn't."

- Mark Twain

"We are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent."

- Oscar Wilde

In this short, jokey, serious piece I continue with a series that looks at gender. In essence the argument will be that, as we come to live at the centre of our unique experience, the grip that our conditioning has upon us begins to loosen – including, of course, our conditioning into gender.... Some distance emerges between us and our conditioning.... We see it with more and more clarity.... We begin to see the difference between words, concepts, codes – and what they indicate (that ‘the map is not the territory’, as they say).

We can then ask ourselves whether the concept on the tag on our gender collar is accurate – whether we feel it describes us absolutely totally, or not – and perhaps, above all, whether it serves us in staying in the mystery of the moment, and in relating honestly – that is to say, in a way that allows for possibility....

Why allow for possibility? Because everything else is a hiding, an attempt at control, and an avoidance of life. Imagine millions of people getting up.... How many possibilities are there for that day? What are the exact words that will be said by those millions that day? What are the exact movements they will make? Imagine a day with a cloudy, windy sky over Europe.... How many cloud formations will there be over the continent that day? Life is a non-stop proliferation of possibility. To live aligned with life (which is only ever unfolding in the present moment), therefore, is to live in possibility....

Anti-Gay

I am anti-gay.
I know this might surprise you,
but it's not for the reasons you think.
I am anti-hetero too.

I am anti-lesbian –
anti every dam in the river,
anti plastic, steel and cement
choking the Earth.
I am anti mono, bi, poly, peter and paul –
I am anti names,
anti knowing in advance,
anti fighting the unknown...

"I'm a lesbian", she said.
I said, "Oh, that's a shame!"
"What – did you have plans to fuck me?" she said, angrily.
"No", I said, "It's a shame you limit yourself that way".

"It's not a limit, it's my body's longing", she smiled.
"You mean, it has been until now", I said.
"Yes", she said.
"And who you're going to be from now on, you don't know...
I mean – now, and now, and now..." I said.
"So?", she said, defensively.

"So you can only say:
I used to define myself as lesbian,
but I don't know what I am now.
Or at least, just as I think I do,
then again I don't!"

"How should I define myself sexually then?" she asked.
"When people ask," I said,
"say:
I try not to."

IT'S A BOY!

*"Remember when you were young, you shone like the sun. Shine on you crazy diamond!
Now there's a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky. Shine on you crazy diamond!"
- Pink Floyd*

In this piece I discuss our fundamentally un-gender-conditioned natures, and the intensity of gender-imposition.

In an aside, I ask and answer the question as to whether by writing a book for men I might be perpetuating the 'gender-branding' programme.

I then suggest the tone of a non-gendering way of relating to our babies, and our children – but I end by reiterating that only as you and I discard our own gendering – the weight of the socialisation process that we ourselves have been through – are we going to be able to give them what our love longs to give them.

If in reality (whatever ideas we might have as to how liberal or progressive we are), we are ourselves not free-form in the way we allow our bodies and hearts to move, and free-form in our moment-to-moment relating, then we will not be able to support these beautiful creatures we are birthing into becoming – like the oak in the acorn – the unique expressions of the great mystery that they are.

It's A Boy!

I.

The baby's born.

One second, two, three... (let's see how long it takes), and...,

"Congratulations – you have a baby girl –

oh look at those fat little legs,

isn't she a sweetheart!"

Or:

"Congratulations – you have a baby boy –

oh look at those fat little legs –

I wouldn't like to get into a fight with this one!"

Excitedly, naïvely, affectionately,

we immediately gender the baby –

as if identity limitation
was our topmost obligation.

Is this baby really a strong boy, or a sweet girl?
Not in its own estimation!
It does not use binary gendering
to self-categorise!
Each baby is a unique blend
of qualities we classify
as masculine and feminine.
We overlook this
and brand every baby
by its genitals.
(Which, if not penis or vagina,
are problematic.)
This genital gendering not only excludes variation,
but determines then and there –
once and for life –
how the baby will be socialised –
the personality we want for it,
the way we want it to perceive.

II.

If this gender-branding
is fearful and oppressive –
why do I address only men?
Does this not perpetuate the branding?
My intention is
not to perpetuate the gendering,
but to support those of us already ‘masculinised’...
so that we can defy the brand,
contradict our socialisation,
and celebrate ourselves
as we were when we were born –
neither masculine nor feminine,
mascufeminine nor femimasculine –
and continue to look as a baby looks
in amazement upon this world,
and live our birthright –
genderless and free.

III.

Can we tend, not direct,
our babies's growth?
As parents, family, friends –
as a social system –
can we not production-line them –
not immediately insert our tiny, beautiful, beloved babies
into the great, two-lane socialisation programme...,
"She's a girl –
you know what girls are like!
He's a boy –
and boys will be boys!"
Can we not be so affectionately oppressive,
so innocently violent –
can we not violate their virgin hearts,
can we not doctor their wide-open free will,
can we not mutilate their futures?
What?
You think I should save such language
for clitoridectomies –
and circumcisions?
Is not the mental and emotional pre-packaging of babies
the ultimate fascist dream?

Can we take our babies to an open field
and let them listen,
without saying how to hear?
And can we listen to them like animals listen –
and support them in hearing the world
as perhaps we do not,
as perhaps nobody ever has,
as perhaps nobody ever will
except them?
Can we take them to an open sky
and let them look
without saying how to see?
Can we let them walk without saying where?
Can we let them talk without saying what?
Can we be radically brave enough
to let them have the direct access to reality
that is their right –
not reality-access mediated by our mindsets?
Can we not manipulate them

as we have been manipulated?
Can we love them so completely
that we are ready to let them hear, see, talk and walk
into a new world, a new civilisation –
a world we will never enter?

We love them so utterly,
and yet we crush them.
It's not our fault.
He who was crushed will crush.
It is not our fault.
OK.
But what comes next
is up to us.

IV.
You agree with me.
I agree with you.
We are in intellectual accord.
Yes,
but –
dare we,
you and I,
let go
of being masculine,
or being feminine –
of being straight, or bi, or gay, or trans, or
anything definable –
and open to the flux of energies
passing through our bodies
now, and now, and now –
just as they have been
since the moment we were born?

If we can't,
then on we go:
"Congratulations, it's a boy!
Oh look at those strong little legs...."
Children do not imitate ideas.
Only when they see we are not afraid
to stand in the unknown
will they know
it's OK to be free.

NOR FEMININE

*"They are so identified with concepts in their minds that
other human beings become concepts as well."*

- Eckhart Tolle

Tinted Windows

Throughout this book I have been stressing our liberation from concepts – from looking at our bodies, each other, and our worlds, as if through tinted windows. Whether I look at my world through a window tinted by race, class, religion, gender or whatever, I diminish and distort my direct experience of what's there.

That doesn't mean, for example, that a black man should be unaware his skin is black (although we could talk further about that, as even skin colours seem to have been categorised into half a dozen types, when as far as I can see, there are hundreds, thousands... at least). But, yes, he is aware his skin is so-called-black. And to liberate himself from racial identification doesn't mean he pretends it isn't. It means he is not looking at every encounter – however subtly – through the tint of genocides, slavery, oppression, abuse, rage, idealisation of the white man, identification with the oppressor, and imitation of the white man's ways.

All of that's there. He doesn't need to pretend it isn't. It's already there in the collective energy field. Your racism, and even your now-reversed idealisation of the black man, will evoke it. But he doesn't need to wear it like a uniform. That limits him, and it limits everything.

In the same way, in this book I have been presenting the possibility of a manhood not mediated by masculinity. And here I want to add – nor by femininity. Whether the archetypes exist in any absolute sense or not, I don't know (in the next piece I talk more about archetypes). Nor do I know whether animus and anima are anything other than concepts. But to have become identified as feminine, as not-masculine, and to go about one's life wearing tinted glasses with the designer logo 'feminine' on the side, is as limiting to us as wearing glasses logoed 'masculine'.

"I am not a Ladyboy" he said, "I am a Lordgirl!"

"Wow" I said, taken aback.

"But do you see yourself as male or female?" I asked, a bit stupidly.

"Darling" she said, amused, tolerantly, "that really depends which day of the week it is!"

"But seriously... " I said.

"I am being serious!" he exclaimed, "I don't know! It does depend on the day of the week! Sometimes I feel like a man on the outside, and a woman on the inside, sometimes I feel like a woman on the outside and a man on the inside, and sometimes I feel like neither, and sometimes I feel like both!"

"What's that like?" I asked, intrigued.

"Really, really sexy!" she roared, and fell on the floor in fits of laughter.

On One Leg

Whatever "I am a feminine man" might mean to you, I would suggest dropping it. Not only does it make you a second-class woman (because 'feminine' is synonymous with woman-like), but it limits your relationship with reality. And I don't just mean sexually, I mean that going through life as a feminine-identified man one acts and reacts in certain ways (that a masculine-identified man wouldn't) and one's life ensues accordingly. It serves you no better to only walk on your left leg, than it does him to only walk on his right. Either way you do not stand up straight in the multi-possibilitied present.

Not only this, but – whether we are identified as macho and/or guilty masculine men, or submissive and/or independent feminine men – as per Jung's animus and anima, we all have the opposite identification within us. One can observe a caricature of this in hierarchies in which the men bully the men below them, and lick the arses of those above them. They exhibit an extreme of 'masculine' conditioning towards those below them, and an extreme of 'feminine' conditioning towards those above them.

And to feed "I am feminine" is to not feed "I am masculine", and vice versa. To keep one alive is to keep both alive – disproportionately, and self-damagingly. Every time I stuff "I am feminine", I starve "I am masculine". By walking only on my left leg, I weaken my right.

I remember a story about a community in Africa in which, when the men marched back from war, the women would line up on both sides of the parade – offering them the softness of their bare breasts. And that, seeing this softness, the ferocity of the warriors would dissolve – in tears. That was a community that knew we need all of ourselves.

Furthermore – by identifying as feminine, and renouncing any identification with whatever qualities I associate as masculine, I put out a plea to others to carry those qualities for me:

"Oh I am such a scatter brains!"

"Don't worry, darling, I'll sort it out for you!"

"My hero!"

Perhaps others will step in, as in this example, only too gladly. Perhaps they find comfort in the masculine conditioned posture. But it doesn't serve them. It puts them back behind tinted windows, on one leg! In fact, your identification as feminine is a disservice, if not a violence, towards them.

Neither Nor

This book is addressed to those of us who have a penis. Perhaps even that is not objectively fixed (as I suggest in the piece "The History of Nipples"), but it's at least provisionally-true, right now. It is also addressed to anyone who is, to whatever extent, identified with the 'Archetype of Man' – that is to say, with masculine conditioning (regardless of biology). If you have a penis, this book is addressed to you. If you feel yourself to be, and experience yourself as, a man/masculine – this book is also addressed to you. The first is a biologically-based identification as man, the second is more emotional/existential. In short – this book is addressed to anyone who identifies, in whatever mode, as a man (and even: to any part of anyone that feels itself to be male).

It is a call to men, to the disowned brotherhood of all men, to let go of identification with the concepts, not only of masculinity, but also of femininity – to take whatever qualities we have associated with these concepts, and scatter them to the winds. And to let the winds blow them back at us in disarray – with the tag kind-and-gentle no longer dangling off of 'feminine' (woman-like), and 'bold and hard-headed' no longer knotted to 'masculine' (man-like) – so we can be the uncategorised, unboxed, unlimited creatures we were when we arrived here in this world.

This book is addressed to (among others) those who, like me, when they were just born, were held up, legs open, and upon whom it was then pronounced, "It is a boy", the full unsaid sentence being, "It is a boy – masculine it shall be!"

I would have preferred it to have been announced, not religiously, but in wonderment: "A creature of mystery has arrived among us! We stand in awe of this moment! And we offer all possible well-wishing upon this tiny creature's lifetime! May he not be who we want him to be, but may he fully evolve all that is already within him!"

But that was not to be. And since then I have believed, "I am a boy – so masculine I should be!" Because that's what boys are. Are they not?

Personally, for me – it hasn't been easy because masculine I am not – human being I am. I have qualities and desires that don't fit in masculine, and others that don't fit in

feminine. And, and, and, and.... and that makes for a confusing childhood, and an even more confusing adolescence...

Perhaps I take on the 'masculine' value-cluster, or, perhaps – for whatever reason – I don't. Perhaps I choose to identify with the 'feminine' value-cluster. Either way, the 'cluster' is total. It includes everything. It is a complete domination of my thinking, feeling and physicality. It includes: the way I should hold my body. Facial expressions and gestures that are OK, facial expressions and gestures that are not. How much tenderness I should show towards my body. How hard I should push it. How I should dress, and how I shouldn't. What I should think and feel about myself, men, women, all genders, sex, work, sport, hobbies. Oh, why bother?! The list is endless! And not just what I should feel, but whether I should feel, and how much I should feel, and which feelings I should feel, and, of course, which ones I shouldn't.

The cultural imposition of two possibilities, of either-or – in which I end up choosing either "masculine I shall be!" or "feminine I shall be!" – leaves me bound, either way, in a straightjacket wrapped suffocatingly around the entirety of my being – one that seeks to define and direct the very meaning I place upon my existence – pumping me full of information about the right things to want, the goals that should satisfy me, the appropriate ambitions, the nature of success and fulfilment. In fact, all of the above, and at such a speed, and with such intensity and unconscious conviction, and so subliminally (even for the 'grown up' who is imposing it upon me) that, as a young child, I am helpless.

To self-define as 'feminine' is to perpetuate this violence, this psychic violation of our children. Of course, it's more popular to say "to self-define as 'masculine' is to perpetuate this violence" – after all, all things 'feminine' suffered under patriarchy... it's 'the masculine' that must pay! But no! To identify as either is equally damaging for ourselves and for others. I don't care whether it's a pink straightjacket, or a pale blue one, or a straight jacket or a gay jacket – it's all violence and imposition... and if I want to be me, then I also want you to be you – and so for both of us, for all of us, I cast these concepts to the warm and forgiving winds...

SISTER, BREAST IMPLANTS AREN'T COOL AT ALL

*"Maybe one day you will say 'my breasts are beautiful as they are.
It is not their shape that counts, but how full of love they are.'
- from 'The Electric Fan Is An Imposter' (Chpt. 3)*

Written to my sisters as a postscript to 'The Electric Fan Is An Imposter', I am nevertheless including this piece in this book to you, my brothers – because it all applies to us all.

It's not size (penis, breasts) that counts. It's not shape that counts. That is as superficial as judging a man by his car. Brother, sister (excuse me, but) – don't be so stupid!

What does count then? The love that hums in a woman's breasts. The love that erects my penis as I enter. Not "I will love you forever" love, not "you are so special" love, not even "you are so beautiful" love, but the love that comes from astonishment at our absolute equality, a sense of "we're all in this together", and a sense that whatever this 'existing' is, clearly, we are part of it.

So take the little ones inside you (the ones who value others' feelings and opinions above their own... the ones who, in that sense, therefore, are still children) – the ones who say, "If only my penis was bigger/smaller, if only I was taller/shorter, fatter/thinner – if only I was more like my culture's Ideal Man" – and love them, these inner children of yours, so softly and so steadily that gradually they will come to love themselves and interest themselves in their own experience; go deep into themselves and discover how vast and beautiful they always were.

Then you will become like the "honest woman" in the second verse who takes us into self-acceptance – beyond the disempowerment of fixation on the preferences and judgements of others – into warm reconciliation with our mortality. And in this warm reconciliation: the eroticism of self-love.

If I make myself an object according to the standards of others then I will become a fuck object. And for the one who fucks me I could be absolutely anyone. I will not be loved. I will not be loved because the other will not be able to reach me. I will be hidden behind a wooden/plastic version of wo-man – and the soft, vulnerable, fearful, passionate, crazy, wild me will not be touched. In fact, I will not even be object-fucked. The wooden/plastic me will get it.

Finally... a few lines at the end suggest a meeting: of two people in passion, in openness, in letting go.... An image. A reminder – because so many of us have forgotten....

Sister, Breast Implants Aren't Cool At All

I.

What counts is how
when I squeeze them tenderly
near the nipple,
but not too close,
slowly, I mean really slowly,
tranquilo, really tranquilo,
shanti, shanti...
as if my hands were clams
opening and closing in an easy tide,
your breasts remember they're an ocean
of love aching to be....
That's what counts!

What counts
is the permission you give yourself
to swim underwater forever –
to breathe in the bliss
of drowning in yourself.
That's what counts!

And don't you forget it!
Caress your breasts at night,
rub them full of love –
give them their nightly top up!
Then you won't be fooled!

Then you will see yourself everywhere:
the plastic woman, the metal woman, the wooden woman, the glass woman
you have become.
And nobody is to blame!
Especially not you!

Tears of forgiveness and understanding
will roll down upon your beautiful, droopy, uneven,

too-big, too-small, perfect breasts.
And every tear will swell your ocean.

And you will cradle her –
she who was persuadable enough
to be persuaded to be
someone else –
gently you will whisper
(deeper than soothing,
deeper than therapy,
wanting nothing):
"I know, my love, I know."

II.

An honest woman looks at herself
naked in a full length mirror.
We hear her say:
"Beloved body,
you are my body,
my only body.
You were a tiny baby,
you will be an old lady.
You are the body of my life.
I love you.
I take care of you.
Thank you:
through you I am alive."

And she caresses every part of her body,
particularly those parts that give her most pleasure,
and she smiles a smile that is
unfathomable,
and as broad as the sky.

III.

Her eyes and yours open,
fucking in love in outer space....
That's what counts!

*"When we gaze into the eyes of our beloved, we're staring into the eyes of a sacred mirror,
and we recognise our oneness."
- Alex Grey*

NOBODY IS BORN MASCULINE (OR FEMININE)

"For centuries we have been conditioned by nationality, caste, class, tradition, religion, language, education, literature, art, custom, convention, propaganda of all kinds, economic pressure, the food we eat, the climate we live in, our family, our friends, our experiences – every influence you can think of – and therefore our responses to every problem are conditioned."

- Jiddu Krishnamurti

I.

We might be born with a chromosomal, or hormonal predisposition towards the concept-cluster 'masculinity', but, at the neurological level, what we feed flourishes and what we neglect withers – so gendering quickly becomes biological fact. We are masculinised not just emotionally, but physically too, at a very young age.

But however much masculinity we arrive with, and however much is put into us – by the culture's 'Neurobiological-Modification Socialisation Programme' :) – what can't in any way be useful, if we want to create a cultural climate of staying in our unique individual experience, is the ubiquitous imposition of one, standardised version of masculinity, of man.

However subliminally and subtly imposed, any standardisation is a spanner in the works for the personality – it bangs about in there and damages everything. You can't say to a boy that one character-type/behaviour is OK and another is not – for example: that to be brave is more manly than to be timid – without jamming up the whole personality. From then on the boy is no longer spontaneous, or authentic to himself – he is trying to be someone (and that someone is not him!).

When I talk about the Archetype of Man I am talking about a personification of this standardised-masculine socialisation. The socialisation is everywhere, it's in the air – and the cloud of it that hangs over the culture I call the Archetype of Man. He is 'Our Idea of Man'. He is a puppet master, energy 'god', made up of our evolving ideas about what it is to be a man. The qualities we ascribe to this Archetype become the qualities we aspire to, and our behaviour writ large across the culture reinforces the Archetype. And when I say 'we ascribe': this ascribing happens over generations, it evolves; nobody decides, and yet everyone decides – it is collective and instinctive. It is the way the Archetype is formed – and the way the Archetype is transformed.

So what would it be (rather than to standardise) to say - – first to ourselves, and then to our boys: "Be authentic – be who you already are!"? Can we imagine many, many men and boys going about their lives in authenticity – that is, staying at the centre of their own experience of the mystery, and relating in absolute equality? Their collective

energy would snowball, and the Archetype of Man would be transformed for the generations to come....

While the nurture/nature debate rambles on, we continue to impose a standardised masculinity upon ourselves – and any standardisation of our boys is their dehumanisation.

II.

All constructs, all standardisations, are an attempt to control reality, which is ever-changing and uncontrollable. They, therefore, create friction and suffering. Anything fixed sets up a friction with that which is in flux.

Masculinity (and femininity) are constructs, as is every principle that divides us. Racial identity and national identity are constructs. There are thousands upon thousands of constructs. Anything that gives us collective identity is a construct.

It is not just that we have inherited these constructs – we are fully identified with them. We don't just believe (since we're masculine), that we should look a certain way, we actually only feel good when we think we look that way. We don't just believe we (since we're masculine), should behave in certain ways, we actually feel embarrassed, if not frightened, to behave contrary to those ways. We don't just subscribe to these constructs, we live them. We have become them. Actually, we are not living them – they are living us. They are our puppet masters. We are not free.

*“And the idea of ourselves is our escape from the fact of what we really are.”
- Jiddu Krishnamurti*

WONDROUS

"Every morning when I wake up, I experience an exquisite joy —the joy of being Salvador Dalí— and I ask myself in rapture: What wonderful things is this Salvador Dalí going to accomplish today?"

- Salvador Dalí

This piece is not so much about gender as about the wonder of birth – the naturalness and simplicity of birth, and, simultaneously, its cosmic resonance... And it is about wonder per se.

As we walk down the street we don't usually think, "He was a baby once, she was a baby once, he was a baby, too, and she was a baby..." – just as we don't tend to look at old people and remember that a moment ago they were exactly as old as we are now. We don't usually see the teenager dancing all night, the passionate sexual lover climaxing, the young mother breast feeding – inside the old lady. But they are all there, and if we were to see all of her faces, all of the women she has been – then we would be wonderstruck.

There is also within this piece an affirming of the beauty of Man – who, as I have often commented, I see as in an archetypally weakened state of low self-worth. There is also an honouring of Woman here, and of how when the females of a species give birth, through them the whole universe births and rebirths itself.

Wondrous

I.

Every man was a teenager.

Every teenager was a boy.

Every boy was a baby.

Every day babies are born.

Baby frogs, baby snakes, baby bats, baby alligators....

And also baby oaks and baby apple trees,

baby nettles and baby marigolds....

Every day it's all go –

creation creating creators who create creators....

It's just all go!

It's a cacophony of bliss!

Every day and night babies are born
in factories called hospitals.
It is a functional operation.

II.

Let there be birth in the meadows,
in the forests,
on the beaches –
in the lakes!
Every day vaginas and hearts
disintegrate in pain, ecstasy, and love...
Every creature on earth –
every creature –
holds its breath...
in every eye a tear that speaks
the wonder of our oneness.

As every mother breasts her baby,
every flower and plant and tree
sighs contentment,
through every leaf,
through every root...
the Earth tosses spirals of wind into the air –
delighting in a new innocence,
touched by a new wondering...

III.

Every man was a teenager.
Every teenager was a boy.
Every boy was a baby
who was born,
and every birth is wondrous....

Every baby is wondrous.
Every boy is wondrous.
Every teenager is wondrous.
Every man
a wonder.

*"There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their story."
— Mary Lou Kownacki*

THE THEATRE'S END

"Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."

- George Orwell

Taking up from the last line of the piece *The History of Nipples* – "Oh no," I thought, "here we go again" – i.e. the possibility that there might be great, millennial, cultural pendulum swings of sexual superiority and inferiority – this piece, also a story, tells of a travelling theatre that became infected by gendering, and self-destroyed, but which then re-created itself, but then....

There is a still moment in the story, a moment of choice, a moment in which the back stage door opens – presenting us with the possibility of walking out – of exiting the whole trans-generational gender storyline.

This stillness is awareness, it is the presentness to our own experience that allows us to self-observe without judgement – and see the endless flux of sensations, feelings, thoughts and energies in which we live in every moment – and the artificiality (and inevitability of engendering conflict) of any fixed conceptualisation of reality.

When asked why she didn't take the exit, a woman in the story says, "Better the devil you know" – in other words: what alternative is there? This echoes the couple in the piece *'Honest Relating, The Couple & Community'* who reply that the happily-ever-after monogamous dream "is the only dream we know to dream".

And that's understandable. What is the alternative? It's not clear to us.... I would say this: that we can't drop sex – we do have penises and vaginas (although not all clover has three leaves) – but we can drop gender. The problem is that we don't know what that means. In my understanding it means to live in spontaneous faithfulness to one's all-modes experience – and to relate to the unknown in the unknown. Every new moment – a surprise. Every new me – a surprise.

People sometimes say that we need 'better rôle models', or a wider spectrum of rôle models – that not only the rugged male be promoted in the minds of men, but the quiet, gentle, sensitive man, too – so that boys will have a wider spread of possibilities to imitate and grow into. Yes, that would be (and in many places, already is), a step in the direction of letting go – a relaxation of the one-size-fits-all intense propaganda for manhood with which we bombard our boys. But what about letting go altogether? What about just walking out on the whole disturbed story?

Genderlessness, as I understand it, is not just the absence of gendering – it is living in intimacy with oneself, observing one's feelings, and refusing to gender them: "This kindness I am feeling – is it masculine, or feminine, or is it deeper than definition?" It is deeper! It is neither! It is as masculine, or feminine, as fear, or patience, or generosity, or hate.

The Theatre's End

I.
Once Upon A Time
there was a travelling theatre.
Its entrance door was birth,
its exit door death.
It performed the dramas of the generations –
its actors,
you and I.

Into this community of travellers
many children were born –
some had penises,
some had vaginas –
(and some had neither or both.
These were problematic.)

Nobody knows exactly when or where,
or even why –
but one day –
the directors decreed:
"Let those with penises lead us,
let those with vaginas follow...
let those with penises be on top,
let those with vaginas be beneath...
let those with penises be powerful
let those with vaginas be tender."

The people quickly agreed
and rushed to help
the children with penises become powerful,
and the children with vaginas become tender –
surgically modifying those who had neither or both,
"To avoid confusion", they would say.

The travelling theatre performed
uncountable dramas,
in land after land,
year after year –
for centuries...
for millennia.

Children with penises who wanted
to be tender,
and children with vaginas who wanted
to be powerful,
became more and more problematic because
the people had forgotten
the directors had decreed it so
(not life itself)
and had become certain that
those with penises
need not become powerful –
because that was what they all always already were,
and those with vaginas
needed no help becoming tender –
because that was what they all always already were.
"To each their nature",
they would say.

"She wants to be powerful!" they would mutter and scoff.
"As if she had a penis!"
"He wants to be tender!" they would chuckle and mock.
"As if he had a vagina!"

II.
And so,
in place after place
time after time,
innumerable drama after innumerable drama,
the theatre travelled on....

And nobody knows exactly when or where,
or even why –
but suddenly they had been fighting
for a long, long time....
Perhaps it was because
one cannot truly be powerful

without tenderness,
or be truly tender
without power....
Whatever the reason –
those with penises won
and they tightened their grip on the world,
and stepped harder on the ground,
and confused power
and violation.

The theatre would set up its circus-like tent
on dusty patches of land at the edges of towns
and proclaim their arrival,
as always they had done,
for thousands and thousands of years –
until suddenly,
for a long, long time,
there had been hardly any audience at all.

The theatre community was restless.
There were more fights.
Those with penises became more violent.
They performed terrible acts
upon those with vaginas,
upon each other,
upon the land....
Until suddenly those with vaginas said
"Enough!" –
and the travelling theatre disbanded –
and the people dispersed....

III.

The dispersed community had children
in every continent,
in every city,
in every town –
in the moonlight,
in the starlight,
in the sunshine,
beneath the clouds....

The children with vaginas now said,
"You have a penis –

you are
one of the violent ones.
The theatre of our ancestors is in ruins
because of you –
look what you have done!"

They said,
"All who have a penis are bad!
Look where you have led us!
Look what you have done
to us –
to the world!
You are bad,
and we are good!"

The children with penises replied:
"Yes, we are bad –
you are right,
you are good.
You lead now!
We are not able.
Look what we have done!
You lead us now...
with your tenderness!"

IV.
And so,
the travelling theatre was reformed,
and became popular again....
For a few hundred years
they performed new dramas....
The most popular being:
'The Tragedy Of The Guilty Penis',
'The Glee of The Vindicated Vagina',
and 'The Tale Of The Soft Penis And The Hard Vagina'.

That is...
until...
one day,
once upon a day –
inconceivably,

unprecedentedly,
shockingly –
time stopped,
and the drama froze.
Not only in the Arctic and Antarctic –
no –
time froze at the equator,
the drama stopped all over the world.

I can tell you,
because I was there!
I was on stage that day!
It is difficult to explain though....
It was a fairy tale moment –
an invisible ice covering the land...
the descent of an enchantment...
breath suspended in time....

Everything, everything around me froze.
I looked about me –
other actors were becoming ice statues of themselves....
And a voice said
(we all heard it):
"You need not be part
of this drama.
You can walk away.
You need not retell the ancestral story.
You need not repeat and repeat
the old script.
You can say, 'No'.
You can walk away.
You need not be part of this play
of persecutors and victims,
of the cruel and the kind,
of sinners and saviours,
of devils and angels –
of man and woman,
of woman and man."

The voice said..
"You have choice.
You need not be part
of the inherited gender drama....

You can step out of it!
You can walk away!
Let go!", it said.

"Let go!", it said –
so I did!
I packed my bags and left....

Time did melt,
actors thawed,
and the show did go on.
Others actors left, too –
but most stayed.
I asked one why –
why stay?
"Better the devil you know!" she said.
"But where there are devils there are angels," I said,
"and where there is good and bad –
there is war!"
"Yes," she said, "I know –
but if we weren't good and bad,
who would we be?"

8

SEXUALITY & RELATIONSHIP



“love is the resonance of freedoms”

SEX, RELATIONSHIP & THE RESHAPING OF SOCIETY

"We die to each other daily. What we know of other people is only our memory of the moments during which we knew them... at every meeting we are meeting a stranger."

— T. S. Eliot

A Social Shake Up

Once you realise all you will ever have is your own experience – that you are free – you realise you don't have to live in the nuclear family, either in its full manifestation, or as a single person longing for it, or as a single person defeated by the dream of it. You realise you can choose to live in the arrangement that pleases you. Or in no arrangement.

This might well mean being quite proactive... asking and answering for yourself questions like: "What do I want? To live alone? In community? In a shared house? A shared street? In a co-parenting network of families?" The options seem endless. You realise you are free to choose to live with as few or as many people as you wish, to choose your favourite option, to create your own.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. It is deeper than this, much deeper. Not only are you free to find the living situation you desire, but you are free to relate to anyone in any way in any moment – it is truly up to you.

Then, as you continue to allow yourself to experience the fullness of your experience, the more interested you become in meeting others who allow themselves the same. Because you are quite emotionally open, say, you enjoy another's emotional openness – you can travel deeply in the emotional mode together. You would not be able to travel so deeply with someone who was much less emotionally open than you. You tend to gravitate towards, and hang out with, people at your stage of openness.

As you open in all modes – and, of course, this includes sexually, erotically and sensually in the physical mode – you enjoy relating with people who are as open as you. And because you are both open to your experience in the moment, and both relating honestly from that experience, anything can happen. You are in deep, respectful, loving, freedom together.

If as a brotherhood we take on the metafocus of staying in our own experience – our

right to honour our own experience, our right to respectfully express/share our experience, and our right to act respectfully out of our own experience – then we are also envisioning, or ‘dreaming into being’, the possibility of a culture in which any mode of meeting can happen at any moment with anyone.

This is why this is a total social shake up. Staying in our own experience is not only empowering at the individual level – internally, metaphysically, etc. – but it also has social consequences... unpredictable consequences. But if we act in dignity, they will be dignified consequences...

The Post-Monogamous Landscape

With the rise of science and the discrediting of ‘The Holy Books’ as ‘The Truth’, the idea of monogamy as the divine ideal began to crack. Then with the industrial revolution, the geographically-based extended family began to fragment, and the traditions it held in place began to fall apart. In came the modern, romantic myth of the ‘one, special, lifelong true-love’ – the modern, global, ‘American’ dream.

A century or so later, the forever-after, romantic dream is in tatters. In so many places it has dissolved into domestic routine, excessive emotional dependence (and therefore blame), with an underbelly of pornographic degradation. The disillusion becomes too much. If they marry, they divorce. And then they both start again with someone else!

We have to be honest: we are afraid of consciously choosing to go beyond monogamy (or, more precisely, afraid to admit we already have, though not too consciously). But, let’s be clear: we are not dismantling a monogamous utopia, we are creating anew on a landscape of breakdowns and split ups, of possessiveness and co-dependence, of repression and disillusion, and of consenting titillation, quick winks and escalating sexual extremism.

Of course there are exceptions. The most beautiful exceptions. And of course we love our children. And of course I am generalising wildly. Nevertheless, at the societal level we do need to acknowledge the happy-ever-after, one-on-one, you-are-my-everything, post-religious, romantic-consumer, perfect-couple myth has been a short-lived social experiment.

So how about we stop perpetuating it? How about we ‘be the change’ – not only psychologically, but at the levels of intimacy and sexuality too? How about we ‘be the change’ completely – with our whole selves, including our bodies? How about we be completely honest – and see where that leads? How about we address our addiction to the drug of the one-special-other (who recognises the one-special-me), and the disempowerment of seeking ‘my other half’... ‘with you I feel so complete’? And how

about we commit – each one to themselves – and meet in our unique authorities, and in authenticity, and dream anew?

Warning

A warning: let us take great care; this ‘meeting in freedom’ sounds great – and it is – but we are not educated in living in freedom, so there’s a danger that in advocating sexual decontraction (and not only mental, emotional and existential decontraction), we just add a string to the seducer’s bow – that we give some sort of existential justification for sexual superficiality and greed.

This is why, in the past, conscious sexual explorations were deemed ‘secret teachings’ – esoteric as opposed to exoteric teachings. Such teachings were held for the initiates, because the uninitiated were not considered able to live them. The basic understanding was that one is not going to be able to surf the enormous waves of sexual passion until one can, say, stay in one’s own experience while ambling peacefully across the sand: if you can’t walk across the beach and stay in-yourself, how will you when the waves hit?! It’s going to be a fiasco....

In fact, these secret teachings were considered dangerous in the hands of the uninitiated. Appropriated by the uninitiated they could become an excuse for promiscuous abuse. By promiscuous abuse I mean relating to others as if they were only bodies – and penetrating them, or being penetrated by them, in order to find relief from the pain of identification with contraction. But equipped with this knowledge they, the uninitiated, could veil their abuse with ‘all the right words’ – with sophisticated ‘tantric’ justification.

The unprepared (those who are not living in their experience, or even interested in staying in their experience, but who are living on the rack of a contraction and seeking relief), may even perfect the art of appearing interested in their own experience on first dates. Yes, even the opportunity to meet another in the unknown, to stay each in their own experience, to share attractions and mistrusts, boundaries, longings, resistances – even this can be twisted into a new fad, the "staying-in-your-own-experience" fad, which is the in-fad, the fad you have to be into to get laid.

To be either initiated or uninitiated is not the terminology of our times. Nor do I feel that the path of honesty is as black and white as that. I feel, in those terms, that the initiation begins when we’re being born, and is lifelong. Seen like that we are neither initiated and ready, nor uninitiated and not. But we do need to take care.

We need to be honest: "Am I as interested in meeting in the mystery of the moment with this woman as I am in caressing her breasts?" No? Hummmm... fascinating...

"Am I as interested in meeting this man in unconditional love as I am in sucking his penis?" No? Hummmm... Fascinating...

Maybe I am a faddist? A flitterer? A butterfly boy? A puer? A sex addict? A tantric playboy? Let me enquire....

But hey, nothing substantial has no shadow. We can only be forewarned. I am not preaching a panacea. I am just saying that if we become interested in staying in our own experience this will have both revolutionary personal (intrapsychic) consequences, and revolutionary social (interpsychic) consequences. And those consequences will bring their own challenges...

So, a warning: probably (i.e. statistically) you are as-yet incapable of living and relating to everyone in sexual as well as emotional and existential openness – however, to say "none of us can do it" and therefore we shouldn't try, is simply discouraging. That would be like saying Eckhart Tolle's books are worthless because, after all, who's really able to live in the present?!

If we are agreed that all we have is our own experience, and if we are educating ourselves in staying in it, and interested in meeting others in that place, and in finding out what a society of 'stayers' might look like – then we need to be realistic: we are opening a potentially really exciting new chapter of cultural history, and part of this is that we are loosing the ropes of the beast. If you think you are the exception – take care, brother, take care!

Everything Must Be Possible

That said – everything has to be possible when two adults meet. Otherwise how can they say they are in the unknown? Unless every possible relational road is open (intellectual, spiritual, emotional, sexual, rational, etc.) – how can there be full, undefended meeting? The relationship is already being set to run along preset tracks. Some allowed, some not. Some allowed to an extent, but only as far as that. Unless everything is possible we are being operated by external authorities, like some kind of wind-up toys. As Oscar Wilde puts it: "Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation".

I am not saying to go about looking at everyone as a potential lover (even if they are), but rather to direct our attention to our own whole-body experience – part of which is sexual, and needs to be able to flow, as does every other part of us. To the extent we restrain that flow we are all jangled up on the inside, and therefore compensatory. And compensations aren't pretty.

To self-define as monogamous, or polyamorous, or polygamous, or even to self-define as gay, lesbian or heterosexual is to perpetuate this restraint. "I am not that, I am this" always blocks the energetic flow, the flow of possibility. These self-definitions are just identity calling cards designed by past experiences. There are no calling cards when we meet in the unknown.

There have been cultural phases of greater and lesser sexual 'liberation'. I am not especially interested in sexual freedom – not more than I am interested in rational, emotional or existential freedom. I am interested in them all. Our indefinable sexuality just needs to be honoured and given space, like every other energy in us.

There are many reasons we are so afraid of claiming our sexual freedom – from the shame that hangs over the Archetype of Man in the globalising culture, to our fear of the beast, to our fear of social chaos. But, ultimately, absolute sexual authenticity takes us, like any other total honesty, into our aloneness – which is the threshold of our freedom. So it is not specifically sexual freedom we are afraid of, it is freedom itself.

But if we do want to open through our fear, and if we do want to live at the centre of our own experience – then we have no other choice than to include our sexuality... it is part of our experience. If we choose to block or limit any part of us, then we will block and limit our freedom.

Today, reciting various patriarchal, religious, consumer and romantic logics, most societies still favour monogamy, or (more accurately) 'the concept of the couple', as the primary unit and building block of the social sphere. Most of the world has internalised the couple-ideal – so we don't need to be supervised. We regulate our own relating.

But is the couple concept harmonious with experiencing one's own experience? If people were dedicated to experiencing their experience, would that naturally express itself socially as a couples culture? What might the social expression of each person experiencing their own experience look like?

IN HONESTY I RELATE

*"If we are bold, love strikes away the chains of fear from our souls."
- Maya Angelou*

Here (and in the pieces that follow) I call “staying-in”, and “relating-from”, our own experience ‘honest relating’. And, of course, this means feeling and expressing (as we feel appropriate) the whole of our experience – not just the aspects we consider good, or feel are pleasurable, or that we want to experience.

Honest relating: being alert and sensitive to what one is experiencing, in all modes, and communicating with others without losing touch with that – neither pushing for a particular outcome, nor inhibiting the flow of one’s inclinations – in a ‘field’, or atmosphere, of deepest, loving equality.

Honest relating is therefore no more sexual than it is intellectual, or anything else.

And ‘other’ can be an animal, a tree, a landscape, a city, a street. Because we are always being impacted and, therefore, always relating.

It is the kind of relating we need to educate our children in, and the kind of relating we need to educate ourselves in if we are to be able to educate them.

In Honesty I Relate

Honest relating is a way of relating
not only to people,
or other creatures –
it is a way of relating to everything.

I relate honestly
to a film or song,
to a restaurant,
to my food,
to the Earth –
to the greedy soul of capitalism,
and the vacuous soul of consumerism...
to the rapacious soul of the military.

In honesty I relate.

In honesty I relate
with the lonely
who don't know their aloneness –
with the frightened
who fight their fear –
with the hardened
who fight all feeling
except the rightness of their revenge
for their pain –
and knowingly poison the Earth,
and knowingly poison the insects and animals and birds,
and knowingly poison our food,
and knowingly poison our bodies,
and the bodies of our children,
for generations and generations...
In honesty I relate.

In honesty I relate
to the glimmer of honesty still alive,
like a curious child,
far off inside the eyes
of every big-time and small-time tyrant –
their scheming meetings
making kindness itself shiver –
making the soul of the world
nauseous...
In honesty I relate

In honesty I relate
to the restless, ambitious soul of the city,
to the graceful, noble, mulching soul of the forest,
to the tremendous, waltzing soul of the ocean,
and the moody, empty soul of the sky.
In honesty I relate.

In honesty I relate
to the entrusted echoes of my ancestors –
and to my every brother and sister
here on Earth.

In honesty I relate

in the kitchen,
in the bedroom –
out shopping,
at work –
with my elders,
with my youngers –
with those who are like me,
with those who are not –
with those who like me,
with those who do not –
at the gym,
at the pub, at the bar, at the club,
in the street, on the beach...
in the flow of situations –
the flickering constellating of interactions –
in honesty I relate.

I relate from that magical, placeless place
where I begin and end forever.
From that place I relate
to the same invisible, colourful place in you –
the place that trembles
with the vulnerability of freedom –
that can barely hold steady
as certainty dissolves –
that loves burstingly
every summer, autumn, winter and spring,
and every person driving every car everywhere –
that is passionate and surrendered...
determined to flower,
and ready to go to seed.
From there, to there, in there –
in honesty I relate.

NEVER LET YOUR PARTNER DRESS YOU!

“Before him I may think aloud. I am arrived at last in the presence of a man so real and equal, that I may drop even those undermost garments of dissimulation, courtesy, and second thought, which men never put off, and may deal with him with the simplicity and wholeness with which one chemical atom meets another.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Never let anyone dress you. Not a partner, not anyone. (Except for fun!) Dress yourself. Take advice, if you want – but mull it over, don’t succumb. Stand on your own feet, in your own shoes. In the shoes you choose.

Yes, we say, we all know that! But the more intimate a relationship the more it promises soothing for our loneliness and low self-worth and, therefore, the more we cling to it – and, therefore, (when it doesn’t deliver – after three months, after three years, after thirty years – when we still find ourselves lonely, dull and self-doubting) we blame that intimate other for not being who we had promised ourselves they would be, and we reject them, and go hunt for another who we will, inevitably, once again, rise up then cast down.

Unless that is, we ‘get it’ that we will never come home to ourselves by clinging to someone else. Unless we realise we have been letting someone else dress us – that we have been looking at ourselves through the eyes of other: that we have been trying to be the image of ourselves that we hoped would please them – so that they would smile upon us, and our self-judgement would dissolve, and for a while, maybe, we might be relieved of our emptiness.

It’s easy to say, “Just both be yourselves, and the relationship will flourish.” Yes, I agree. But the closer, the tighter, the relationship, the harder that is.

Never Let Your Partner Dress You!

I.

What you choose to wear

is how you choose to be perceived in the world.

Let this choice of costume and communication come through you:

yesterday I just threw an old T-shirt on,

today I am preening myself for a party...

"Oh, but, darling
every wo-man I know dresses her man!"
"Indeed", should be your reply,
"a sad evidence of the disempowerment of men".

But you shall not dress me, my love,
nor I you.
As Kahlil Gibran says:
"Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup.
Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf.
Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone."

"Oh, but, darling,
we're going to my parents' at the weekend –
and you know how important it is
to them
that you
look right.
Darling, please, just this once, please,
let me suggest what you wear."

Not once!
Not now!
Not never!
Never, never, never
let your wo-man dress you.

(Except for fun.)

Beware!
For s-he is the Western Warlock Witch,
the Eastern Tempter-Temptress
at the gate to the World of Illusion,
the Mythic Giant Spider on the Axis Mundi,
the Classical fe-male Siren singing
in every language throughout time
in words only you can hear:
"Come, my love, I understand,
I can make it all better,
I can make it all go away!"
S-he is not your freedom!

S-he may be of comfort,
a place of sweet repose,
but s-he is not your challenge,
and s-he is not your freedom.

You are your freedom!
Dress yourself!

II.
Never forget
you do not know.

Believe nothing.
Let your life be your prayer.
Be a prayer.
Be a prayer that will never be heard
by anyone except you –
and therefore, through you,
by everything.

Stand before your own mirror,
and with a steely, glassy resolve –
as you shave, or comb your hair,
or put rings on your fingers –
say to yourself so silently
that even the stars will know
you mean it:
"Following others
I die by increments, by the day –
following myself
I am reborn every dawn."

Stay in your experience –
not his, not hers...
You are unique –
be unique!
Wear what you want to wear.
Don't interfere
in the experience of others.
Let everyone wear
what they want to wear.
Relate honestly.

Offer your talents in service of all, remembering: the most profound service you can possibly offer when a brother or sister or brosis or sisbro or anyone asks you to dress them is to say: "No! No! Absolutely not! You dress yourself!"

HONEST RELATING, THE COUPLE & COMMUNITY

"When risk goes out of relationships they become impossible."

- Alan Watts

"A community best serves itself when it truly serves the awakening of the unique story trying to come to life through each person born."

- Michael Meade

Although this piece is a complex conceptual collage, the essence is super simple: if we want to stay at the centre of our own experience, and relate 100% authentically from our own experience, then neither monogamy nor polyamory, nor any other fixed social-sexual system will be acceptable to us. We will need a society (network of communities) in which we are free to express ourselves fully, in any mode, in any moment.

In other words, for example, we are currently told that we are intellectually free – free to think and speak and write on any subject. Whether this is accurate or not is another matter, but most people in modern society sign up to our right to full freedom of intellectual expression. In the intellectual/rational mode, then, at least in theory in this culture, I can flow as I please. I can relate intellectually to whomever I wish, there is no restraint on the number of my intellectual liaisons, nor am I expected to remain ‘faithful’ to, say, the philosophical perspective I held as a young man. I am allowed to explore, express and evolve.

That this is not the case sexually is self-evident. Rather than allowing me the same freedoms in the sexual/physical mode, I am encouraged into a monogamous commitment (whether lifelong or not), into relationship with one other (above all others), to whom I must remain ‘faithful’, and – unless we have decided upon some non-conventional ‘adjustments’ to the all-pervading format – any sexual connection with anyone else is frowned upon, if not considered an outright betrayal.

This is an unacceptable socio-sexual set up for those of us who want, as I said above, “to stay at the centre of our own experience, and relate 100% authentically from our own experience.” We need a social structure that will support us in relating 100% authentically in every mode – intellectually, yes, of course, but also in our sexuality

and our loving (in the current couples-culture the arena of our loving is also restricted, since we are not 'allowed' to love anyone else more than we love our partner).

However, the bottom line is that people are going to follow their hearts, minds, genitals and dreams despite what I or anyone else has to say. Realistically, then, whatever anyone recommends, there are still going to be couples, polyamorous groupings, and so on – so what is needed (I propose, in this piece) is community that supports us all in staying individually in our own experience (taking it as obvious that freedom of expression in all modes is our birthright) – and is aware of how easy it is, if not how inevitable it is, that we lose touch with our deepest aloneness (freedom) in intimate relationship, get seduced by the promise of love ("I've never felt like this before"), security ("I will never leave you"), importance ("you matter so much to me"), and so on – seeking completion of ourselves in someone else.

Knowing all this, the community can serve everyone by supporting us in cultivating the skills we need to be able to stay in centre/aloneness/freedom /mystery – so that we lose ourselves less, maintain more self-seeing, and are able to be more authentic in whatever relationship we find ourselves in in any given moment.

The shift then is from 'the couple' as the basic building block of the social sphere, to the individual, from a culture of unconnected couples to one of individuals united in community; from the legacy of 'marriage as the will of god' and the happily-ever-after couple, to a shared focus on staying in our own experience; and from sexual exclusivity and repression to the inclusion of sexuality as a mode of relating with as much right and need of expression as any other.

What such communities might look like, how they might function, and so on – I don't know. Nor do I feel it would be appropriate for me to suggest some sort of template. I feel we need to establish experimental, exploratory communities – and watch as each one finds its way....

And - a note in another tone:

We can have inspiring discussions about parenting and schooling, and 'supporting our children in being true to themselves', but the long and the short of it is that we cannot teach our children to be true to themselves – in other words, to follow their impulses – if we ourselves are inhibiting the flow of our own impulses.

However, we can only follow our own impulses when we trust ourselves, and we can only trust ourselves when we live in trust, or 'belonging'.

So our foremost priority must be the cultivation of trust.

To live in trust means to entrust oneself into the keeping of the mystery, of our ancestors, and of the Earth.

(When I say 'entrusted to the ancestors' I mean a sense of being part of the ever-onward flow of evolution, or flowering, of the human race – a sense of being in service of (what one feels would be) the human race's most dignified seeing of itself. I mean a sense of everyone who has gone before being behind you, everyone who's alive being with you, and of those who are to come already grateful to you.)

This state of trust is also a state of aloneness, freedom and love. Let's call it 'centre'. In centre we can trust ourselves to flow through our impulses and instincts. Then we can educate our children – because then we can show them how to do it!

Right now we need community that will reinforce our individual commitment to living in trust, and in trusting out impulses.

(And one does not suddenly become sexually obsessed by allowing the sexual impulse to flow – because at centre there is no particular emphasis on sex. One is not pushing out one's sexuality, just allowing it to flow should it want to. But one is just as allowing of every other impulse.

And by 'allowing' I don't mean acting-out. I mean energetically allowing: giving space, observing, accompanying, taking care of....)

Get Away!

In our schools, emotional education is not on the curriculum.
There is no university degree in emotion.
Then we condemn psycho-sexually-emotionally illiterate action –
and declare the need for control!

How would an educated public act?
We do not know.
Has there ever been one?
We do not know.

But for myself I say:
"I am literate enough!
So get your hands out of my trousers!
Superego, or whoever you are, Cultural Mind –
how dare you
put your hands inside my underwear!

Get away!
Get back to your offices!
You should be facilitating my freedom,
not manipulating my dick!
Leave me alone!
I can regulate my sex myself!"

I will not sign up to your sex laws!
I subscribe to no social-sexual code –
I subscribe to love.
Not sex –a
love.
And not the idea of love,
but the love that is released
when deepest equalities meet.
Which may be sexual,
which may not.
Nor do I subscribe to
the idea of equality –
I subscribe to what I feel
when our bodies feel each other
even at a distance,
when we meet –
the mystery-me and the mystery-you –
feelings flying through us like starlings
in sparkling murmuration.

To that I subscribe!
Not to president, not to priest,
not to the billboard, not to the big screen.
I subscribe to naked honesty,
to the education that unveils us –
to the discipline to love.

One to One

(a)
I,
the life I am,
I –
am unique.

I am one.
I am a singularity,
a singular occurrence –
one unique among perhaps infinite uniques –
a unique in a universe of uniques!
I,
like every single tree,
like every single ant,
I –
am the universal unit.

(b)
I,
and you –
we –
we individuals –
we irreducible individual universal units –
are also, therefore, the prima materia
of the social.
Society is made up of us.
Society is us
interacting –
no more.

We,
we individuals,
are the universal unit
and the social component.
As Erich Fromm says:
"The basic entity of the social process
is the individual".

(c)
All is amazing.
Yes.
All is as amazing as the eye of the seer.
Yes.
And oh, how beautiful
two naked minds, two naked hearts, two naked bodies
amazed by each other!

But who knows how to meet in amazement?

Fearing life
I rub my body on yours
for relief.
Fearing the inexplicable, irrational moment
I stuff myself with porn.
Fearing you, other, sister, brother –
fearing human beings –
I hide inside
my committed relationship.

How to arrive on the other side
of this distress?
How to awaken amazement?
By honesty to self?
By walking hand in hand with the river?
By sleeping cuddled up with the clouds?
By self responsibility?
By self acceptance?
By all of the above.

For some aliens we are huge,
for others we are microscopic –
but all agree
we are amazing!
Today you and I look upon each other with alien eyes:
my lizard-like penis fills with blood
before your primeval genitals and tongue.
Lungs to lungs,
we respire love.
"Who are you?" I ask,
and we laugh.
"I am the one!" you say.
I say, "So am I!"

Who who sees would dare interfere
in such amazement?
Who who feels
would presume to orchestrate
the chords we form
as we pass,
as we see,
as we touch,
as we feel?

(d)

Let us be lovers of ourselves –
of the many energies within –
of the many energies we're in...
Kind and clear
with the ones who would confuse the moment
with memories and imaginings,
with obsessions,
with neediness
and a simmering resentment –
while secretly quivering
with terror and shame.

Accept, yes, let us accept them all –
and hold the hurt ones,
and love them, yes –
but with a love that is not stupid:
with an unconditional love
that can say, "no",
unconditionally

Living from centre,
caring for the young ones within,
I am the dancer of my experience.

It's not so much fun when you trip,
when you can't go on,
when your body's not listening...
It's so much fun
when you too are a centre dancer!

If a man chooses to stand in centre,
and walk in amazement,
and dance in the rain –
he is in a state of receptivity –
every exhalation a blush of sweetness and trust –
and he can't help it:
what he brings upon himself he brings upon us all.
He can't help it.
A state is a state.
It's a climate.
It's the state he's in.

Out in the rain
he rains on us all.

Until then,
until a man dances in the rain of belonging
he will be wanting himself to be
an idea of himself –
and in that state
he will want you to be
some idea of his of you,
and what he calls love
will be whenever, it seems to him, his two ideas align.
As Robert Anton Wilson puts it:
"We're all looking from the point of view of our own reality tunnels."
In this state,
in this personal climate –
in these relentless, self-eroding, bitter winds
(he can't help it) –
he will erode you too.
He will lash out, or fly off, or groan like a darkening sky
whenever you deviate
from his idea of you.

I can only call you to centre
from centre.
You can only call me to centre
from centre.
We cannot call each other to centre
from contraction.
This loving each other is not hit and miss.
It is the joy of sustained accurate intention.

Loving all of me –
all of me, all of me –
my bizarre thoughts, my cowardice, my cruelty –
all of me, all of me –
I come to love
all of you.

We all have access to the objectifier,
to the rapist,
to the paedophile.

They are in the collective archetypal cultural air...
We are in them –
and they are in us.
We have choice,
but they are in us....

Beware of good people!
Beware of people who are who they want to be!
Love especially
everything you wish you weren't!

Come –
it's raining outside
our ideas...
Come, quick, now –
let's all rush out,
and splash about...
this kind of weather is contagious!

(e)
Honest relating
is self-love meets self-love.
Pain swells within me,
I love him –
fear swells up,
I love him –
hatred,
I love him –
loneliness, longing, lust –
love, love, love.
They are, after all,
my palette –
and I their art.

By lovingly fathering my own experience
I see you
in your experience –
your self-doubt, suffering and joy
reflecting my own.
And because I see myself
in you,
I love you.

Because I love, I see,
and because I see, I love.

If experiencing one's experience
is the individual way,
honest relating is the social way.

Let us let honest relating –
not concepts
like monogamy, or polygamy, or polyandry, or polyamory –
weave a society of individuals
experiencing their own experience.

All such -amies and -andries and -amories
are social systems seeking
to contain the universal sex pulse,
to constrain the wild rain,
to get us to dance in straight lines....
They are all external authorities –
to bow to them is to surrender to impotence.
They are the warmongers of the psyche –
setting up battles:
"What's allowed? What's not?
What's good? What's not?"
They frighten us with fantasies.
If you sign up to any of them
you will end up disliking yourself.

The issue is not which system, or combination of systems, we choose –
the issue is how we choose to relate –
sexually, emotionally, intellectually...
The issue is whether we choose
to learn to relate from the centre of our experience
in honesty.

Polyamory and honest relating are not the same –
honest relating is not circumscribed,
even provisionally.
Honest relating is not a social structure.
Honest relating is not a form,
it is formless....
It forwards no fixed social form for our relating,
no formula....

It is free-form relating –
liberating us
even from the polyamorous proposal
of an updated, expanded monogamy,
a liberal, flexible, multi-monogamy –
the three, four, or five person couple.

(In my imagining)
a society of honest relating
would include monogamous couples
and polyamorous families –
but it would not be focused on the forms of our relating –
it would be focused on the relating itself.

The Castration Of Monogamy

Limiting ourselves here to the globalising culture, when we talk about the patriarchy, and its most basic, fundamental, controlling social structure – monogamous marriage – we tend to see Man as the patriarchal oppressor, as the one who imposed marriage to guarantee his heir was his. And, as far as my understanding goes, this is part of the picture.

Another part of the picture is that even this desire for perpetuity through a son and heir was something that as men we were conditioned into – and that marriage has been, and is, as oppressive for men as it is for women, or for anyone.

Apart from the fact that the patriarchy castrated us (in the existential mode) by indoctrinating us into religion, and castrated us (in the emotional mode) by indoctrinating us into masculinity, it also castrated us (in the physical mode) by indoctrinating us into monogamy.

Let us imagine you go to a party with your exclusive sexual partner, who you are loving (not ‘who you love’), or, being polyamorous with, for example, your three exclusive sexual partners, who you are loving... And let me ask you a question (you might need to close your eyes a moment to feel-into this): are you as sexually open to everyone there as you might’ve been had you not been ‘in a relationship(s)’? If the answer is, “no” – which, to be frank, in 99 cases out of a 100, it will be – then who has your balls? You?

And no blame here. Your partner hasn’t got you by the balls. You have handed them to your partner on the platter of your contracted self-worth.

When we can go to a party loving a sexual partner, and be as sexually relaxed and open as we would be if we had no partner, then we can be reassured we have not lost touch with our sexual birthright, our sexual sovereignty – our unique erotic connection with the sexuality that pulses through all of creation.

The man who would fuck where he will (not to hurt, not to take), but genuinely fuck – in a celebration of deliciously dirty primal lust – this man is locked out of me by monogamy (one room in my own house now out of bounds to me). The man who would meet another in the perfumes of erotic love, and then another in other perfumes, and then another... he too is locked out of me by monogamy (another room in my own house now out of bounds to me). And of course, it's subtler than this – it's not just about intercourse or penetration. This erotic constraint affects my every gesture – especially if I am attracted to you. I end up confined to a small corner of myself – perhaps proud of my goodness, or my responsibility, and almost certainly haunted by guilt (I know who lives in those locked rooms). I don't know what word would describe that emotional state...: disempowered? Frustrated? In self-denial? Self-betraying? Hypocritical? Socialised? Tamed? Domesticated? Castrated? So many words seem to fit...

Pornography As Monogamy's Twin

And let me just add a word about pornography here. There is nothing 'wrong' with pornography in itself (there is nothing 'wrong' with anything 'in itself', i.e. until we have a set of values by which to judge it). And I am definitely not going to bring any set of moral values to bear upon pornography. From my many years of work in deep openness with groups of men I believe that pornography (or more accurately, pornographies) can serve many functions.

I also believe there are many of us who have been, or are, addicted to pornography – and struggle with that. (By 'an addiction' I mean something we keep returning to, hoping to rid ourselves of our pain.) For these men, the porn experience begins with an erotic buzz and ends with feelings of distaste, discomfort, loss of self-respect, awkwardness (not feeling right in one's skin), emptiness, even depression.

Each man then thinks, "Well all men aren't addicted to porn, like me – so there must be something wrong with me". What he is overlooking is that (although other men do have other addictions – primary among which is the addiction to signed-up relationship), nevertheless, there are millions upon millions of men caught in the same struggle with porn.

Now we can say that each man's pain is individual – a mess of immature parental, community and cultural mixed messages which resulted in his fear of abandonment,

or his fear of engulfment, or his violence, or his fear of conflict – and so on. Yes, I agree. And...

There is also a collective aspect to our pain. Isn't it a little simplistic, a little dubious, to say millions upon millions of men have a problem because they want sex with more than one 'approved' other? That would be like saying that millions upon millions of men have been sado-masochists because they've marched merrily off to war – such tragic, surreal jubilation – hey ho, hey ho... off to kill their brothers, and/or get killed they go. They weren't really merry sado-masochists. They were just coping.

Might it be that millions upon millions of men are living life under the boot of societal sexual repression, and coping with it in the same shadowy way? Could it be that the tyranny of monogamy almost forces men to seek relief in pornography? That the permit for just-the-one, approved, sexual partner 'in reality' almost creates the pornographic universe of many partners 'in fantasy'? Could it be that the prohibition of the free flow of our natural, animal sexuality creates the black market of pornography? That pornography is the denied twin of monogamy? That through pornography modern man survives the romanticised crusade of monogamy? That they are inseparable?

The Couple & Loss Of Self

In bed together –
in fleshy, sweaty closeness –
your lover whispers oh-so-erotically:
"I feel you complete me... it's, it's
as if you were my other half!"
Brother – roll off the bed, grab your pants, and run –
run, brother, run!

Nail a sign to your front door:
"I will not sacrifice myself on the altar
of other's incompleteness."
Better still –
hammer it into the wall
above your bathroom mirror...
better still –
tattoo it on your dick.

Lost underwater
together

in the rivers of fucking animal loving let go...
their beautiful swollen lovers' lips murmur
"Without you I am nothing", and
"You are my everything!"...
It is a sacred
suicide pact.

Is it even possible
to be half other,
or all for other?
If the basic existential unit is the individual,
is there ever dual existence?
Do we ever
see out of four eyes,
taste with two tongues,
digest with two stomachs?

Our thoughts might synch,
but do we think with one mind?
We might share a love –
but each of us loves alone.

If the adventure of honesty
is a pilgrimage to ourselves,
to what and where we already are –
(to whatever we are,
and wherever we may be) –
guided by half-heard whispers,
and half-trusted intuitions –
requiring of us, therefore, the alertness of a deer, or dog –
a fine listening
to the song of our own, unique experience –
then we must ask
whether it is of service to the individual
on its path of self-recognition –
(or whether it is blurring and confusing)
to push it to couple-up,
to travel as a two,
to be a half of two,
to enmesh with another half-of-two,
to become a half.

Maybe yes, maybe no –
maybe sometimes yes, sometimes no –
but we must (at least) ask...

We must ask
because we are free.
Whatever we have been suggested,
however many times insinuated –
like it or not –
we are still free.
Who owns the birds?
Nobody.
Who owns the ants?
Nobody.
Who owns you?

However internalised the restrictions
(however certain the open door is shut) –
however domesticated,
however timid –
we remain, each of us,
as Henley reminded Mandela
"the masters of our fates,
the captains of our souls",
free under the stars,
timeless all the time,
owned by no one,
answerable to ourselves,
each living the consequences
of his own choices –
sculpting out of air
the memory of who we were....

We must question
because we are free
to decide who we die as,
and because we are free
to offer each other freedom.

Can we couple-up and love
without loss of self?
Yes, of course we can,
but...

is who you need me to be for you
who I need to be for me?
And is who I need you to be for me
who you need to be
for yourself?
Can our needs synch in perfect precision?
Yes, of course, at moments, but
“until death us do part”?

How can we not manipulate each other
when we don't even feel the tug of need
in our every soft caress, our every gentle glance –
lurking inside our every word –
when, as Jung puts it:
"We don't have a subconscious,
the subconscious has us"?
Yes, we can synch, but....

The most widespread addiction,
and most denied addiction, in the world
is addiction to relationship.
My importance to you
bestows importance upon me.
Your love for me
makes me loveable.
Because in a crowd of faces
you spot me –
yes, me! –
I exist.

"I feel so seen by you!"
"I will always be there for you!"
Translation:
"I don't know I am indefinable, unlimited beauty.
I think I am a shit.
But you, you say no, you say
I am a marvel, a one-off... kind and strong...
how fortunate would anyone be, you say,
to have a person such as me
in their bed!
Your words rebirth me, continuously..."

In return for your seeing,
in exchange for this affirmation
I cannot give myself,
I pledge myself as your spouse,
your life companion, your soul mate –
and here, like Salome's head, here on a platter
are my energy, my will, my authenticity,
my ungiven gifts, my unwalked path,
my pulse, my breath, my time!
As Milton puts it:
'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven!'
Better to be a someone in your eyes
than a no one in my own."

If other is not an addiction
then why do we not want them to be free?
Why not let them follow their intuition,
their instinct,
when they call them beyond the couple's accords?

I love it
when we love each other above all others –
when we are 'the only one' for each other.
But if you are not my captive, resident addiction,
why don't I celebrate the image of you
in orgasmic intimacy with anyone but me?
Why does the image of your joy bring me pain?

Still...
let's stay open...
Who knows?!

There are millions of relationships,
thus millions of variables.

And...
let's be adult:
most of us have 'fallen in love' and heard,
within months, within years,
our "no" to ourselves out-shout our partner's "yes",
our resounding "yes" to our partner fade –
and yelled and sobbed as our partner's "yes" became
an "OK" –
or a "no".

At the very, very, very least,
let's agree:
this romantic "we are each other's everything" modern monogamous myth
is fucking tough.

Therefore the question:
can we educate ourselves and re-structure our society,
to support you, to support me (to support the individual),
to not get entangled in the web of other,
to own his own habitual manipulating –
and to stop it?

Can we become indefinable, genderless individuals –
not pushing each other into the one-on-one web,
where no loss of self is fucking tough –
if not impossible –
instead,
each of us pushing the other back to themselves?

Can we hold each other back
from self-loss and collusion?
Can we restrain the panicked personality –
so desperate for another panicked personality's
"Yes, you matter,
you matter to me –
more than anyone!"?
Can we create structures that remind individuals
they are individuals –
that remind free individuals
of their forgotten freedom –
that facilitate the unavoidable love
between freedoms?

A man's true home –
his sphere of self-remembering and repose –
is the house of his aloneness –
not the roof he huddles under,
or the bed where he cuddles up
with his one permitted sexual playmate.

Yes, his bedmate might be
his single strongest bond.

Yes, he might be
monogamous from freedom.
Yes, he might be a fulfilled family man...
Nevertheless,
if his marriage or partnership is not an island he sails to
from a mainland of aloneness –
rather than vice versa –
then
somewhere in the life of that two-headed beast
a man will lose his clear sight,
his rhythm, his tone,
his self-listening,
his yes, his no,
his reckless idealism,
his worldcentricity...
Somewhere in the captivating mix
of two-dreams-made-one,
drunk on reasonableness and romance,
if a man has a sense-of-self
he will lose it –
and if he hasn't,
he won't find one.

We are each other's mirrors:
because of how I am seen by Jack,
in front of Jack I see one Mark...
because John sees me differently,
in front of John I see a different Mark.
To live in the presence of
only ever one other adult mirror
is not supportive of self-seeing.
It ties us to one past –
to one version of the history of ourselves –
it binds us in the present
to one, specific, limited image of ourselves,
and steers us towards the one, top, future,
couple-endorsed possibility of ourselves.
Whereas,
if we are as close with many adults –
we find ourselves in a hall of mirrors,
a hall of parallel universes
flickering with different past me's,
present me's seen from different angles,

and a whole community of opinions and intuitions
as to who and how I am becoming –
we are thrown back upon our aloneness.

Aloneness is freedom.

To stay alone in relationship
with a stranger on the street for five minutes
is tough.

To stay alone in relationship
with someone who depends on you for everything,
and upon whom you similarly depend,
is tougher than tough.

But that's what we've been told we want –
and want it we do.

Brothers,

we have to change this!

We're setting ourselves up to suffer.

We need new structures.

We need structures that throw everyone back
upon their aloneness –

and because aloneness is belonging,

and because belonging is beautiful,

and because of the trustworthiness of such beauty,

favour honest conversation

whether logistical, intellectual, emotional, sexual,

or in silence.

Brothers,

I suspect there are walls to knock down
between apartments.

Our architecture, after all, is couple-culture architecture.

And I suspect, as the walls come down,

(all the while, self-educating, together) –

more will crumble than brick,

and more will fill the air than dust...

that we will liberate joy –

the joy of getting our lives back –

the joy of getting ourselves back,

and the joy of getting each other back.

One-mirror monogamy isn't even good for the kids!

As Terrance McKenna puts it, it's

"a cauldron for the production of neuroses":
the one parental mirror
(more often than not, the one example of male, the one example of female)
the family code, the family way,
the way to be a baby that gets fed,
the way to be to be child that gets loved.

Some people say
some couples are codependent.
That is ridiculous!
Almost every couple on Earth
is the embodiment of codependence –
a four-eyed, four-legged creature
dangerously devoid of centre,
dangerously devoutly conditioned,
clung together by fear.

Synchronisation,
mutual sacrifice of self,
is inevitable within the I-complete-you, you-complete-me,
discrete and therefore isolated couple.
You begin to move at the same pace –
the couple pace.
(You deny this –
you're not like other couples.)
You begin to act in one mood –
the mood of the couple.
(You deny this too,
vehemently.)
You do the things you both like doing,
you begin to like the same things –
the things the couple likes.
It is inevitable –
and catastrophic
for individuation –
for the individual's return to itself.
The synchronised, co-addictive couple trance
keeps us locked into each other,
and locked out of ourselves.

How can a man make any choice
if he has no aloneness to contemplate in?

How can anything he says have weight?
How can he know his direction
(let alone his purpose)
if he is not in-himself,
at the centre of his world –
sensitive to his own likes and dislikes?
Couple-man doesn't know what he cares about,
or if he cares at all...
He doesn't know what he feels –
he only knows what he should feel,
and the turmoil in him when he doesn't.

Why Couple-Up?

Once,
the couple had a secular purpose
(inheritance, lineage...) –
once the couple had a religious purpose
(salvation) –
but what's the point of the romantic couple?
Romance?

If it is child rearing –
it is not the optimum social structure –
it is emotionally harmful, and logistically overwhelming.
If it is love
(which only fills the air with amazement
around autonomous equals in the unknown,
dazzling them with each other's beauty) –
it is actually an inimical social structure
since it melts autonomy, and blocks out the unknown.

And if the point is healing and awakening,
(as some therapists and spiritualists now suggest) –
since the sexually and emotionally circumscribed couple,
hypnotised by each other's expectations,
the adventures of their futures already vowed-away –
is perhaps, for personal transformation,
the most challenging social scenario imaginable
(like, say, learning to wind surf in a hurricane)
one must ask whether this is not just pumping oxygen into a corpse,

and whether it's time to let go
of the concept of the couple as the basic social unit –
to let it die.

Brotherhood and community are not just for companionship,
or support with survival,
or even personal development –
they are intrinsic to the letting go –
they are the lab of our social reshaping...
Where other than in experimental community can we practice
relating from aloneness?

If alternatives to the couple concept are to take root,
brotherhood and community are the soil.
Beyond mother and father transference,
beyond little-boys, mummies and daddies,
beyond: "Love me unconditionally, as a mother does her son –
as my mother did,
as my mother didn't" –
beyond that doomed demand and the other one:
"Affirm me unconditionally, as a father does his son –
as my father did,
as my father didn't" –
can we let go of family as we have known it,
and vision family anew?

Why? Why would I couple-up?
Let me ask,
"As a man who loves freedom, and loves love,
who wants to live at the centre of his experience –
what social structure will serve me?
The couple?
Or do I need a prior sense of belonging in community?

If all of the factors that reinforced the couple structure are invalid –
the patriarchal, the religious, the consumerist, the romantic –
then a man must ask
what purpose the couple has for him,
or, more specifically,
whether coupledness is supportive of his purpose.
Is it possible that
the couple contract is a social structure that is out of date,
that (if it ever did) now makes no creative social contribution whatsoever,

that, on the contrary, engenders loss of self,
and therefore all of the antisocial behaviours
of people who are lost?

Let us move our society
from couple-centricity towards exploratory community.
This does not mean we have to buy land together,
or move in together.
But it does mean we have to move out
of our isolation
as couples and single-parents and lonesome singles,
and no longer be limited by inherited social structures
that now dominate and divide us,
and deprive us of each other.

The Enduring History Of The Couple

Love happens.
But why do we hold on
to the dream of a house of our own,
a world of our own –
a world of together forever?

So our sons will inherit?
(This is how it began.)
Or because it's God's will?
To stay safe from Satan?
(The religious rationale.)
Or are you a devotee of consumerism?
(Capitalistically, it makes such sense –
fridges and dishwashers,
televisions and curtains
for all!)

I imagine, more likely, though, it's because
romantic movies have assaulted you with associations
between sex and the couple,
intimacy and monogamy,
goodness and fidelity,
heaven and the home,
and the rightness of the loving twosome....

"As the animals entered Noah's Ark,
two by two,
so will we
stroll into eternity,
hand in hand,
for so was it meant to be....
As a couple we shall share
joy on earth –
until death us do part –
and, after that, perhaps, who knows...".
Though the language is biblical,
the sentiment blasts and blares out
through every romantic movie.

We are not victims of a conspiracy though.
The brainwashers themselves are brainwashed.
They too are being swept away
in a subliminal flow of multi-generational advertising
financed by no one,
financed by us all,
financed by insecurity,
financed by misplaced longing.

No matter if we marry, or cohabit, or are 'partners' –
still we perpetuate the 'Couple Myth'.
Why does it endure?

Men said and say,
"She was a virgin when I married her,
and she has been chaste.
Thus my heirs, my boys, are mine,
and my estate retains my name."
Are we choosing to perpetuate
this crux of patriarchy?

Men said and say,
"God took a rib of man
and made of it woman.
Thus man shall hold fast to a wife,
and their flesh shall be one."
Are we choosing to perpetuate the will of the god

of the cross, or the star, or the crescent,
or any other logo or badge?

Consumerism says,
"It would be economic disaster
if streets shared their washing machines...
and then, maybe, their irons,
and then their ironing boards –
where would it end?!

It would snap the masses out of the spell
of time deprivation –
(busy busy busy, go go go),
and social fragmentation –
(‘Darling, together, you and I, we can do it all’),
both so absolutely essential for economic progress."
Are we choosing to perpetuate
our own economic slavery?

The screens and magazines say,
"When a couple fall in love,
their love sets them free.
They are charmed by each other’s foibles,
together they chuckle wisely
observing each other’s irrational conditioning,
they become large and generous Buddha-lovers,
compassionately comprehending
of each other’s
egoic, reactive, aggressive and/or self-pitying defensiveness.
Indeed, to wed, or handfast, or ritually commit,
to the life-long couple-life
is the magic potion of everlasting erotic love."
Are we choosing to perpetuate
such psycho-emotional nonsense?

You say,
"Yes, yes, yes –
of course we agree –
we know all this!
But the rest of our lives
under one roof, our roof, together,
is all we can imagine –
it’s the only vision we’ve been shown....
Of course we know if we couple-up

we'll get logistically wound up,
and emotionally wound up
beyond snapping point,
over and over, again and again....
"We're not stupid!" you say,
"We even know our dream of children,
our children –
will wind our nerves still tighter,
and possibly, if not probably, shatter our couple.
We're not naïve!
We know the statistics!
But we, we and our children,
we in our home, our own home –
is the only dream we know to dream."

Community

Which is why
we need to originate our own imagining –
an imagining that is not bowed to male domination,
or religious domination,
or economic domination,
or the domination of our childhood fantasies –
but an imagining that bows in service
of a human race that walks the path of honesty,
stepping into the unknown
continuously –
all connected,
each alone –
everyone free to think, feel and make love
whenever, however, and with whomever they choose.

We need a social-structural imagining
that understands the limits of understanding,
that recognises the equality of our subjectivities,
that makes space for each of us
to lose and find, and lose and find, ourselves –
until we choose freedom and love –
not because it is written,
or because we have an image of perfection,
or because it is the community ethos –
but because we have let go into trust,

and made love in the unknown,
and now experience
everything else as exploitation.

Let us honour ourselves,
and honour each other.
Not merging,
not isolating...
sitting in circle in community –
let us appreciate each person's unique humility and courage....

Let's imagine communities
exploring the greatest of responsibilities:
being 'true to oneself' –
and therefore, and only therefore, being able to be
true to each other.

Let's imagine unconfigured community...
"Only men with women, no same sex love", or
"only singles or couples, no groups"...

No!

Let's imagine free-form, all-form, no-form community
that supports singles
who are not single
to avoid connection with others,
but who choose to be single
to be with themselves...
that supports polyamorous groupings
who are not polyamorous
to avoid connection with themselves,
but who choose polyamory
to get closer to themselves –
and that supports couples
who have both chosen themselves
above all others –
yet who feel, somehow, called to each other.

Let us imagine community
that offers such a variety of reflections
that seeing so many of ourselves
it becomes impossible to be them all,
and we must therefore choose to be
who we ourselves choose to be.

As each of us comes to accept
'all I have is my own experience',
the basic unit of society becomes the individual –
not the couple.
Yet we travel alone-together –
each of us, in some sense, carried by everyone else.
I am an individual.
I have my unique journey.
Yet I also belong –
I am also one of us.

Let everyone be welcome!
Let there be homo, hetero, trans, bi...
Let us perhaps, even, cast out gender –
and meet beyond definition...
Let's explore, together...
let's play...

Say to yourself:
"I am free
to make love with anyone!"
It doesn't matter to me how you name yourself –
I am nameless, and (I believe),
under your name
so are you!
You who are the authority of your moment,
are the authority of your lips and fingertips and cock...
You are free to let your gaze vanish into another's –
you are free to go close and listen
to whether or not their body says –
closer...

Eros is never far.
He is latent in us –
a sigh away.
He is not a man of certificates or licenses.
He will not be kept to the bed, or the night.
He can't tell the time.
He will not dance in straight lines.
He is a devil of a god –
we are wooden and dry without him.

As well as all else,

we are erotic creatures....
For there to be a prohibition
against spontaneous eroticism
is a fascism of the flesh.
In deepest sensitivity,
and in deepest respect,
and in deepest pleasure:
you decide who and how you touch,
and who and how you let others touch you.

Should Eros descend upon you –
should your soft eyes recognise each other,
should heavy pleasure swell below in your bellies,
should your wry lips be calling each other,
should you not need each other
but want each other...
give thanks for his visitation –
make love!

ADVICE ON COMMITMENT

"The only advice... that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions."

- Virginia Woolf

In fact, the only advice anyone can give anyone about anything is to follow their own instincts, to use their own reason, and to come to their own conclusions....

I like it that she includes both instinct and reason in the mix. The image that comes to me is of a chef with cooking assistants – one named Instinct (which can sometimes be a felt-sense, and sometimes more of a bodily-sense), the other named Reason – and I would also invite a third assistant: Silence. He just sits and watches everyone else – but what he sees is also worth seeing. His seeing holds Instinct and Reason within a larger not-knowing, a greater mystery, an awareness of infinite possibilities beyond right or wrong.

Everyone is captain of their ship – chef of their own life! As each person cooks their way through their days, may they have at least these three assistant cooks, may they not forget they are the chef (centre), and may they be friends with plenty of other chefs! :)

And... it's only natural, now that I am in my sixties, that younger people ask me for advice. Especially when they arrive at a great life-crossroads, where one god beckons along one path, towards one future, towards one universe, towards one version of themselves, and another god beckons to another....

Although every day is a cornucopia of decisions... we never stop cooking!

But what should I do (when I could not possibly presume to know what is best for them, and yet, in my perception, they are, say, about to hurt themselves, and others, badly)? Well, I try to share my experience as my experience, and the conclusions I have drawn as my own conclusions – and not to imply, even fractionally, that their experience will be the same, or that my conclusions are correct.

I can also encourage them to be their own chefs – not overly identified with any of the cooking assistants – and offer (not impose) my impressions of how they are managing their expanding and contracting. "My impression is that you are quite contracted, that your fear of losing touch with your own emotions, and your own

will, is holding you back from being intimate with another", for example. But that doesn't mean they therefore should enter that intimacy. It is simply an invitation to return to centre.

And yet, and yet... even then.... Even then – who knows?! Was that a helpful invitation? Well, it concurs with all I have come to believe. What's that? That the best decisions are made from centre? Is that true though? Is that (to be even more self-challenging) true for all people, in all situations, at all times? To answer "yes" would be tantamount to proclaiming the universal truth!

Looking back at most of my own life-crossroads decisions, I couldn't honestly say how centred they were – how mixed up with various contractions. One was largely impelled by engulfment, another time I just ran blind, another time it was anger that got me through the door! So even to advise to act from centre might not be helpful! Maybe, at that precise moment, the only way that person can do what somehow they know they have to do is to surrender to a contraction – to let go into neediness (and through that, perhaps, let themselves be held), or to let go into rage (and through that, perhaps, shake off the obsessive reasonableness that has kept them handcuffed to mediocrity).

What to do then? 'Caminante no hay camino, el camino se hace al andar': brother, pilgrim, fellow traveller through this great mystery, there is no path through the forest, but, as we walk, every time the sole of a foot touches the leaves on the forest floor, a path is created – and yet, looking back, there is no sign of where we have walked (or that won't be blow away in a few days, or years, or centuries), and looking forwards, the same.

Advice On Commitment

I.

Younger brothers often ask me:

"I want to unite my life with another's, yet I want to stay free – what do you advise?"

I re-affirm the bottom line:

"Rest in your experience –
dance the unrehearsable dance
of destiny and free will,
and there will be only beauty –
pleasurable beauty, perhaps –
painful beauty, perhaps –
probably both –
but beauty nonetheless."

And then they say:
"Yes, but what do you advise?"

Two days ago a brother said:
"I have met a woman.
She wants children.
I want to unite my life with hers.
I want to be a father.
Yet I am afraid
to lose myself."
I said:
"I imagine you will –
and if you do,
I hope for you
your loss will be
your great learning".

Yesterday he said:
"I am going to promise my life to her,
even though I know
every promise is a lie."
"We are all liars," I said.

"We can be," he said,
"but I don't want to be.
In our marriage vows we will not promise –
we will say it is our intention
to laugh and cry in love our whole lives
together.
That is more honest!"
I asked him why
that would be his intention,
and why not to just
be honest.

"The intention to stay together
(not the promise, the intention)", he said,
"will make it less likely we break up."
"Why would you ever want to break up", I asked,
"if your hearts are open in honesty to each other,
if your bodies are open in lust to each other,
if your beings see eye to eye?"

II.

Yes, every promise is a lie.
What future do we ever know for sure?
How can we promise?
And yet all edges are lies.
We live in lies.
We lie to survive.

All edges are lies:
where the tree ends, and the sunshine begins, is a lie –
there is light inside their leaves.
Where the tree ends, and the air begins, is a lie –
there is breath inside their leaves.
There is light in them, and breath, and rain in their veins –
they do not stand upon the earth,
or in it –
they are of it:
the earth the womb of their descendants,
the graveyard of their scattered ancestors –
the forest floor a great molecular morass of birth and death.

"Look, my darling, a tree!" we say to our children.
It is a lie –
at best, a convenience –
for them, for us –
for peace of being,
for ease of doing.

There is no line around you –
within which you are,
and beyond which you are not.
That you begin is a lie,
and that you end is a lie.
Every edge, every separating-out, is a lie –
every this and that,
every me and that,
every me and you is a lie.
Without lies
how would we survive?

Should I judge your lying?
That would be to judge you
for being alive!

III.

If I don't judge,
how can I advise –
since advice is based on judgement?

Maybe you have lived a thousand lifetimes –
in every one suffered excessive independence,
a terror of intimacy,
isolation and loneliness –
maybe you have come in this lifetime to experience excessive dependence –
so that in a thousand lives from now
you will know the balance between me and you,
and be able to live in us....
Who knows?

Maybe for a thousand lives
I have cut violently from relationships –
and in this lifetime come to experience
that which I have inflicted upon others....
Who knows?

Maybe there are no past or future lives.
But maybe I have to experience
slavery to insecurity
before I can be free....
Who knows?

Who knows, and therefore –
who can judge?
And who can advise?

Speaking like this,
as honestly and openly as I can,
I believe myself the best kind of friend.
But who knows?!
All I can say is:
my intention is to be a friend,
but whether I am or not -
I do not know

RELATIONSHIP AS PATH

"The love I feel for my friend, this year, is different from the love I felt last year. If it were not so, it would be a lie. Yet we reiterate love! love! love! as if it were a coin with fixed value instead of a flower that dies, and opens a different bud."

- D. H. Lawrence

Although I don't see how we can honestly commit to stay in intimate relationship with anyone 'forever' – after all, we can't predict what's going to happen in five minutes from now, or even in five seconds – nevertheless, if we are going to enter a relationship as a 'path', or 'journey', of healing, or awakening, or transformation, we can establish agreements to sustain the relationship for as long we are in it. Here are four considerations that might be of assistance in defining the agreements you make:

1. If the relationship is to be one of mutual, personal transformation then who sets out on this 'journey through time' together? Not our conditionings. They come along for the ride :) – but the "Yes, let's go!" has to come from the centre of each individual's unique experience. The decision to set out must be made between centres. It is an alliance of centres. Therefore, each person has to be individually committed to the cultivation of centre, for themselves.
2. Not only do our egos/conditionings/contractions/inner children (whatever the vocabulary) 'come along for the ride' – they are continuously vying with centre for the driving seat! So each individual also has to be committed to getting to know, caring for, 'parenting', and managing their own tendency to contract. This individual responsibility is the other half of the relationship alliance.
3. When each individual is engaged with these first two points – not for the sake of the relationship, but for themselves, then they can meet centre-to-centre with compassion for their own and each other's tendency to identify with conditioning. It is important to meet regularly in this way – whether that's formally (just like people decide to go out on regular 'dates' together), or as pillow talk, or whenever, spontaneously. This 'honest relating' nurtures the connection between centres, and diffuses the tendency of our egos, or inner children, to overrun the relationship.
4. If we are not careful, all of this can get a bit heavy! If we are not truly, experientially, bathing in belonging (i.e. truly experiencing centre), then we can often reveal our conditioned thoughts and feeling without truly seeing them as such, i.e. with too much identification.... For example, we say: "Darling, last night at the gathering, when you said we were tired of living in this town, I felt angry because I wanted you to speak for yourself, not for us. Can you please speak for yourself in

future? Actually, if I am to be fully honest – I am sick and tired of having to keep reminding you of this! Is it clear now? Or will I have to be saying the same thing again after the next gathering?!" Sounds fair enough, right? Especially if they've agreed to each live-in, and speak-from, their own experience?

But now let's imagine they first reconnect with their alliance: they look into each other's eyes, breathe and relax into belonging, and enter the '50/50' state (the one I invoke in the piece Brother!, referred to in the meditation in the next piece, 'Together', and outlined in detail in the end notes on 'Self Education') – and only then reveal their feelings. Let's imagine they have both truly given up on turning the other into their own perfect Snoopy blanket.... Then, perhaps, the same person says: "Darling, last night at the gathering, when you said we were tired of living in this town, I felt anger in me. I felt-into that anger from my centre, and could feel it was masking an embarrassment, a fear that people would judge me as being merged with you, as not having a will of my own, as being disempowered, as not being 'a real man'... I could feel how this anger wanted to lash out at you, and 'make you wrong' – accusing you of having broken our agreement to speak for ourselves...

"But then I asked myself why I feared being seen as disempowered, and had to admit that it was because that's how I often feel, and don't want anyone to know. I want to hide my feelings of disempowerment – and when you made that innocent remark – that 'we' were tired of living in this town – I felt exposed in my disempowerment (whether it could be seen or not). I felt vulnerable, suddenly, unexpectedly. On reflection, I can now remember many times when I have created an angry scene in order to not be exposed in my vulnerability."

What a difference! One takes them headlong into an argument, the other takes them into making love (in whichever mode). But of course, this requires enormous commitment-to-self, presence, and emotional awareness – and a lot of the time we are semi-centred, at best. So semi-owned anger accumulates, the mind repeats itself a million times ("Yes, but they broke our agreement", "Yes, but they broke our agreement", "Yes, but... "), and the feelings that we keep hidden remain untouched, fermenting in the gut of our egos.

This is all inevitable, the stuff of transformation – but we do need to make sure we don't let the relationship slip into a heavy groove – an over-serious mood of 'working on ourselves', or a collusive identity as being 'relationship as path people' (very special people indeed!), or a striving for some imagined relationship perfection. How to stay balanced? Play! Make love! Be physical. Run, dance, mess around. Be naked together in nature. Play with water! Be creative. Plant things. Do meaningless things. Be bad together! :) Take risks, do new things, do the same things differently. Above all, feel what it is you want, and make it happen. Don't wait for them. Keep opening the windows of the relationship, let play in.

TOGETHERED

*“The question that surrounds lovemaking is, ‘Did you cum?’
and the unasked question beneath that is, ‘Am I all right?’”*
— Sam Keen

This quote highlights the sad state of affairs of so much of our so-called love making.

This piece is about another way of making love. It has two parts. The first part is just that. It is a poem about making love in three modes – physical, emotional and existential. (If the rational was to come into it, it would be to remind us to return to the other three modes: to our bodies, our feeling, and our awareness.)

The second part is a meditation to support us in making love. In this I make use of the Indian chakra system (although, as in said in my preamble to ‘Fists, Toes, Wings...’, I have no investment whatsoever in it being factual, or not). I invite us to breathe through the chakras, one by one, with a lover (or lovers – although this piece is written in the singular). This chakra-breathing activates the energy associated with each chakra (love in the heart chakra, for example), and bonds the lovers in that activation. Just this can be ecstatic.

Then we go on to practice ‘following the body’ – as against ‘trying to have sex’ – pausing regularly to reconnect with our breathing, and to see how connected we are both with ourselves and with our lover.

I am not suggesting that every sexual encounter has to be like this. Sometimes we just fuck, and that’s what we need to do. But this way of making love – by including the breath and, therefore, awareness, and by including the energies that can tend to be discarded if we only follow the race of our lust – points us towards those times when we make love more fully....

The Forest Riding Through Us

We sit face to face,
body to body,
among the afternoon trees,
upon the warm earth.
We are lusting for each other.

Each retains sovereignty –
uncompromisingly
their own sky.
We savour our lust....

We are loving each other –
bewildered by our unlikeliness,
and grateful for it.
We sit in love.
We speak our experience –
the naked truth –
until there are no words –
just the forest breathing.

We sit together in that place where
the physical is less concrete –
where the dreams of our nights and the dream of the day merge –
where anywhere could be anywhere –
where children go when we're not looking,
where the animals wait for them....
There
we sit –
togethered –
breathing bliss.

And now our bodies are moving...
When did they begin?
Neither knows....
They have chosen –
we feel chosen....
My chest pushes love in and out of yours.
Your eyes push time in and out of mine.
Our genitals are symphonic.

I am riding your body,
and you are riding mine –
and we're both being ridden
by the forest....
We are laughing, crazy, panting dogs –
the summer sky in our lungs
breathing us as one....

We are fucking the way dinosaurs fucked,
and elephants and camels still do,
the way lizards and snails fuck,
the way we all fuck
when we are possessed by the primeval pulse –
when the world,
after howling at us for so long,
finally hears us howl back.

Love Making Meditation

Sit opposite each other, close your eyes, and, in order to be in-yourself when you come to meet your lover, breathe through the chakras.

By 'breath through' I mean aim your exhalation at a specific chakra, and then exhale, imagining you're releasing the breath through that chakra – in the most gentle, kind, soft, loving way...

Here are the chakras and some names for their associated energies:

1. Between anus and genitals – Earth
2. Between genitals and navel – Sex
3. Just below ribs – Authority (Sovereignty)
4. Heart – Love
5. Throat – Honesty
6. Between eyebrows – Awareness
7. Top of the skull – The Mystery

Once you have spent some individual time like this (if you want to, you can agree how long beforehand, and alarm it), both open your eyes.

Keep your arms open, don't have your hands crossed over the chakra line (up the front of your body) – your 'frontline'.

Gazing into each other's eyes, try to maintain the same level of connection with yourself that you had when your eyes were shut. Let your gaze be relaxed. Hold your lover in high regard. Be open to each other, but remain open to yourselves. Be 50% with your lover, 50% with yourself. You can play with this ("let me be 90% with my lover and 10% with myself", for example – and see how it feels). In my experience 50/50 is the place of optimum connection.

Once you're both settled in this, begin the chakra breathing. Do this for approximately 5 minutes at each chakra. (Again, you can agree the timing in advance

and use a timer, or if you prefer no clocks or bells – agree that one of you will give a nod when they feel it's time to move onto the next chakra.)

Chakra 1: Both breathe down – down through the pit of the belly, down through that point between the anus and genitals, down down down, out into the Earth – until you can both imagine yourselves connected with the fiery core of the Earth, until you both feel 'plugged in' to the Earth, so to speak – strengthened by a felt-remembering of yourselves as noble creatures of this magical physical mode that we call Planet Earth.

Then imagine the energy connecting you with the centre of the Earth in resonance with your lover's – like two guitar strings in resonance.

Chakra 2: Both breathe out through the chakra point between the navel and the genitals – releasing the sexual energy, 'lust', towards each other. Desiring each other as fully as you like, let those two energies resonate with each other. But just keep breathing, don't try to make anything happen – don't try to make things 'sexy'. Let your lust and your lover's lust resonate however they want to. Just feel the resonance, don't act on it.

Here we are honouring lust – which can be a thrilling healing balm for those of us who have been terrorized by ideas of (love) right and (lust) wrong. In fact, to consciously honour our lust to fuck in this way, breathing tenderly through our genitals together, can be intoxicating.

Chakra 3: Move your focus up to the solar plexus (on the frontline, just below the ribs) and exhale your authority. Let your sense of being the authority of your life resonate with your lover's sense of the same. Let your personal power meet and begin to dance with the personal power of your lover. Be as unashamedly proud of your authority as you would be of, say, your love. Stand proud in your authority in this relationship. And welcome your partner standing proud. Notice if you tend to make yourself less (or more) – and return to 50/50. Meet in powerful equality.

Chakra 4: Both exhale through the heart – exhale love. Let the outbreath carry your love for your lover into the space between you – where it can resonate with your lover's love for you. Love and let yourselves be loved. Offer and receive. Stay in 50/50 and, in the space between you, let the energies of your loving dance however they choose.

This is not therapy, so if you encounter difficulty, or pain, in opening your heart (or any other chakra), don't start to explore it, or 'deal with it', or heal it in any way. In your mind's eye let the pain know you care, and that you will attend to it later. But now, be as fully present in each chakra as you can.

Chakra 5: Both exhale through the throat chakra. Exhale honesty. Exhale your commitment to speak the truth of your experience – to be true, to be authentic, to express. Let the energy of your honesty resonate with that of your lover. There might be something of a reaffirmation of your personal authority here – a sense of dignity resonating between you.

Chakra 6: Both exhale between the eyebrows, through the ‘third eye’. Exhale awareness. Awareness means an expanded perception. It means seeing the gestalt, the whole – i.e. not just your own personal perspective, but having a sense of the whole scenario within which you find yourself – a scenario of which you, your body and your feelings, are a part. See the whole. See yourself within it. See both of you within this scenario, in this moment – exhale this awareness and let it resonate with your lover’s awareness.

Chakra 7: Both exhale through the top of the head – the ‘crown chakra’. Exhale the mystery. Exhale your openness to life, to the cosmos, to existence. Exhale gratitude, appreciation, awe, oneness and trust. And let your expansiveness resonate with the expansiveness of your lover.

From here on, you can be more spontaneous. At a certain point you are going to begin to touch each other, and move together, but let it happen at its own pace. You might stay there for a while, in resonance at every chakra, before either of you moves.

But once you do start to move together, let the guiding principle be ‘follow your body’. This is very different from the usual way in which we approach love making – which is to make something happen: to get pleasure, or to give pleasure. Don’t try to get or give anything. Be aware of where your body is touching your lover’s body, and let it respond as it wishes. Wherever it wishes to go – follow. Let the energies that you have evoked together during the chakra breathing take you wherever they want. Do not aim for orgasm, do not aim for anything. Stay in the present. Don’t try to make love, let love make you.

I have spoken to so many men who have said that, if they were to be completely honest, they would have to admit that – more often than not – sex was disappointing. But that’s hardly surprising: we are not in-ourselves, we are not energetically open, and we are acting out the culture’s programmed patterns of sexual behaviour.

To make love in this way, though (which does take some practice), is to co-create an energy field resonant with Earth, Sex, Authority, Love, Honesty, Awareness and Mystery – and to then dive into it together! And to then let ourselves be-made-love-to by that energy field, to let ourselves be danced, is heaven on Earth!

This is a way of extending honest relating into our love making. It is honest love making. Let the energies rise and fall. Take breaks, chat, get passionate again. Make a night of it. Make a day of it.

During the breaks check in with yourself and see how you are doing – whether you have been able to stay in yourself while in such deep intimacy with another. Maybe you need to pull yourself back into yourself.... Or maybe you notice that you're not that open, that you are subtly distant, and that although you're enjoying yourself, you are not seeing the beauty in your partner that you've seen at other times – and this is disturbing you. Maybe you need to open your heart more.

These are just examples of possible self-reflections. They're not things to begin analysing, but observations that – when the passion arises again – can help us return to our erotic resonance with presence and freedom.

Some Notes

- It can help to use the mind and, as you exhale, think, for example (at the heart chakra): "You are a beautiful person, I love you, you are amazing in so many ways, I love you...". But above all, exhale the feeling. Let feeling resonate between you.

- You can practice the chakra breathing with a lover at a distance – by videoconference, for example.

- It can help to release a small sigh or groan each time one exhales. This can help the energy of each chakra soften, open and flow.

- Don't only cast out the tendency to aim for orgasm, also forget altogether about whether you have an erection or not. The idea that one has to constantly have an erection is not only irrational but also extremely distracting – and quite obsessive in many of us.

- You can practice chakra breathing, staying in 50/50, and following rather than leading anytime, anywhere, with anyone – or alone. Of course this doesn't mean to act disrespectfully, or inappropriately. Ultimately, we can make love (more or less fully), with everyone.

- It all becomes much more spontaneous as each lover lives more from centre.

"We fucked a flame into being."
- D. H. Lawrence

JACK HAS AN ARGUMENT WITH HIS EX

"I was only kidding about the hundred," she says. "Oh," I say, "what will it cost me?" She lights her cigarette with my lighter and looks at me through the flame: her eyes tell me. "Look," I say, "I don't think I can ever pay that price again."

- Charles Bukowski

This piece echoes the 'warning' in *Sexuality, Relationships & The Reshaping Of Society*. Here it is spoken by an angry woman. As Robert Bly says, "I believe that a woman sometimes finds herself channelling the rage of dozens of dead women who could not speak their rage while alive. Conducting that rage is dangerous." It is dangerous, yes – because it becomes disproportionate, it becomes the rage of the generations, a collective rage, aimed at a solitary individual. And unless that individual is strongly rooted in belonging, and extremely adept in the management of his emotions, it will be too much for him – and he will either collapse in guilt, or (more likely) respond with rage, respond with intellectualised rage (by arguing back), or just disappear.

It's not that this rage is invalid. It has so much to tell us, and teach us. Nor is it healthy to sit on it (and anyway, it will seep out). But we do need to discriminate the collective and the individual. What men have done through the patriarchal millennia is not the individual responsibility of any one man alive today. It's not that the seeds of patriarchal indoctrination don't live on within men, but just as 'you are white and all white people are imperialist, genocidal slave traders' is a racist slur that speaks little of fact, and a lot of the individual speaker's pain – similarly, to scream sexist generalisations about men tells us more about that person's personal experience, than it does about the actual nature of men.

Best, then, to relate from our own experience: this I have felt. This I am feeling. These are the thoughts and judgements that pass through my mind when I feel these feelings....

After the angry woman (Jill's) attack in the first section, her ex-partner (Jack) is left in grief. He contemplates the commonplace sentiment, "Oh, what a shame, I thought they were going to make it. They seemed so good together..." – the implication, of course, being that separation is a failure. This sentiment, I would suggest, is deeper than our rational OKness, "Oh, well maybe it's for the best... maybe they completed what they had to do together...". People say this, but on the inside they're thinking "but I hope my partner and I will make it" – i.e. until death us do part.

Separation is not necessarily destructive, nor getting together with someone necessarily creative. In fact, in the third section of this piece, Jack goes on to tell us about a young man who visited him to invite him to his wedding. Jack is, predictably, ambivalent. But most importantly of all – whatever the young man chooses, and whatever feelings or opinions Jack might have – Jack let's him know that whatever he (the young man) chooses, he (Jack) will be there alongside him.

Jack Has An Argument With His Ex

Jack and Jill didn't end well. The relationship ended because Jack said he didn't want to be sexually exclusive with her anymore. No more monogamy. That was five years ago, they're friends now – but they still have their moments....

When I arrived at Jack's house, Jill had not long gone. I entered the front room, where Jack was white. "I taped it", he said, and pressed 'start'.

I.

Challenging Non-Monogamous Man

Jill: You are betraying womankind! In her heart every woman wants a partner she can love like no other – someone to grow old with, a companion through the ups and downs of everyday life, someone to laugh with, someone to confide in, someone they trust – a sexual partner to meet in deepest intimacy, a companion here in the great unknown!

Jack: Is that so?

Jill: Even if it is not all women, it is the vast majority – and you, you, you just want the softness of woman, the sensual, the sexual, the romance, the honeymoon. You don't want her blood, her illness, her doubts, her needs, her pain. If you were a real man you would choose one woman – and you would love her totally. And by loving her you would love all women, and you would become yet more of a man!

Jack: Is that so? How do you know that what a woman wants is not what she has been told to want – since she was very, very little? Perhaps this longing for 'that special one', that 'other half', is just one indoctrination on a long list of indoctrinations she received – at the very least, from the moment she was born. "I knew it was going to be a girl – look I have bought her a pink bonnet!"

What if she had received another message as a child: "You are free. You are free in every moment. How you choose to respond to each moment is up to you. There is

no one way to be a woman. There is no correct way to relate. Nothing is written in the sky. You are responsible for yourself – so stay close to yourself, so that you can know yourself, and where you stand – and speak and act with integrity. Value your feelings. Place yourself below no one, and place yourself above no one. Value others' feelings too. Be clear, be honest, love and respect. And whatever you choose, we are with you!" Perhaps then less women would be dreaming of 'the one'.

Jill: You just want to justify your betrayal of women's hearts and bodies! You want to free yourself from guilt and shame so that you can use women and not feel bad about it. Even if a woman says she doesn't want a full-on, one-to-one relationship – don't believe her, because she is lying to herself. Maybe she is disillusioned, maybe she is bitter, maybe she has identified with men's conditioning. I don't know. Each individual case is different. But in her heart of hearts, every woman, or almost every woman, wants that one person with whom she can go all the way!

Jack: Sure, there's shadow in everything. The shadow of sexual liberation is unfeeling promiscuity, and the shadow of the couple is security through possessiveness – but I don't feel guilty because I know I am relating with integrity. If I meet a woman and there is an erotic connection I don't ask her if she's OK with me not wanting a long-term monogamous relationship once we're both half undressed. As we meet and I explain my position, I feel for the congruence in her words. And if she's such an expert actress that she fools me – what can I do?!

And I don't just want the juicy bits. If I have a relationship with a woman then I have a relationship. I do not have porno pseudo-relationships with women – even if there is a raw animal in me who would fuck almost anyone. My heart is too open. I look into a woman's eyes from the moment we meet. Otherwise, how do we meet? I could not have sex with a woman and not look into her eyes. Without looking into each other's eyes there is no depth, no connection, no eroticism, no journey – only a fuck, and that just feels disturbing...

No, I don't want to be-a-couple with anyone: "Have you heard – John and Samantha are now 'an item'!" No, I don't want that. I don't want to wake up in the same bed every morning, and do our morning things alongside each other, and carry each other's concerns, and be aware of every detail of each other's doings, and be so much more intimate with that one person than with any other person on Earth. No, I don't. But that doesn't mean that I am a superficial, cut-off bastard just out for a quick fuck, ready to dump any woman who shows the slightest sign of dependency, or who might be going through a tough time, or who needs to be seen in her distress.

If we have a sexual relationship, and it's not to be just fucking (which it's not), then there has to be an emotional relationship. In fact, for us to make love, there must be – love. This doesn't mean that she is 'the one', or 'until death us do part' – it means

that I love her – her body, her expressions, her way of moving through the world. It means I feel a heart-bond with her. It means we are there for each other. It doesn't mean we abandon each other just because there's pain. We don't live in each others' pockets, that's all – or become each others' Snoopy blankets.

(Rustling sounds) Jack interjects – “That's Jill collecting up her things.”

Jill: It makes no difference what you say. I know what women want in their heart of hearts, even if they have been hurt and betrayed by men like you, even if they have been used and abused, and say whatever they have to say – like beggars, beggars for love... anything to be told they're beautiful, anything to be received in their love, anything to be held and to be loved. (Door opening.) And I am not just talking about young, silly women. I am talking about mature and empowered women. I have seen it again and again – we all have this in us. And you, you take advantage of it! (Door slamming.)

Jack: (calling out) Isn't such desperation a bit suspicious?

Jack pressed 'stop'. "That was it", he groaned, slumped across the sofa. "I'd wanted to say more... about marriage as a therapeutic relationship – 'marriage as a shared journey of self-realisation', we used to call it – and about unrealistic expectations. As it was, I was alone up my end of the sofa. A sofa where we'd laughed, and had sex. A sofa we had loved each other on. A sofa now, it seemed to me, soaked in sorrow. Our years together had been beautiful – and ugly, yes – but we had travelled together in deep, deep connection – how could there not be sorrow? Whatever other feelings might also be there, there was loss, and grief... I've been feeling so much grief...."

II.

Separation As Success (The Box Didn't Fit)

Jack said, "When people say, 'They could've made it. Such a shame!', I know what they mean. I feel we could've too. It's not that we didn't have the emotional skills, and there was no lack of love (although you might've doubted it sometimes, like today). But when people say "such a shame", to me that implies it was a failure, and that success would've been to have stuck it 'til the end. But I don't see it like that. I feel we were trying to squeeze ourselves into a modernised monogamous mindset that is the greatest and most unacknowledged addiction on Earth. "You be my woman, I'll be your man", "Never let me go!", "I'll be there for you forever!" And I just got bigger than the box. Thanks to our marriage I got bigger than the box. So, thank you, marriage! You did your bit. You were a great success!

Maybe it was less of an addiction in other times, when people had more gods and more kings to die for (other Snoopy blankets). Today, with the extended family evermore distant and dispersed, in a wasteland strewn with divorces and split-ups, porno desperation, and lone parenthood – romantic monogamy is more charged with need than ever. Step forward therapeutic monogamy! We worked at it, Mark, we really did. We used to say, "We're supporting each other in growing together". But it was a last-ditch attempt to salvage the wreck of the monogamous inheritance. I didn't leave in despair. I just didn't want to live in a box tied with the ribbons of marriage vows that dictated who I could and couldn't be intimate with, and who I could or couldn't have sex with. When I left it was such a relief. It felt like I'd been in voluntary imprisonment because I'd been afraid to face my loneliness, and my emotional and sexual authenticity. It felt like I'd been hiding from myself inside our togetherness. Actually, I realised that, most of all, I'd been afraid to be free!"

III.

I Am With You

Jack and I talked for ages, but there is one other incident he related that I'd like to share with you. The previous day, a young brother had come to see him – to invite him to his wedding! He'd told Jack how much he wanted to be a father, and how he and his wife-to-be were committing to a journey of parenthood together.

Jack, it seemed to Jack in retrospect, although he didn't say anything at the time, must've been showing signs of doubt or disapproval – because the young man then added, "It's not out of fear. For both of us, it's a very conscious choice".

"He was right – I was doubting him!" said Jack, "I was thinking about my own capacity to fool myself – and suspecting that this young man was more moved by indoctrination and fear and neediness, and less by freedom of choice, than he knew – so I said, "Just make sure you surround yourselves with brothers and sisters who can say, 'hey – you're fading away, we can feel it, you're losing touch with yourselves, you're merging with each other – just don't blame each other for it afterwards!"

"No, no, no!" the young man was adamant. "We're both very clear about that!"

"Then," said Jack, "I made the mistake of asking him how long they were committing for."

"Jack!" he snapped defensively. "You don't understand! It's not cold blooded like that. We love each other. We're not even married yet – we're not going to start planning our separation!"

"I understand", Jack said, gently. "Well, I'm with you," he said, "whatever you choose, my heartfelt desire is to always be with you." He felt like he was with an addict who thought someone was stealing his stash.

THE SCIENCE OF RELATING

"In introducing me simultaneously to skepticism and to wonder, they taught me the two uneasily cohabiting modes of thought that are central to the scientific method."

- Carl Sagan

"Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?"

- Henry David Thoreau

This piece takes us full circle – back to the essence of all relationships: that they are marvellous to the extent we stay, in them, in ourselves, at the centre of our own experience.

At the centre of my experience, meeting you at the centre of your experience, the indefinable-whatever-it-is I am meets the indefinable-whatever-it-is you also seem to be – and there we both connect with the utterly unesoteric or holy, utter inexplicable, everyday miracle of existence. From that connection we know in our bones the core feeling that would be at the heart of any honest civilisation.

This piece is called the 'Science Of Relating', and not, say, 'The Art of Relating', because I want to convey the rigorous logic and the demonstrable, replicable results of staying-in and relating-from the centre of our own experience. I have spent this book presenting these results from various angles. And hopefully that has been inspirational for you. However, that inspiration will be conceptual and short-lived, and you will soon require another shot of inspiration from some other source, unless you conduct the experiment on yourself; unless your life becomes your laboratory.

Let's each of us link up with other relationship scientists, let's find out what it feels like to go deeper-and-deeper into no-holds-barred relationships; let's dare do in the world what we truly feel needs doing, and let's see whether such creative, loving, honest, open, exploratory communities do, or don't, feel like microcosms of a new civilisation.

The Science Of Relating

The optimum way to relate, meaning 'the most loving' way to relate (to strangers, acquaintances, friends, lovers, shopkeepers, masters, servants, countrymen and family of the world), is to change nothing – to remain at the centre of your own experience. This is also the greatest gift you can ever give anyone (faith in their own direct relationship with the mystery). The more authentically you can communicate from this place, the more love you will feel for everyone.

When you meet someone, be more fascinated by your own subjective experience of the meeting than with any pretence at an objective assessment of the meeting – more attentive to your body than to the bodies of others – feel your own emotional experience, don't be blown about on the winds of the world's emotions – welcome your actuality of your meeting – welcome what you're actually experiencing.

As against our habitual state: we meet someone new and we're all tensed up in some kind of psychic ventriloquism that's already willing them to tell their friends: "Wow, I've just met the most amazing person" (you).

Fascination with our own experience is not narcissism. Narcissism is not fascination with indefinable experience, it is fascination with a finely defined self.

To be in a state of fascination with our own experience is both a great liberation and a great exposure. It's not safe. It's not still – never, ever, not for a moment. It's out of our control.

Honesty. Own Experience.
Not-Knowing. Mystery. Freedom.
Belonging. Trust.
Uniqueness. Equality.
Centre. Managing Contraction.
Honest Relating.
Purpose.
These are not a set of ideas you repeat
that don't even scratch your reality,
let alone revolutionise it –
if you light your firework with them
they are fucking dynamite!
They will blast you into eternity!

This is not another ideas game.
This is Zen revolution! :)
This is someone elaborating the subtleties of the obvious.

This is what you already know.
This is the Uprising Of Man.
This is Archetypal Man awaking...
looking upon the sores that cover his body and realising:
"If I keep licking them, they can't heal" –
stretching and standing and declaring:
"I am completely alone forever –
therefore I am free!
That anything exists at all
is a miracle –
and I exist!"

And how do free men act?
And what do free men allow?
And what do free men stand for?
And do free men ever stand down?
What is the world that free men work for?
And to what do free men donate
the life that was given to them?

If I am not in my experience, how can I know what I feel when I am with you? I need to be open to myself, to feel my experience of us. My experience of your face, your hands, the tone of your voice, your gestures... you never stop changing... My experience of us never stops changing.

If I get closer to you, and closer, and closer –
and lose myself –
I am lost,
in you.
If I hold my distance
(in the name of staying in my experience),
we are lost –
relationship is lost.
Meeting
both of us in our own experience
thickens the air with significance,
Eros stirs,
and love comes waltzing in....

If I can stay in my experience of being with you,
and you stay in your experience of being with me...
then, then, oh then –

we connect as we always imagined we could –
or intuited we could,
but couldn't quite imagine.

If we weren't afraid
where would be the courage?

Each person's commitment
to their breath,
to their spine –
to their vulnerability...
to veto conformity,
to hear their own voice,
to die in their own arms –
is a contained, restrained, latent energy....

Then
when
each opens to the other,
their energies release –
and their meeting trembles terribly
with the waves of their resonance....
Sexually it is passion.
Emotionally it is love.
Existentially it is union.
And beyond reason
everything makes perfect sense.

9

RISING UP



“Why should humility be meek?”

INTERESTED?

"Individual crimes committed for selfish motives play a quite insignificant part in the human tragedy, compared to the numbers massacred in unselfish loyalty to one's tribe, nation, dynasty, church, or political ideology."

- Arthur Koestler

In the first section of this piece I try to dismantle the resistance that is so often there to 'joining a movement' – the historically understandable resistance to dogma and domination. Through a series of questions, I explain how any movement based on not-knowing, equality and each man staying in his own experience, would inevitably be non-dogmatic and evolving, liberating (not limiting), and empowering (not diminishing).

Taking it as understood that the intention of this movement would be to participate in the co-creation of a new civilisation on Earth, in the second section I move on to particularly address those of us who have "been around the block a thousand times" – those of us who have growth-work and kombucha and vision quests and Ayahuasca coming out of our ears – pointing out that (because a more all-round-mature civilisation could only possibly mean a civilisation of all-round-more-mature individuals), we are advantageously positioned for leadership by example in the co-creation of a new civilisation.

Almost as an aside I mention that many of us – fearing ourselves not alpha enough to impact the "alpha-world" – might need to adjust our conception and, therefore, our experience of power.

I also say that the natural consequence of 'self-development' (whatever we might like to call it) is to live within a larger seeing than the prescribed media reality – once again putting those of us who've been around the block again and again in an advantageous position to see clearly, and to re-vision, civilisation.

Is it therefore our responsibility to be interested in uniting one half of humanity, the male half, in the massive, spontaneously co-ordinating, 'deeply democratic' (as Arnold Mindell calls it) re-creation of civilisation? No. That would imply the existence of an external set of moral absolutes.

But, again, I suggest that a natural consequence of getting dizzy for decades – going round and round and round the block of self-awareness and social-awareness – is

that, although one might not any longer feel so responsible to (any moral standard), one develops the natural sense of responsibility that one feels when one feels one belongs...

Interested?

I.

Actually (truth be told)

I have no idea

if this is the time

for a second wave men's movement.

But what if it is?

What if now is the time

for a men's movement –

as powerful in this century

as feminism in the last?

What if it is?

What if it's up to us?

What if it is?

Would you be interested?

Would you be interested

if there was no one ideology,

no stone headquarters,

no head,

no hierarchy...

would you be interested?

If there was nothing to join –

would you want

to be part of it?

What if it was a moving movement,

an open evolution,

a self-expression through many bodies,

a great psychic yawn, and stretch, and awakening,

a breathing climate...

life art –

society co-creating

itself –

a drowning culture waving –
a declaration of dignity,
an invocation of nobility...
What then?
Interested?

What if it was
a movement that championed not-knowing –
without patronising knowing –
(after all,
it's a belief like any other)...

What if it was
a movement that championed uniqueness –
without patronising conformity –
(after all,
we all long to belong)...

What if it was
a movement that championed absolute freedom
and absolute equality –
a moving movement that did not want you to be
less than you are –
an organic, evolving movement that wanted you to be
all of you.
What then?

Would you get off the couch?
Would you get off the phone?
Would you take your place?

II.

When Tesla said,
"There will only be peace on earth
when everyone is enlightened" –
although rather than 'enlightened' I would say
'fluid within our experience' –
I extrapolate from his statement
that our collective evolution is dependent
upon our individual evolution.

To self-educate
in the art of staying in one's own experience
is that individual evolution.
It is existential, not just academic –

physical, emotional, rational, and existential.

This co-evolution of the individual and the collective
is what I hear in Arnold Mindell's words:

"For organisations, communities, and nations to succeed today
and survive tomorrow, they must be deeply democratic –
that is, everyone and every feeling must be represented."

In other words:

for not just organisations, but for the world to succeed and survive
we each need to become authentic to ourselves.

When all of us can be all of ourselves,
because each of us is in-themselves,
then there will be a new civilisation on earth –
a beautiful one,
to replace this one
which has passed its sell by date.

Ram Dass said something like

"After all these years
nothing has changed –
I am still the same ol' me,
with the same ol' habits as always.
What has changed is my love of me."

I feel the same.

After decades of growth-work,
I am at peace
with growing or not.
After decades of self-development –
after all the therapy,
all the expressive dance,
all the acupuncture and Chi Gong,
all the health foods
and sleeping under the stars,
I feel that whatever has grown, or developed,
or matured in me,
has done so by its own grace.
It has happened of its own accord
and (whether because of or despite my efforts)
I have been its beneficiary.

I say this because
those of us who have been around the block
a thousand times –
if we are in agreement with Tesla, Mindell and Ram Dass –
are advantageously positioned to lead-by-example
the co-creation of a new civilisation on Earth.

Because the majority of us are not alpha-types
this will require a new understanding of power –
power as proportionate to the consistency and depth
of one's staying in one's own experience.
We then no longer know what power looks like –
we have to feel it.
It is no longer muscles, loud voices, threat, dominion.
Power can be expressed in a whisper.
Power can be received in a glance.

I ask myself:
do I feel a sense of responsibility
to be interested,
to step forward?
Yes, I do.
Not a responsibility-to –
(‘to’ some moral code),
but a sense that my authentic response –
if I have chosen to be free –
even here, inside this
tortuously contracted culture,
rotten to its core –
is to refuse the hypnosis
of TV, newspapers and entertainment –
to not keep up with the facts
or the fashions
in clothes or preoccupations –
but to live in a larger seeing –
a seeing that includes
those who were here before us,
and the other races with whom we share
this tremendous yet delicate planet,
and the filth seeping from the underbelly
of this corrupt culture,
and the intrinsic mystery
snaking through everything.

This not only, once again, positions me advantageously
to perceive the magnitude of necessary turnaround,
and to imagine on the necessary scale –
but also (even though I might have hardly noticed),
the years of choosing, relating and acting
from that larger seeing –
have already set me on my feet.
I am already responding.

But as Richard Tarnas says:
"If ever boldness, depth, and clarity of vision
were called for, from many, it is now."
From many....
Which is why I ask...

What if now is the time
for a men's movement
as powerful in this century
as feminism in the last?

What if it is?
What if it's up to us?
What if it is?
Would you be interested?
Would you?

*"Disobedience is man's original virtue."
- Oscar Wilde*

METAFOCUS

"I have one major rule: everybody is right. More specifically, everybody — including me — has some important pieces of truth, and all of those pieces need to be honored, cherished, and included in a more gracious, spacious, and compassionate embrace."

- Ken Wilber

Situating A Personal Focus Within The Metafocus

As I have said, by a metafocus I mean: a 'reality-focus' with which we can align our lives without any loss of personal authority, or sacrifice of existing individual focus, but through which our individual focus is affirmed and enhanced and we can experience a sense of expansion and empowerment by standing in unity with others who also choose to align with this metafocus.

And the specific metafocus I am proposing is of 'experiencing our own experience'.

But what does this mean in practice? What does it mean, for example, if I see my focus as being an eco-warrior, or an activist, or an artist, or a scientist – or if my life-focus is on 'loving', or 'just being happy'? What would it really look like if I aligned my existing focus with this metafocus?

For Example

For example. Let's say I am a scientific researcher. And let's say my focus is on being rational and fair, on impartial examination of the evidence at hand, on humility and honesty, on avoiding 'sentimentality' and 'wishful thinking' (trying to make the evidence fit some would-be ideal), on being 'realistic'. Let's also say my intention – through the scientific method of one provisional 'truth' giving way to another – is to improve the living conditions, or the health, of humanity.

I am, of course, already in my own experience. (At no given moment am I in anyone else's experience, and not in my own... nor, at any given moment, am I not in my own experience – even if it is an experience of numbness or absence.) But, in this example, I am predominantly identified with one mode of experience, the rational mode, and for the most part, unconsciously – in other words, I am mostly up the contracted end of the contraction/expansion axis. I am not open to my experience, in

the present, consciously choosing to relate to reality through the rational faculty, but am essentially identified as mind, a slave to its set ways.

If I now decide to place myself within the metafocus of 'experiencing my own experience' then I am entering the unknown – in as much as there are (at least) four basic modes of experience (the physical, the emotional, the rational, and the existential), and as soon as I enter the actuality of my experience I am going to encounter, to whatever degree, modes of experience with which I am unfamiliar.

But let's now examine, mode by mode, what, in practice, alignment of my existing individual focus with the metafocus of 'experiencing my own experience' might look like...

As the scientist I am (with my own focus, but not yet linked in to the metafocus), when people ask how I am, or when I self-reflect, I experience a general sense of satisfaction with my work, and also with the way I apply the same principles of fairness and honesty to my personal relationships.

Now I align to 'experiencing my own experience' (placing myself within the metafocus), and I begin to feel the subtleties of my moment-to-moment emotional fluctuations. In fact, I realise that my 'sense of satisfaction' was vague and sentimental, and completely unfounded in the scientific principles I say I value. I realise I had no microscope trained on my emotional experience – I wasn't actually observing it – until now I had just had ideas about my emotions.

So our first observation is that: alignment with the metafocus of 'experiencing my experience' has not distracted me from my existing, rational focus. On the contrary, it has refined and enhanced it, bringing it into greater harmony with the emotional mode of experience. I might even be feeling a pleasurable sense of increased personal integration, of wholeness.

And let us say, for the sake of this story, that on the same day I (the scientist) then meet a poet – who tells me he values, above all else, "the intuitive flow of the passion of the heart". This poet, though, is aligning to the same metafocus as me. Like me, he is becoming aware that he has various modes of experience, and is coming to value them all. Now, whereas previously I tended to consider poetry entertaining, even enriching at some yet-to-be-explained level (but not foundational for human progress), and the poet previously tended to consider science mundane and dull, although undeniably useful in its applications (despite being blind to the magic of the moment), we both appreciate that each one has been primarily, though not exclusively, interested in one mode of experience (I in the rational, he in the emotional), and we find ourselves united in mutual presence in the moment (united in our mutual interest in what we're actually experiencing, and in how we both tend

to preference a mode of experience). I also notice how we are both trying to give up imposing our mode and views upon the other, or submit to the other's mode and views, how we are both 'rested in ourselves' – and how we're meeting in a (for me, at least), previously unlikely if not impossible, equality, respect and brotherhood.

And this is not just because we have both broadened our conceptual frameworks to include other modes of experience, thus both becoming 'more tolerant of others' – it is also because we are meeting within the atmosphere of the metafocus, the atmosphere of presentness to experience.

Our second observation then is that alignment with the metafocus of 'experiencing our experience' has brought me a sense of unity with another, previously seemingly-incompatible focus, a sense of mutual supportiveness, and that this is accompanied by a new sense of relaxation, equality and intimacy.

As I open to the metafocus, the same can be said about what happens to me as I open to the other two modes of experience (physical and existential):

(At the physical). Having tended to be 'in my head', as I become interested in experiencing the entirety of my experience, and therefore include more of the physical mode of experience, I notice (for example) a certain habitual tightness and tension in my movements (and perhaps how this is impacted by, and impacts, my emotional experiencing), or how my diet, fitness and daily rhythm affect me, or the discomfort or inefficiency of the research facility...

In this way, firstly, (once again) my existing focus is enhanced (the rational and physical begin to 'sing the same song'). And secondly, not only am I no longer at odds with others (the builder, or the athlete, say), who preference the physical over the rational, the material over the intellectual, but I come to co-exist with them (if they too are opening to this metafocus) in a whole new experiential atmosphere – a state of genuine mutual respect, and thus of mutual 'positive mirroring' (empowerment), held together by a metafocus that values every individual's actual, unique, mixed-mode experience of the moment.

(At the existential.) Having tended to be 'realistic' (that is, excluding of everything to which the scientific method struggles to apply itself), but now becoming interested in experiencing the entirety of my experience, I open to the existential mode (awareness)... I become increasingly aware of the totality of interactions happening at any moment, of the space between things, of never-stopping time, of the immediacy of the miraculous, of whatever it is that runs brains (billions of human brains, horse brains, fly brains...) and, whether my research is into alternative energies or genetic modification, I now poke my fingers more carefully into the fabric of existence.

Research becomes more conscious, more honouring of its prima materia, and more aware of its interconnected consequences.

Now when meeting (within the metafocus of experiencing and valuing all of our experience) with brothers and sisters who tend to preference the existential mode – brothers and sisters who I have perhaps judged as unable to face reality, deluded by supernatural fantasies, and so on – I notice how their words and presence lighten the heaviness of my reason, and even how the groundedness of my reason sobers the intoxication of their surrender. Again – not only is my personal focus enhanced by situating myself within the metafocus of experiencing-it-all, but I find myself in unaccustomed, mutually-respectful resonance with people whose personalities and lifestyles contrast strikingly with my own.

Metafocus

The Metafocus Ocean
Here we are,
surfing
in the metafocus ocean,
together...

The waves are enormous,
then they vanish –
then suddenly they're crashing over us again!
It's not easy!
It was never going to be utopia –
a world of wisdom, passion and peace –
these waves are not easy –
but we're energised –
and we're alive!!!

Rational waves
rise in unstoppable not-knowing,
crash on the rocks of fixity,
then rise in not-knowing again...

Emotional waves
rise in glorious compassion,
dissipate in petty resentments and self-pity,

then rise up again
with overflowing love...

Physical waves
surge towards the coastline,
passionate, wild, delighting in dying,
retreat in exhaustion, in illness, in pain,
then suddenly sprint at the beach again
with such joy....

All the while, existential waves
rise and fall in slow motion,
like great whales
silencing us in awe,
then abandon us in insignificance,
then return in magnificence,
sparkling in the sun...

It's not easy.
We're up, we're down.
We're fearless, we're afraid.
We're, both of us –
ourselves.

Both of us
allowing ourselves to be
more of ourselves –
thanks to each other's allowing.

THE CALL TO UNITY

*"We are the ones we've been waiting for!"
- June Jordan/Lisa Sullivan*

Here is the crux of it: everything (it seems) is unknown, a mystery (perhaps unknowable). We don't know what is going on. We don't know why what is happening is happening. And yet we must act. And act we do – all day, every day, until one of those day we die. And so the question is not whether to act, but how to act – and this (it seems) is up to each of us to decide for himself. It is each man's 'innermost decision'.

But what if what each man decided in his innermost self (without any external authority) was essentially the same? Then we would have a mass movement unlike any other – a unification of intention of unprecedented power precisely because it would be rooted in individual men's unique commitment to their innermost selves

It is not too hard (it seems) to unite men. We seem to respond well to ideologies, to rhetoric, to orders, to uniforms, to flags. Apparently we are easy to manipulate. We are easy to convince to die, and we are easy to convince to kill. It would be understandable, therefore, if men of conscience opposed any unification. And I could respect such opposition. And...

Fundamental – foundational and irrevocable – in the uniting I am calling for is our standing by the metafocus of valuing our own and each other's unique experience – our uniqueness and our equality. And this would be new.

When the hippy movement fell apart it was because we realised that we couldn't change the world without changing ourselves – thus the 'consciousness raising'. Well are we risen enough? Risen enough to rise up?

Who knows?! The only way we will find out is by sounding the call to 'the unity of unique authorities' – and listening out for resonance.

What would it mean to resonate with the call, and respond to it? What would it mean to unite? To continue our personal self-education (in staying in our own experience), to open to each other as brothers (and help each other), and to ask ourselves what we care about, then get together and do something about it – however seemingly small.

Some people (regardless of gender) might be threatened by such an energy swell in the collective male psyche – to see men writing a new myth of man, to see the Archetype of Man stirring in his slumber – because, indeed, it would not be based on a book, or religious or political prophet, but rather on each man's commitment to himself – which is much more difficult to pull out from under his feet...

The Call To Unity

Brothers –
let us call for unity....

Let's shout into the core of man.
Let's ignite fireworks of remembrance.
Let's resuscitate the moon man,
the lunatic lover.
Let's punch and kick and enrage the defeated warrior
back onto the battlefield of inalienable equality.
Let's mirror man in the tediousness
of his harmless chitchat
and insidious self advancement.
Let's run him into exhaustion
with himself,
and en-courage him to stand shoulder to shoulder
with brothers equally humbled
by their own blameless stupidity,
their own lifetime-wasting.
Let's unite him with men like him –
men equally ready to jump,
to freefall in honesty...
as T. S. Eliot says
"and know the place (this place, this world)
for the first time".

Let us call for unity...
for a worldwide brotherhood
of men rising to their feet
in their offices and living rooms –
amazed and celebrating
the ridiculously psychedelic nature
of everything...
men arising amidst the clutter of activity –
mind-blown, dumbstruck, awestruck...

And from there –
there in the unknown –
steadfast and strong –
looking with gentle eyes
upon every situation, every act, every exchange –
no longer for or against anyone,
but rather
(no cliques, no clubs, no collusions) –
a supporter of everyone equally.

Let us call for unity...
for no one-way, or even superior way –
for no standard man...
a loud and insistent invitation
to recognise our pretentiousness
and addiction to obliviousness –
to reincarnate within our lifetimes,
to come back to life,
to return to the mystery of pain
and the mystery of joy –
to fall into life,
to fall from mind to moment –
to unite in simplicity –
and be the men
freedom and love will turn to
in their hour of need.

Let us call for unity...
let's amplify the resonance of dignities –
man to man to man.
In this age of stumbling male shame,
let's call to the ageless in man –
to our disgraced idealism,
to our dormant nobility,
to our forbidden vulnerability –
to the timeless tenderness of man.
Let us call forth
the unseen power of our united honesty,
and the unseen power of our united love.

Let us call for a men's movement
of being and doing,
of inner and outer,

personal and political –
of radical aloneness
and radical unity.

Let us be
a movement of visionary men
dedicated to the rebirth of
man's faith in man –
not in defiance of woman,
nor in repentance,
but in responsibility
and a collective choice to be
as we were perhaps, once, as pre-patriarchal men,
or as, perhaps, we've never been –
but as somehow, hauntingly, we know we can be –
and know we are not yet daring to be...
and yet long to be....

Let us call each other
to take a stand –
to stand together –
to make a choice.

Let us call each other
to choose to return –
a thousand times and more –
from the contractions of blame and attack...
and choose to return –
a thousand times and more –
from the contractions of self-pity and no-hope....
Let us call each other
to choose and choose and choose –
until we have no choice.

Let us call each other
to creativity....
Let us unite our current creativities....
Let us plant our feet in the magnificent mud,
let us grip each other's wrists firmly –
and risk our own hearts actually snapping
so that a one-hearted co-creativity
can erupt
crashing and splashing

though us....
Let us let Man orgasm!
Let us make this planet dazzle!

Let's make the aliens look up
at alien tea time,
and observing the fluctuations in the Earth's vibratory field, say
"I wonder what that's about!"

But seriously....
What does "let's make it real" mean?
What does 'reality' mean?
Let us call each other
to be real....

FREETHINKERS – STEP FORWARD!

*"The more powerful and original a mind, the more it will incline towards the religion of solitude."
- Aldous Huxley*

This is a time when the freethinkers of the world need to step forward – despite their tendency, as Aldous Huxley notes, towards solitude – to step back. Firstly, in the modern age, this tendency no longer needs to confine the freethinker to isolation. Today the freethinker can live in solitude and at the same time, through the internet, be in contact with people all over the world in whatever dosage he chooses. He can now have the best of both worlds – solitude and also the nourishment of connection with others.

But why do so many freethinkers step back in the first place? Because the company of others, of the majority of others, doesn't stimulate them as much as their own company. Their vision is larger, more nuanced, more felt, and more real – in a deeply existential way.

The foundation of the freethinker's psyche is the humble recognition that all 'truths' are provisional, that we have always been ants gazing at the moon, spinning cosmic theories – theories which, if the future is in any way to resemble the past, will be surpassed and supplanted by the theories of our descendants. This foundation continuously returns the freethinker to an openness that allows a questioning of every cultural assumption, every mindset, every 'common sense' – in short, of everything held as unquestionable by those with a narrower outlook.

Unfortunately, this openness can also make the freethinker so empathic as to render him almost paralyzed. Seeing every issue from every side, he can need so much time and space to weigh up the options as to seem tedious and irrelevant in a high octane, sorry-no-time, techno culture. And so he gets side-lined, we lose his input, and his own solitude continues.

But in a culture that is idiotically happy genetically modifying its grandchildren, feeding itself on fish fed on plastic, pumping poison into its own air and water, exterminating hundreds of species daily and, like some biblical planetary plague, running the Earth into the ground – we need people who can see beyond our madness, who can see through the fog of complexity, who can see underpinning principles, whose intellectual sophistication could lead us to simplicity, and whose 'out of the box' creativity could inspire us to new and unexpected modes of action.

Today, when 'in the box' solutions are pointless because the box itself is driving us to destruction, we need our freethinkers – even if they're a little slow. Or perhaps because they're a little slow. In fact, in my opinion, without them we are doomed. Civilisation is poised like a car half off the edge of a cliff, see-sawing back and forth in the wind, creaking. And we are trapped inside – with leaders so narrow-minded, so intellectually blinkered, their main concern is the colour of the upholstery. "What emergency? We see no emergency! I prefer the mauve paisley – what do you think, George?"

They are so small minded they genuinely don't see the blinding obviousness of the edginess of the human situation – that life on Earth is now in the balance, and that a radically new civilisation is not an interesting possibility, but an absolute, urgent necessity. Engaged in a passionate conversation about the upholstery, they are 'not available for intelligent comment'. To put it bluntly – they are too anal, too emotionally constipated, and too terrified to respond intelligently to our perilous situation.

Freethinking brothers of the world; there needs to come a moment when (a) you admit to yourself the largeness of your vision, (b) you admit you've always known (almost all of) our leaders, whether voted-in or not, were (if not individually insane) the puppets of insanity, (c) that they are not (and I mean NOT) going to get us off the cliff, and (d) that it's up to us (that's to say: that it's up to you to step forward).

Freethinking brothers; we need to get out of the box. So we need you. We need your intellectual courage and your bold imaginations. We need you to step forward and inspire us. We need you to put down your spliffs and consoles and pizzas and come out into the daylight! We need you to cut your hours at your corporate-sponsored labs, at the university, college or school teaching regurgitation skills, at the internet marketing company prostituting your programming, at the interior design company prostituting your creativity, at the factory colluding with built-in obsolescence, on the construction site building buildings that are not eco-friendly, but eco-inimical... Above all, we need you to link up with other freethinkers, and throw ideas at us, plans, proposals...

Of course, this is exactly what some freethinkers are already doing. But now it is time to step forward en masse. We don't need a Gandhi or a Mandela or a Martin Luther King, or 'One Great Plan' (governed from on high). We need hundreds of thousands of individuals who know their local communities and landscapes – individuals with big and humble hearts, open, humble minds, and the balls to step forward and give their energy (dare I say it?) – to what we all already know needs to happen: the uniting of the human race in protection of the Earth.

MAN, YOU ARE FREE!

*"You must be ready to burn yourself in your own flame –
how could you rise anew if you have not first become ashes?"*

- Nietzsche

*"I tell you: one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star.
I tell you: ye have still chaos in you!"*

- Nietzsche

We are at the end of an era. An era in which, as Nietzsche predicted, God has been dead – a brilliant era, a terrible era – an era of functionality and efficiency and holocausts, culminating now in the real possibility of species suicide. A Kali Yuga. A sparkling dark age.

If ever there was a chance the baby might be stillborn, it is now, and if ever it was critical the baby be born healthy, it is now.

In this book I address what I feel to be one of the greatest challenges to our united arising: the undignified collective condition of so many men.

Though men of dignity would rise up with an unshakably gentle power, stand humble and proud in the indefinable moment, and set the agenda for the next generations (despite what any industrialist or politician or professor might object) – instead, seduced by slick propaganda, both spiritual and material, modern man lounges in an opium den of conformity to consumer fatness, an ethical blind eye, and inexorable progress in the direction of disaster.

As Nietzsche's Zarathustra might have cried out: "Man of dignity – where art thou?"

And as Zarathustra might have continued: "Modern man does not love himself. His dignity, at best, a forgotten friend of his youth – shrouded in shame – he acquiesces... he does not choose his own life. Educated in institutions, and not beneath the sky, domesticated, castrated, an obedient coward, burdened with self-judgement, empty of ideals, purposeless yet defeated – he shuffles along looking down, as if there were no muscles in his neck. He has forgotten there is no man above him. He has forgotten freedom – when once it was all that mattered."

This book is a serious call for a radical, grassroots, global brotherhood. Grass welcome, oaks welcome, so-called-weeds and so-called-prize roses – everyone welcome! In-the-system brothers welcome, out-the-system brothers welcome –

everyone welcome! No leaders. No one way. Honesty. Equality – felt equality.
Action.

The whole point of this book is to outline a unifying philosophy to invigorate such a brotherhood – to shake it into existence! How much more impossible does the situation have to get, before we attempt the impossible?

Let me give the last word to my echo of Zarathustra:

"Brother, look – the coils of guilt are slipping to the ground....
Arise! You have remembered: you are not your history.

Brother, look – the pompous ropes of state law are coming undone....
Arise! You have remembered where humble authority resides.

Brother, look – the leash of monogamy is falling from your genitals....
Arise! You have remembered: not just your penis, but your whole body,
is full of the blood of love.

Brother, look – the taut strings of certainty are snapping in your mind....
Arise! You have remembered: you are safe in not-knowing – already safe, rested in
the arms of the great unknown.

Brother, look – you are discarding the bondage of masculinity like a snakeskin....
Arise! You have remembered: you are male and genderlessly free.

Brother, look – the knotted ropes of identity are tumbling all around you....
Arise! You have remembered: you are indefinable,
foolish beyond imagining, forgiving beyond reason,
some kind of cosmic comedian... yes, now you remember:
it was you who knotted the ropes!

Brother – breathe again, cry relief, run about, remember happiness – you are free!

Brother – you are free! Free to be you, free to let go, free to not let go, free to be
everything, free to be no one!

Brother – you are free to love your world, to love your body. You are free to be
happy in pain, in grief, in joy.... You are free to be free! You are free to look through
your own eyes, to see what you see.... You are free to hear the birdsong at dawn – all
day long!"

But come now - we have a civilisation to co-create! So much is not all right.

And – as the three little birds on Bob Marley’s doorstep might have sung (if they’d had a few more verses) :) – "every little thing is already alright!" By this I mean that I, personally, feel and trust that every atom of existence is flowing in the only possible way it can: honestly. The ocean waves rise and fall in an unplanned, spontaneous, mathematically inevitable (air currents, etc.), unpretentious, honest response to the wind. I don’t know when or where or how or why. And this does not mean there is no free will (if there is, that too is a factor in this flow). It means that to be an honest man is to be opening into the flow of the honesty of existence.

*"If you don't break your ropes while you're alive, do you think ghosts will do it after?"
- Kabir*

IN THE YOUNG BOAR'S EYES

When I look upon the creatures of this world, like the wild boar that wander free here in Sardinia where I'm writing, for example – when I look into the eyes of the little ones... so beautiful, so innocent, such a joy... I can't help but feel what a brutal and heartless species we have been.

They are endlessly present, endlessly fresh, endlessly forgiving, endlessly loving – they do not judge us... but if we were to judge ourselves, if we were to look at ourselves through the eyes of all the assembled species of the earth – would we not agree with what I feel in the young boar's eyes: what a brutal and heartless species we have been!

That said, the fact there is a part of me that is touched by the beauty in the young boar's eyes means there's more to us than this. At the moment though, our brutality and heartlessness – endowed with unprecedented power by modern mechanisation – is thrashing and trashing the planet and all of its inhabitants with unprecedented psychopathic efficiency.

It is to the part of us that is other than this that this book is addressed. That part is honest.

10

END NOTES



“purpose is creativity charged with meaning”

SELF-EDUCATION

"Our moment in history is indeed a pregnant one. As a civilisation and as a species we have come to a moment of truth, with the future of the human spirit, and the future of the planet, hanging in the balance. If ever boldness, depth, and clarity of vision were called for, from many, it is now."

- Richard Tarnas

The Rubber Hits the Road

Do you understand what honesty is? I am sure you do. Understanding is quick. And it gives us rational orientation. Which is important. But we don't really understand what we understand until we take it out for a spin. Honesty as a principle is simple enough, but to live in honesty requires not only courage and determination, it requires practice and skill.

Self-education is where the rubber hits the road. I have spoken about self-education elsewhere – in the piece 'For Men & Not Against Non-Men', for example. And in the glossary I have explained it like this: self-education involves practices one can take upon oneself in order to explore concepts experientially. Conventional education is extremely hierarchical – teacher knows, student doesn't. That's why he (the teacher) is there – so that we can learn from him. By putting the word 'self' at the front, I mean to imply an adjustment to this teacher-student power balance – to put the accent not on learning-from (someone outside of oneself), but on exploring one's own thoughts, feelings, intuitions, etc. about what that person is presenting. Of course, one person is guiding the process, and the other is being guided – but in self-education, the so-called 'teacher' and so-called 'student' do this as equals.

I might be in the teacher rôle with someone who's in the student rôle. But I am still in my own experience of the encounter – of my own moment – in which I am also learning, just like him. I can share my seeing of, say, the degree to which he is open emotionally, and I can suggest ways he can explore this. He might then come back to me, after some exploration, and I can share my seeing again. But he is the subject matter under enquiry, and he is the enquirer. I am just one possible mirror he can use, while he finds me useful.

Basically, in self-education – you, the so-called student, do the work! There are subtleties – of course there are... and these reveal themselves in time. But the essence is extremely simple. Any 'teacher' could explain it in five minutes: be honest (in all modes, not just rationally). This will lead to seeing that, in any given moment, 'all you have is your own experience' and that, therefore, we are, each of us, both alone and

unique. This then leads, naturally and effortlessly, to our equality – which, if fully felt, is love.

All the teacher has to do is say ‘be honest’, and then support the student in feeling the consequences of honesty. The first consequence is love. The second is power: the experience of aloneness and uniqueness is the beginning of the end of comparing ourselves with others (better/worse), and is therefore also the experience of autonomy, of authority, of power.

The other thread that emerges from the commitment to honesty is ‘not-knowing’, which, when felt (again – not only understood rationally), leads to the experience of mystery... which, in turn, when fully felt, leads to a sense of belonging, to trust and to freedom.

Yes, to be able to enjoy the consequences of honesty we have to learn to manage our contractions and expansions – otherwise we can’t maintain centre. And brotherhood/community, honest relating, and purposeful action (creativity) support this learning – still, the fundamentals of the self-educational programme are super-simple.

But, however straightforward, however simple, realistically – because our global civilisation is still so taut in terror-of-reality (and therefore radically dishonest, in all modes) – any major transformation of our collective consciousness is going to be multigenerational. This is why our priority needs to be the facilitation of the self-education of our children.

Although, of course, we can only begin with ourselves. If we are going to support our children in their love, power, freedom, and creativity, and in co-creating whatever kind of supportive relationships and community they feel they want – we can only truly do this by example. By living ourselves, moment-to-moment, more and more, in honesty – our every glance and gesture, our whole way of being in the world, explains the dignity of Man more articulately than any amount of schooling. So, at least for now, each man’s priority needs to be his own self-education. Our children need to be our priority, yet paradoxically, so do we.

Maps

The three conceptual models I have referred to throughout this book are the Four Modes Of Experience, the Contraction/Expansion Axis, and Centre & Self-Management. They combine to form a multi-layered, dynamic map. They create a kind of rational safety net we can fall into whenever we stumble as we venture out into the unknown. The map underlies our self-education. ‘The map is not the territory’, as they say – but it has a use: we can use it to orient our self-education.

The Four Modes helps us locate our whereabouts (where), the Contraction/Expansion Axis helps us recognise how we are being and behaving in that mode (how), and Centre & Self-Management enables us to do something about it (what).

None of this prescribes a direction. It supports us as we learn to drive. Where we then go is up to us.

Finally: maps need to be held lightly – they are not ‘the way’. Sometimes we need to just put the map down, and follow our intuition. Sometimes ‘breaking all the rules’, and not following the map at all, is exactly what we need – and leads to unexpected breakthroughs in our realisation. All concepts are provisional, all conceptual maps are provisional – ‘provisional’ meaning: we use them while we feel they work. We use them, we don’t follow them. As soon as we become followers we become fanatics. We might be using a map, but we’re still in the unknown.

In fact, there are times when we act-out from contraction – and it is beautiful! For example: let’s imagine my boss at work continually insults me in front of all the other staff. I am aware I am rumbling with resentment (contracted in the emotional mode), rehearsing retorts obsessively (contracted in the rational mode), so caught up in it all that any sense of mystery and belonging has slipped away (existentially contracted), and worn out by a cold I’ve had since this began (contracted in the physical mode). I am not only able to observe all of this, but I have been practicing returning to the centre of my experience, and, from there, giving space to my feelings of humiliation – for weeks – as well as to feelings of wanting to punch him, and so on. Today at work I can no more! Suddenly I am possessed by a contracted, righteous rage, shouting at him in front of everyone. I am not ‘experiencing my experience’. I am not experiencing anything. If anything, rage is experiencing me! I am completely out of myself! Nevertheless, it feels really, really right. The upshot: he lets up on the bullying and I am looked upon with a new respect by my workmates.

Was I right? Was I wrong? Did I stay in my experience? Should I have? Clearly, the answers are not so simple. Sometimes our breakdowns, full of ‘bad behaviour’, turn out to be our greatest breakthroughs. At other times we judge ourselves as ‘running away’ from our experience – only realising years later that we needed distance to protect ourselves. At others, what we judge as an obsession explodes in amazing creativity. At others – incapable of staying with our pain – we escape into something that then opens the door to our purpose. And so on.

This is not a disclaimer. The map is vital. But we do need to know how tightly to hold it.

Self-Educational Suggestions

I. The Return to Oneself (Practices in the Existential Mode)

1. Breathing.

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing – breathe! Bring your attention to your breathing. Breathe consciously. Conscious breathing, of one sort or another, is perhaps the most universal of practices. It is central to innumerable systems of self-knowledge. It is portable :) (no icons or incense needed), it is always accessible (there's nowhere you can't take your breath!), and it is discrete (nobody needs to know what you're up to!) – above all, it is perhaps the most immediate and effective of techniques to return us to our actual experience.

(a) 'The Three Breaths'. This is the basic breathing practice I recommend. It is extremely simple, but slightly more structured than 'just observe your breath' (making it, I find, easier to stay focussed), and designed to connect us with the three non-rational modes. It goes like this:

Inhale through the heart, then exhale down through your belly and balls, down into the earth. In this way connect with the physical mode, with your physical experience of the moment. Breathe out and feel the world through your body. What does that feel like?

Inhale through the heart, then exhale out through the heart. Connect with the emotional mode, with your emotional experience of the moment. How is the situation you're in impacting you emotionally? What emotions have you brought to the situation? What are you actually feeling?

Inhale through the heart, then exhale up and around, into the sky, into the surrounding air. Connect with the existential mode, with your direct relationship with reality. Does this re-embed you in a larger belonging? What happens for you?

If I had to choose one practice above all others to accompany me on my own path, it would be this one. By making the rational commitment to practice the Three Breaths regularly, I return to my own experience – in body, heart, and being. To repeat – it goes like this:

- Inhale through the heart, exhale down into the earth.
 - Inhale through the heart, exhale out through the heart.
 - Inhale through the heart, exhale up and around into the air and sky.
- Keep repeating.

Find a quiet place. Be by yourself. Set a length of time – perhaps 10 or 15 minutes –

and do this every day. It can help to do it in the same place, and at the same time, every day – but, of course, that’s not always possible. But keep up the discipline. If you miss a day, or two, or a week – no matter... just get back into it. If it helps, you can make an agreement with yourself to do this for two weeks, or a month – and then, after that, commit to another timespan. If it becomes an unfelt-habit, take a break for a week or so, and then return.

(b) You can also practice Three Breaths ‘On The Go’! By this I mean, having become to some extent practiced in the Three Breaths in the privacy of your home – try it in public places. Try it while driving, while sitting on the train, at a meeting, while shopping, and so on.... Wherever you are, set a length of time – and do it. Don’t say, "I am going to do the Three Breaths all day at the office today" – because that’s overambitious and can lead to feeling disheartened. Decide to do it for perhaps five minutes. And then later on, do it again....

(c) Another wonderful breathing practice is ‘Chakra Breathing’. Essentially it is seven breaths, instead of three. I outline this kind of breathing in the Love Making Meditation in the piece ‘Together’. But here I am recommending it as a solo practice. Again, it is a practice that is best begun alone, but which can later be done ‘on the go’.

2. The Unexpected Moment.

(a) This is an anywhere-anytime practice. You set the alarm on your mobile to go off, say, every three hours. Then each time it rings you just stop. You stop, and gather yourself (breathe), and ask yourself (as per the piece ‘The Unexpected Life’): "Did I expect this exact situation? I knew I was coming to the city centre – but did I expect to see that specific person, or that one, or that one, dressed in exactly that way, walking exactly that way? Did I expect this exact combination of sounds, or of smells? Or those shadows passing over that building? Or that pigeon? Or that dog? Or that glance, or smile, or this mood I am in?" Of course, the answer will always be, “No”. That’s not the point. The point is to stop, and notice just how much we live outside the unexpected moment, how much we make plans and live inside them – going through our days hardly noticing them, living hardly aware we’re alive – existing without seeing existence, or feeling it, or being moved by amazement.

Again, you can set a length of time (a minute? two minutes?). Stop. Breathe. Look, listen, feel. Also notice the impact of this on the next hour. If you do this practice regularly (again – you can make an agreement with yourself to do it every day for, say, a fortnight), notice if your experience of this practice evolves.

(b) An interesting variation on this practice is to include yourself in your contemplations – in other words, you stop and you don’t only contemplate your surroundings, you include your body – you contemplate yourself within the

surroundings. Try it. But be clear. Make it either with or without your own body in the picture, and stick to whatever you have agreed with yourself.

3. Time Alone.

'Time Alone' becomes a practice if we create it regularly, and use it to self observe. Just as the first two practices, above, reveal just how out-of-ourselves and our lives we live – and by giving us the experience of the contrast ("I was so out-of-myself, now I am back in-myself") give us clarity and choice – time alone gives us the opportunity to feel how we feel our life moment without the pushes and pulls of interactions with others. Again, the contrast between, for example, how relaxed we feel alone, and tense in company – or, lonely alone, and comfortable in company – reveals us to ourselves.

By regularly visiting ourselves in this way, we get to see where we're really at, the actual state of our relationship with reality – with our life-trajectory and with our death – and what we're really feeling about what we're going through, and who we're going through it with. 'Time Alone' is a hundred per cent essential if we want to be in touch with ourselves. And only by being in touch with ourselves can we snap out of the trance of the superficial. Again: agree times with yourself, and stick to them. This is not a five or ten minute practice though. It's very personal, of course, but I would say most of us need, at the very least, two or three hours a week absolutely by ourselves.

4. Time in Nature.

This might be time alone in nature, or time with others in nature – the point here is to be in nature. Meet animals, insects, trees. Be naked in the fields. Swim in cold rivers. Sleep out. Be untidy, get dirty. Get to know the land and the stars. Cast off civilization, be an animal again – go a bit bonkers! :) Alternatively – go for a lazy stroll, and stop off for a coffee or a beer along the way. :)

A friend once said to me, "Nature is the great healer". Another once told me "A walk in the countryside is psychic surgery". I feel I have a sense of what they mean. As I walk among the trees, in the open air, whether blossom-proud in the spring or black-branched in winter, I feel I somehow absorb their way of being – which I intuit, or perhaps project, to be one of complete acceptance, oneness with wherever they are, effortless determination, and gentlest growth and decay.

When I have passed through doubt and depression I have found faith (irrational belief) in nature. Irrationally, I have said, "I believe in the goodness of the sunset, I trust in the goodness of the dawn, I surrender into the goodness of the trees, the grass, the insects, the rain...". By nature I am restored.

Again – make ‘Time in Nature’ ‘a practice’ by going out regularly, and feeling it. Relax into it. Set times to go out, and stick to them – even if you live in a city and are super-busy. Get out of the human-made world of streets, clocks, cars and noise – say, once a fortnight.

5. Listening.

Because we tend to be so rational mode identified (“in our heads”), we tend to hear our inner dialogues, but not the world around us. By listening to sound, and listening to the silence beneath, or behind, sound – we drop from our state of (severe or mild), disembodied, mental abstraction, into the felt-experience of our mystery-infused surroundings.

Not only do we tend to be mind-absorbed, but we tend to over-depend on our eyes, and under-depend on our ears. Listening to all of the sound around us returns us to existential awareness. This is augmented even further by listening to the background silence of the world – the silence within which all sound rises and falls. Sometimes I play with sound and silence (especially in very noisy places), saying to myself, "I am going to listen to the silence until it is louder than sound."

Make a practice of listening – at home, alone, in public places, in nature... perhaps as a meditation (for ten minutes every morning and evening for, say, four days – once every month or so), or spike your day with it, using your mobile, say, five times a day, for a minute, during a week).

6. Feeling Beyond The Names.

As per the pieces ‘Living Beyond Definition’, and ‘The Unexpected Life’, make a practice of going beyond the names of things – into their actuality, into what they actually are. Investigate the inadequacy of the word ‘tree’ to describe one. We call it a tree, but what is it? Strip it of its name, look and feel directly – get the words out of the middle.

"I have pain in my leg". Yes, but what is it, actually? If you do away with the word ‘pain’, and feel-into it as fully as you can – what do you find? Is the word ‘pain’ sufficient? Is it even accurate? And finally – what is it?

We experience emotions. But what are they? Yes, we call one sadness, one happiness – but what are all emotions made of? Are they some sort of energy? OK. But what is energy?

A great game in this regard is to take a food you’ve always said was delicious, and eat it in two ways... Firstly, allow yourself to enjoy it as usual. Then, eat it imagining it is a food that disgusts you. Turn it around in your mouth until you find it repulsive.

Repeat these two ways of eating until the food could equally easily be called delicious or disgusting. Then really taste it.

Again – dedicate concentrated time to ‘Feeling Beyond The Names’ in whatever way appeals, and is practical for you.

II. Self Management (Practices in the Emotional Mode, with Self)

7. From Thought To Feeling.

I mentioned our over-identification with mind in my notes on the ‘Listening’ practice. Most men recognise this tendency immediately. In this ‘From Thought to Feeling’ practice, bring your attention not from mind to sound/silence, but from mind to feeling. Recognise your captivation in your own thought world, breathe ‘The Three Breaths’, observe how present you are, or aren’t, in your body, ask your heart what you’re feeling, and feel it.

Feeling, of course, is only ever in the present moment. We can feel our memories – in the present. And we can feel our dreams and fears – in the present. Feel what you are feeling in the moment.

This can be a focussed practice – as a longer morning meditation, or as a series of shorter contemplations through the day. And it is probably best to begin in this way. But eventually it becomes an integrated habit. We hear a song, or thought, repeating itself in our heads, over and over (and over), and we use this as a sign to return ‘From Thought to Feeling’.

As we bring our attention to our thoughts, we are sometimes shocked by just how judgemental they are. We might consider ourselves liberal and loving, but we observe how superficially and yet brutally we are engaged in endless, machine-gunning, negative, and positive, self-judgement and judgement of others. Rather than perpetuating this by judging ourselves for judging – bring your attention down (breath, body, heart), to what you’re feeling.

The critical mind is quite hilarious. We buy ourselves a very expensive coat, say, and think to ourselves, "Wow, you look so elegant and exclusive!" Then we see someone else wearing the same coat and think, "What a pretentious fool – who does he think he is?!" It can be particularly interesting to observe the mind’s antics in a public place (where there are lots of people to judge :) – and ‘public places’ includes family gatherings, the workplace, etc.

8. Felt-Contemplation of Concepts.

In this book I have spoken of many concepts – with which, perhaps, you agree. Here I am inviting you to explore not what you think about these concepts, but your actual experience of them. Take each one, and contemplate it for, say, a week. Use your journal (practice 17), if you have one. Write it on your wall, your mirror, and your forehead :). For however long you have agreed with yourself, take one of these key concepts, and keep asking your heart:

1. How does it feel that ‘all I have is my own experience?’
 2. How does not-knowing feel?
 3. How does it feel to belong (to nature, to the human race, to everything)?
 4. How does aloneness feel?
 5. How does uniqueness feel?
 6. What does equality feel like?
 7. What does it feel like to be working meaningfully?
- (Each subject min. three days. If with mobile: five times/day).

Find out not what you think you feel about these key concepts, but what your actual felt-experience of them is.

9. Loving My Knots.

In this practice we are looking at recognising a particular ‘knot’ (a contraction, in whichever mode, in which we have become entangled), and how, by loving ourselves in it (even though we might be feeling ‘all knotted up’ and be full of self-judgement and/or blame), we naturally disentangle ourselves. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is by not resisting or opposing our knots that we escape them. Rather, when there’s no desire to escape – when we open to them – they open to us. They loosen in our love.

They tighten if we fight them – if we tell ourselves that this is not how we ‘should’ be feeling. This is the difference I have spoken about between ‘centre as a fixed’ and ‘centre as flowing’. If we conceive of centre as a fixed position we ‘should’ be living from, we will wish we weren’t contracted, and push the knot away. Then what happens? It pushes back, and we end up even more knotted.

But if we conceive of centre as flowing, if we have no ‘ideal me’, no super-centred, actualised self we are aiming to be – then we interest ourselves in our contractions, we make friends with them. We don’t look upon them as interlopers, but as guests, or – even more intimately – as our children.

Do not do this practice when you are totally knotted up – when you are furious or devastated – when you are in the throes of extreme contraction – at least not initially. Do it when you’re aware of a contraction, but not overwhelmed by it.

Give yourself 20 minutes to half an hour to do this practice. Do it once a week, or whenever you feel you need it...

- Find centre (use the 'Three Breaths', dance – or whatever works for you).
- Personify your anger, for example, as an angry child (your sadness as a sad child, etc.), and imagine him sitting in front of you.
- Listen for 'his voice' – feel his mood.
- Talk to him as a loving father.
 - (a) Offer him understanding and empathy.
 - (b) Do not counsel or therapise him, do not correct or advise him.
 - (c) Let him lead the conversation, but keep steering it (if need be) back from the rational to the emotional mode ("OK, but what do you feel about that?").
 - (d) Do not seek resolution, only connection. If resolution is to come, it will come naturally. Don't push for it.
 - (e) Absolutely do not merge with him. You are father, he is son. Retain that definition.
- End from centre. In your heart – give him a hug. (You can express this easily hugging a cushion you imagine as him.)

10. Chakra Work.

As I have said throughout this book, I don't believe or not-believe in the Indian Chakra system – but I do find it useful. In that mood, I want to name them, and the concepts/energies/emotions usually associated with them – not exactly as a practice, but rather as seven possible areas of enquiry:

1. Earth Chakra (between anus and balls)

Enquiry: What is my relationship with the Earth? Do I feel my embeddedness in this earthy, wet, muddy, sandy, sundried, icy world? How might I answer this question for myself? Are aspects of this relationship tight and fearful? What aspects need tending? How might I do this? What ideas do I have? Who could I talk to about this? Do I need assistance?

2. Sex Chakra (between genitals and navel)

Enquiry: What is my relationship with my sexuality? Is it full of shame? Is it obsessive/addictive? Do I sex-objectify others? How has my sexuality been conditioned by my culture? What aspects are still clenched? How might I address these questions? What practices could I set in place to support my exploration? Do I need support?

3. Power Chakra (solar plexus)

Enquiry: What is my relationship with my personal power – my autonomy and authority; my determination, will, and direction? Do I tend to be hesitant, reticent, apologetic? Or do I tend to be bombastic, domineering, overpowering? Am I afraid

of my power? Am I afraid of equality? What conditioned images of power control me? Who might give me a mirror of how I hold my power? What practices could we dream up to help me practice new ways of being powerful?

4. Love Chakra (heart)

Enquiry: What is my relationship with my emotions? And what is relationship with love? Love is the ground of all emotion – but that doesn't mean we 'should' be feeling love all the time. We 'should' be feeling whatever we're feeling. What is my relationship with grief, with fear, with rage, and so on? Are there emotions I refuse to feel? Am I afraid of intimacy? Am I afraid of solitude? Can I love without having to make it mean anything? Again – as above – how might I enquire into all of this? What practices might help me? Who might be of support to me?

5. Chakra of Expression/Creativity (throat)

Enquiry: What is my relationship with my creativity, my self-expression? Dare I play? Dare I make mistakes? Dare I be different? Dare I be original? Dare I be rejected, outcast? Dare I be admired? Dare I be big? Dare I be all of me? What is the story of my creativity so far? Again: what do I feel about all this? Is my creativity flowing abundantly? Or is it dammed up? What aspects of my creativity do I feel might benefit from gentle encouragement? How might I give myself this? What support might serve me?

6. Chakra of Sight ('third eye', between eyebrows)

Enquiry: What is my relationship with my reality? What do I see, and do I live my seeing? Dare I speak my seeing? Do I, in fact, see? Or is my vision constricted, blinkered? By what? Why? Do I trust my own seeing, my own reading of reality? Why? Why not? How might I care for this capacity – so that it can bloom, should it choose to? Again – who might be of support to me in this enquiry?

7. Chakra of Oneness ('crown', top of skull)

Enquiry: what is my relationship with not-knowing, with uncertainty, with mystery, with my inescapable belonging, with trust? What is my relationship with the timeless under time, the placeless deeper than place – the here- and-now that cannot be located on any map, or gauged by any clock or calendar? Am I afraid? Why not? Why? Do I need to open more to this relationship? Does anything impinge that opening? How might I go about that? Do I need any help?

III. Honest Relating (Practices in the Emotional Mode, with Others)

11. 50/50.

I have already outlined this practice (see the piece "Together"), and referred to it in various places. For me, it is the fundamental relational practice. Uneducated as we are

in the art of relating, it is an absolutely excellent focus for self-education in relating both powerfully and intimately.

It might, more accurately, be called 100/100 – as I am not sacrificing 50% of myself as I relate, but rather staying 100% in my own experience – part of which is honouring of the other in the fullness (100%) of their experience. I have stuck with the term 50/50 though, because I feel it conveys a sense of relationship balance.

Because I consider this practice so essential I am going to guide you through it again, in more detail. And although it can be practiced alone, I am going to guide you through practicing it with another.

Sit comfortably in front of each other. Find the right distance. Not too close, not too far. What does that mean? You're at the right distance when you feel you have enough space for yourself, and can still feel the presence of the other. Close your eyes. Bring your attention to your breathing. Release an exhalation down through your legs into the earth. Release an exhalation out through your heart. Release an exhalation out through your third eye, between your eyebrows, relaxing all of your face muscles, and up through your crown. (Repeat?)

Open your eyes. Keep your hands within your peripheral vision, so that you keep a visual connection with your own body. Hold a soft gaze. Now the 50/50 begins. Keep 50% of your attention on yourself, and offer the other 50% to the other. Some of us tend to live more out-of-ourselves – these brothers need to pull their attention back into themselves, others of us tend to live more in withdrawal – these brothers need to extend their attention towards the other.

50/50 is a moment-to-moment meditation. From one moment to the next you might be 70/30, then 90/10, and so on. The re-focussing and re-balancing back into 50/50 is a moment-to-moment practice. You can use your breath to support the process – offering one breath to yourself, one breath to the other. You do this by releasing an exhalation down through your own body, then 'offering' an exhalation towards the other, like a gift.

You know you're in 50/50 when you can feel your own presence, and you can feel the presence of the other. When you're in 50/50 there is an open, intimate, present, magical space between you.

As thoughts arise, don't get entangled in the mind. Breathe your attention back into your body. (One breath to self, one breath to other.) Don't repress the thoughts that arise. And don't repress the emotions that arise. Just let them come and go. If attraction comes, let it come. If dislike comes, let it come. Thoughts and emotions are always flowing, one after another. Let them flow. If you block them because there's

something you don't want to think or feel, you'll block the space between you. It's all OK. It's OK to love. It's OK to hate. We all do. We're only human. Accept whatever you're thinking and feeling – moment-to-moment.

Keep breathing: one breath to self, one breath to other. And keep adjusting, re-balancing the 50/50. (Feeling self, feeling other.) If you keep getting entangled in the mind you can deliberately fill the mind with a thought conducive to 50/50. For example: you can look deeply into the other's eyes and think, "I see your suffering, I suffer too. I accept you in your struggles and your suffering, just as I accept myself in my own struggles, my own suffering."

Keep breathing: one breath to self, one breath to other. And keep adjusting, re-balancing the 50/50. (Feeling self, feeling other.) At a deeper level than any judgements that might be arising, I believe we do all wish each other well. Look deeply into each other's eyes. If it's authentic for you, silently communicate something along the lines of, "I wish you well. Whatever you've been through, whatever you're going through in your life at the moment – I wish you well. And whatever you deeply, deeply want for yourself, I want that for you, too. I truly, truly wish you well."

Slowly bring the 50/50 to a close, and thank each other. I would recommend ten to fifteen minutes. You might then like to debrief. In your daily life you can practice 50/50 when you're with another person (whether they're aware of it, or not), and you can also practice 50/50 with your environment (whether it's a forest, or a supermarket). You might like to set your mobile alarm and practice it regularly through the day. Or as you go about your daily life, you might like to practice it spontaneously here and there.

12. Authentic Speaking.

Practice speaking your experience: your actual perception and your actual desires. Say "yes", "no", and even "maybe", with confidence and clarity – but using (something along the lines of) a grammatical system like 'E-prime', that's to say: expressing yourself subjectively, without any pretence to objectivity. Say, "I find you beautiful", rather than, "You are beautiful." Also try to avoid fixity, in favour of flow: rather than, "I love you", say "I am loving you right now." Use your speech to help you stay in your own moment-to-moment experience. And notice what this feels like. When you make an effort to communicate in this way – what is your experience of yourself, and of your relating?

Practice this as 'The Art of Conversation', which is not the way we usually converse. Conversation becomes complex, messy, and conflictive when we speak in a fixed, pseudo-objective manner. Practice speaking subjectively, and also, to whatever extent you can, in disidentification: "I am observing that I am feeling this now", "I am

observing that I am thinking this now", and so on. After all, we are not generating our thoughts or emotions! This does not, of course, mean that you have to keep saying, "I am observing that", at the beginning of every sentence! But hold this, internally, as your focus. Conversation then becomes simple and beautiful. It is no longer about rights and wrongs, but about each person's vulnerable 'confession' of their subjective experience – not about what each person thinks 'should' happen, or how they or another 'should' be or behave, but about each person's self-revelation.

Again – rather than ambitiously saying to yourself, "I am going to always speak in this manner from now on", set regular, limited times to practice. Build it up from there.

13. All Men Are Brothers.

Whether on a park bench, in a café, in a football crowd, or in private conversation – hold the meditation that "all men are brothers". Use 'The Three Breaths' (or similar), to help you stay with centre, and let your heart soften towards your brothers – brothers of all shapes and sizes, ages and skins. Stay in-yourself, but extend your warmth towards them. Say to yourself, "There go I, in another body, in another destiny." Feel how other men are just as important to themselves, as you are to yourself. Feel how you are just as important to them, as they are to you.

Then evaluate the impact of this shift in attitude. And, as with the previous practice: rather than grandiosely declaring, "I will hold this seeing and feeling continuously from now on", set regular, limited times to practice, and build it up from there.

You could also practice 'All Women Are Sisters' – which would have a different impact, and perhaps challenge you in different ways. Or, should you wish to be completely inclusive, you could practice We Are One Family. Whichever meditation you're practicing though, stick to it – don't muddle them up.

IV. Body (Practices in the Physical Mode)

14. Invigorating the Body.

If we are not alert and alive in our bodies, if we are not 'in' our bodies, then our experience of the moment is likely to be once-removed, and our responses under-informed (only informed by the other three modes).

Embodiment is crucial if we want to 'stand' in our experience. Without it, we might have extensive subtle and sophisticated knowledge regarding 'staying in our own experience'- but we won't be able to live it. Without an alert body (in whatever state of health), we cannot express ourselves powerfully in the world.

Get involved with your body. Feed it well. Give it good water, and good air. Let it rest. Exercise it. Energise it. You might prefer weights and press ups, you might prefer wild, expressive dance, you might prefer hard work – no matter. Give thanks to your body, whose every organ and limb works ceaselessly on your behalf – by keeping it fit.

For an absolute minimum of a total of two hours per week: run, stretch, bounce, push, lift, jump, swim, cycle, ride a horse, kick a ball, box, do what you will – put energy into your body. That is how you energise it.

15. Sensuality.

Self-education in the physical mode is not just about weights and press ups, or even ‘sweating your prayers’, as expressive dance teacher Gabrielle Roth puts it.

The body is both extremely tough, and extremely tender. To be present in the body is to be alert and energised, but it is also to be sensually sensitive to one’s skin, to the breeze in one’s hair, to the moisture on one’s lips, to the erotic longing in one’s belly. It is to taste one’s food. It is to know one’s smell. It is to dress for pleasure. It is to be receptive in sex.

For a week at a time, focus on one of the five senses. One week ‘sight week’, the next week ‘touch week’, and so on. As you focus, say, on touch (either in longer, dedicated daily slots, or in short bursts through the day), begin by touching something as you usually would, then touch it more consciously, then really feel what it’s like to touch it. Don’t seek pleasure, seek reality.

Then once a week have a sensuality fest! This might be a hot bath (touch), with oils (smell), candlelight (sight), music (hearing) and snacks (taste). It doesn’t have to include all five senses every time – but one evening a week for a month or two, create ‘Sensuality Night’ – and honour the delicacy and sensitivity of your beautiful body.

V. Mind (Practices in the Rational Mode)

16. Mantra.

Create a focus statement, a ‘mantra’, to return you to your own experience. Find the words that work for you, and plaster them everywhere. Keep it pithy. Write it out in big letters, and frame it. Write it out in small letters to fit on a credit card, laminate it, and carry it in your wallet. Set your mobile phone alarm to go off on the hour, and every time it goes off repeat your mantra to yourself. Let it ring through your head the way an obsessive thought does. Let it become your most available thought – the thought that, every time you feel wobbly or confused, reminds the mind you need to return to the centre of your experience.

You can also repeat your mantra to yourself on going to bed, and on getting up. Don't change it more than once a month. It can evolve, but not too often, otherwise the repetition can't make its impression upon the psyche.

17. Keep a Journal.

By a 'journal' I mean a book where you write, doodle, and draw your realisations, struggles, questions, fears... It is a private book. It is not for the eyes of even your closest ally. It is important to be clear on this from the start – as your journal then becomes a 'private space', where you can be alone with your innermost secrets, shames, dreams and desires. It can then be a conversation 'between you and your god'.

Sit down alone, once a day, for roughly five minutes, and write. If you write for longer, fine – but make a doable agreement with yourself. Ask yourself how you are. "What's on my mind? What am I feeling? What is the cutting-edge of my life right now?" and write – without any need whatsoever to know in advance what you're going to say.

If contracted anger, say, comes pouring out – fine. Let it come. But let your journal be more than a dumping ground for your contractions. Let it include everything that wants to be included – however politically incorrect, immoral, out of order, or outrageous. But the supervising editor must be centre. Make sure the first and last words of each entry come from centre. Begin, for example: "Today I am full of hatred for so-and-so who has insulted me. The hatred wants to say....", and end, for example: "I have given space to the voice of my hatred – beneath which I can feel so much hurt – and from centre I bring the gentlest compassion to that hurt". If we don't put centre in charge of our journaling, we can end up just throwing wood on the fire of our contractions.

An honest journal becomes a valued companion. It accompanies us through the months and years. In it we track ourselves. We use it to guide ourselves. It becomes a mirror in which we image and imagine ourselves – so that we can stay lovingly close to ourselves.

ACTION

"The probability of global catastrophe is very high... It is two and a half minutes to midnight. The clock is ticking. Global danger looms. Wise public officials should act immediately, guiding humanity away from the brink. If they do not, wise citizens must step forward and lead the way."

- 2017 Doomsday Clock Statement

(Science and Security Board, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists)

Reunited

You and I are finally, fully, reunited
when we offer our lives
to the life we share –
each of us an offering...
when we're dying
inside the same seeing.
No less.
No less.

Not 'willing to die',
but dying –
which is to finally live fully –
unconcerned with survival...
Then –
then we're united.

Never, however, confusing
the seeing and the seen...
The seen is the worthy purpose of the day.
The seeing is the sight of mystery radiating –
blinding the intellect,
burning the heart,
enlightening
everything.

For the same seeing.
For the same seeing.
No less.
No less.

An Upsurge of Creativity

I have referred to this book as a collage – rather than as a linear, rational argument. My intention has been to create an inspirational resource that men can dip in and out of – not a document that needs to be read in the right direction – from beginning to end.

The argument of this book is ridiculously simple: if we decide to be radically honest with ourselves and our lives, we soon come to admit that, for each of us, there's nothing outside our own experience – but that we struggle to stay at the centre of it. If we then decide to self-educate in living from centre, our honesty leads us on into not-knowing (the experience of mystery and amazement), uniqueness (the experience of personal authority/power) and equality (the experience of love).

This personal transformation (at least for almost all of us), needs to be undertaken in the company of others, and in this end note I will say a few final words about brotherhood and community.

It is also an active, not a passive, or contemplative, undertaking. There might well be, perhaps even 'should' be, time for contemplation – but learning to live at the centre of our unique experience is a continuous, daily apprenticeship. We learn to ride a bike by riding a bike.

We observe how 'off centre', and 'out of ourselves' we tend to be – how contracted, how small. We observe how we non-stop manipulate others. We observe how dependent we are upon their approvals and affections, and thus, how disempowered. We observe how numb we are to the wonder of existing at all... And we begin to act differently. In fact, every smallest act changes. We come to love our bodies in a new way – as if we'd never noticed them before. Every object becomes a treasure – not to be hoarded, but handled with appreciation. We recognise others' right to their space, their pace, their own will. What we achieve becomes secondary, how we achieve primary.

This means every tiniest act is approached afresh. Old habits dissipate. We become creative again – like when we were babies! We see the world. We marvel. Tidying the kitchen becomes as creative an enterprise as writing an epic novel. We act and act, one act after another, day after day, week after week – continuously writing on the pages of time. The stuff of the world (things, feelings, thoughts...) become the raw material of ceaseless, inescapable, conscious creativity.

Simultaneously, our creativity reveals us to ourselves. We don't observe our shut-downness just the once, and choose to reside at centre from then on, forever after. We observe, we choose, we contract again, we choose again, we go absent, remember, choose, shock ourselves with our unconsciousness, our conceptual identifications, our all-pervading fear, our collection of addictions – and we choose again. This is what I mean when I say the path of honesty is a path of action.

I have considered some of the consequences of this upsurge of creativity: the revision of how we relate to the other animals (the question of factory farming), how we relate to 'the law' (the equal validity of civil obedience and disobedience, the question of war), how we relate intimately (social restructuring not confined by the couple-concept), and so on.

In this end note I want to stress three 'arenas of consequence': ecology, education and religion. But the 'Upsurge Of Creativity' that would inevitably arise from a mass-commitment to staying at the centre of our unique, individual experience would express itself in countless explorations....

The evolution of language is one I feel to be of supreme importance. I refer to the need for this at the beginning of this book, in the piece 'A Note On Subjectivity & Language'. In relation to this, I feel the E-Prime proposal (to do away with the verb 'to be'), perhaps, or something similar, needs serious, deep and wide consideration. How can we relate to life, and each other, from our subjective experience, if the language we are using is constantly framing our expression in the pretence to objectivity?

And going back to 'the other animals' for a moment: can we please end zoos?

Of course art – in its myriad recognised and unrecognised forms – will be alongside us if we do mass-commit to honesty... reflecting back to us the heartbreaking bravery and beauty of our commitment, while also mocking us with our own foolish pretentiousness (like the monkeys in the piece 'Monkeys Laughing, Birds On Our Shoulders').

And I'd like to add that science and art have been promoted to us (in modern, industrial culture), as being somehow in conflict: science is objective, art subjective, science fact, art fiction, and so on. I am not going to go into this here, but I do want to call upon the artistry of the scientifically minded. We need you! We need your technological inventiveness. Help us be less centrally dependent (disempowered). Give us technologies that empower us!

Another area that interests me is the solidarity of this 'pro-genderlessness' Men's Liberation Movement that I am proposing with the ongoing feminist agenda, and

with the struggles of people of all genders. And this extends, of course, into solidarity with every egalitarian agenda – from the racial, to the economic, to the dumping of our old people in ‘homes’.

But the list is endless. In this book I have approached the subject matter philosophically, psychologically, sociologically... but only superficially. I feel I am reviving an ancient enquiry in modern terms, and with a specific focus on men. But the elaboration and application of this reformulation – if it is to fulfil its potential, will be a matter of centuries...

Eco-Purpose

“Action speaks louder than words, but not nearly as often.”
- Mark Twain

Brothers – there is one primary purpose we now need to unite around: protecting and caring for our world. I mean the land, sea and sky; the animals, birds, fish and insects – and our own bodies. Everything else is secondary. However, if we actually manage to unite to protect and care for our world, everything else will get addressed along the way.

This is because we won’t be able to truly unite unless we truly feel united. In other words, true unity is more than establishing a co-operative world culture rather than a competitive one. It is more even than accords to end war. It means closing our eyes, feeling our feet on the earth, exhaling through our hearts, and saying:

"Yes, we all stand on the same Earth. In fact, as I stand here, the land I stand upon is connected with the land you stand upon. The land we stand upon is one. Standing upon, and ‘in’, this one Earth that gives us vegetables, rains upon us, breathes through our lungs, and frightens and delights us – we are all of this world. We are one people."

That would be unity! And then. Then. Then we could truly unite to protect and care for our world. We don’t need sustainable agriculture, we need loving agriculture. We don’t need safe cities, we need loving cities.

Men who could stay centred in their experience (at least some of the time :)), would be capable of uniting in this way – beyond any divisions influential people might try to interpose, for whatever motive. This is because such men would not be dissuaded from their own experience of love by the (however well argued) experience of others.

Brothers. This is my proposal: to unite to deepen in our unity. Let us unite in the name of beauty on this planet.

Let us unite in learning to live beautifully here.

A New Education System

*"You'll have a good, secure life when...
you pay the men and women who teach your children better than the politicians."
- Wilhelm Reich*

As I have said throughout this book – for me, the bigger plan, the long-term hope – the only realistic hope for our species on this planet – is our own self-education in all four modes, which will enable us to support the self-education of our children – by example. Because our real hope is our children.

I call on you, if you are an educator, to join with other educators and co-create new education systems structured around the four modes of experience. How can we, as we now do, not educate our children in the emotional mode? Is that not absurd? And how can we not educate them in the art and science of relating? Is that not absurd, too? Since the life we say we are preparing them for will be an emotional and relational rollercoaster – does such absurdity not provoke the question, "Well, what are we preparing them for then? What are we 'educating' them into? What is the real goal of our current so-called education system?"

Similarly – what kind of education offers nothing in the existential mode, when there can be no more important question than, "Who am I?" And religious education is not existential education. Nor is education in the rational mode about researching and representing information – it is about the practice of intellectual honesty. Even the education we offer in the physical mode is almost void. We teach sport! Is that it? When education in the physical mode could also be about how to make love, and plant tomatoes, weave cloth, and dance....

It is not unrealistic to conceive of a radically different education system, or systems. Education systems have not always been like the one we know now. They have evolved – from the epicedia of Ancient Greece, to the missionary schools of the Jesuits. Today, it seems to me, 'education' is a word we use to describe a system of streamlining young people for specialised placement on the conveyor belt of economic productivity. And that is not education – it is (young) people-consumption.

If we begin now, we could have new education systems in place within a decade –and within thirty or forty years we'd already have children being educated by teachers who themselves were educated in the new systems.

We need to form think tanks, and draw up four mode (at least) self-educational curricula, as well as pressure groups for educational reform, and/or the founding of new schools, colleges and universities.

This is the baseline of societal reform. Education at home, at kindergarten, school, etc. – this is where we either condition our children into conformity, the consequence of which is (at best) a fearful, obedient, dull civilisation – or offer them self-educational opportunities so that they can learn to navigate their experience with expertise, the consequence of which we do not yet know, as it is the radical insanity of our era that is eliciting such a radical rethink.

Have you seen the power in a baby’s eyes? Have you seen the freedom? Have you seen the love? How can we support them so that they meet the challenges and opportunities of this world being what they already are?

Beyond Interfaith: A Metareligion

*“If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?”
- Hillel the Elder*

In ‘To My Religious Brother’ I call on anyone who thinks, feels and acts within a religious worldview (Christianity, Islam, etc.), to unite with all other religious people in honesty (not-knowing, mystery), in belonging (faith, trust), and in equality (love) – to unite faith to faith, and to co-create a new global ‘metareligion’ – in most cases, I would hope, without having to abandon their existing religion.

This surely cannot be a betrayal of your religion! If you feel honesty, trust and love are a betrayal of your religion, I can only wonder what your religion must stand for.

But yes, perhaps you feel to follow this call would bring you into conflict with a tenet of dogma – with one or another officially unquestionable truth. But, brother, we are on the edge of species extinction – if not now, then when are you going to admit that you don’t know your holy book was written by God (The Absolute Truth), or dictated by God, or a/the revelation of God’s will? How could you know such a thing? Be humble, brother. Be honest. Listen to me, listen to your authorities – but then stand in the presence of your own innermost sense of eternity – and make your own deepest possible life-choice... regardless of whatever book you might have been conditioned to preference above all others.

As a race we have whipped ourselves up into a frenzy of glamourised, mechanised self-destruction. We are not just ‘biting the hand that feeds us’, but eating it. We swarm everywhere now, like the biblical plague of locusts. We have become the touch

of death. As Agent Smith says to Morpheus in *The Matrix*, "There is one other life form that behaves like the human species: a virus". Brother – are you choosing to be part of the swarm? Or has the time come to surrender your life to what you – you, and only you – feel to be deepest, truest, and most beautiful? Has the time come to unite with others (whatever their religious affiliation) who have the same depth of integrity, and depth of feeling, as your own ?

I call on you to bring loving kindness and understanding to the internal voices that scream for existential certainty and security, to any voices that might feel guilt, or fear, at ‘betraying’ your tradition, or that might fear loss of identity, or of community – and to any other voices in you that might be holding you back from committing to yourself.

I call particularly upon my brothers in positions of leadership within the religious traditions. Brothers – meet with your peers in other traditions, dare to go together out beyond the niceties of ‘interfaith’ conferences, dare to pioneer. I call upon you to envision and co-create a worldwide unity founded on honesty, a metareligion – within which each regional faith would retain its individuality, and also, as per my definition of a metafocus (see Glossary), be enriched by contributing to, and receiving from, the whole.

I call upon you to confess the dishonesties of dogma, to put aside all attachment to theological differences, all petty identity-squabbling – and in deference to the urgency of these treacherous times, to co-create a new global religion without authority/hierarchy, or dogma. I call on you to step up, and think big.

We are a species in a state of disturbance. But we didn’t always act this way – and we needn’t forever. The mindsets that move us now, and the structures that perpetuate them, were once imagination – if not unimaginable. There was a time on Earth when not one of the existing religions existed. I call upon your imagination, your intelligence, your caring, and your creativity. Let us manifest a global metareligion of unity-in-honesty to help usher us through the deafening death rattle of this insidiously glittering industrial age.

BROTHERHOOD

*"We must straighten our backs, and work for our freedom.
A man can't ride you unless your back is bent."
- Martin Luther King, Jr*

A Viral Proliferation Of Brotherhoods Of Self-Education & Purpose.

Can we travel the path of honesty alone? Of course we can. But travelling together, for most of us, is advantageous, if not essential. Why?

Firstly, there's the question of self-image. I might think I relate to everyone in loving equality – but how do my brothers feel I relate? I might feel I am 'over' that relationship – but what do my brothers see in my body posture, in the gaps between my words, in my eyes? I might feel I am just sad, but my brothers might feel that under that thin lid of sadness I am hiding an explosive fury. Alone there is no mirror. We can imagine whatever image we like. Travelling with my brothers, each one a mirror (as I am for each of them), I am surrounded by a variety of slightly different reflections – the net effect of which supports me in sensing how I am actually showing up in the world.

And although I can practice 'Honest Relating' in 50/50 (see 'Togetherness', and 'Self Educational Suggestions'), with anyone, anywhere – practicing with a brother who is himself practicing and then comparing notes ("Did we stay in our own experience? Did we merge or distance ourselves from each other? Did we both stay in our own authority? Did we get mind-identified? Did we latch on to judgements of self/other? Do we fear deep connection?" and so on), is not only a more textured experience, but it supports me in refining my capacity to really relate.

Entering brotherhood I exit isolation, and begin to sense both the uniqueness and the commonality of our experience. Witnessing my brothers' life journeys, being privy to their privacies, I intuit how they are passing through this world much as I am. Without compromising my individuality in any way, I open to our collectivity. I observe the similarity of our conditionings, and the similarity of our strategies to survive them. In empathic openness to my brothers, the sense of belonging – that is so crucial to my ability to remain rested in centre – becomes more and more of an undeniable, felt reality.

And if I travel alone, there is no one to hold me. And when I say 'hold' I mean both physically and emotionally. Sometimes we feel we just can't go on. Sometimes we need to collapse. Sometimes we need to sob without censor. And this utterly contradicts our indoctrination into masculinity – which is what we're in the group for in the first place – so great! It contradicts our conditioning in two ways: by violating the taboo on emotional expressiveness and vulnerability, and by violating the taboo on not-coping, and receiving.

And just as there are many advantages to practicing 50/50 with someone who understands the point of it, a brotherhood of honest men provides the appropriate setting for taboo transgression – in a way that a pub, say, does not. It is an ideal practice arena for shared self-education.

In offering us the opportunity to receive, it also offers us the opportunity to give – to care for each other. Another taboo transgression! Another blasphemy upon our masculinisation! But caring for each other – travelling together in fraternal love – offering each other our wisdom, offering each other practical help with jobs that need more than two hands... all further deepens our sense of belonging, and pries further open the creaky doors of our hearts.

We see how each brother engages with the ups and downs of the apparent fortunes and misfortunes of his work, his relationships, his health... We are inspired by one brother's moment of courage, learn from another brother's moment of cowardice – recognising ourselves in them all.

Over the years, our connection with each other thickens. We come to feel we walk down the street accompanied by an invisible tribe of brothers, that we no longer walk alone, that there are men who care for us, and for whom we care, who we could call upon, and for whom we would drop everything if need be.

There is also, usually, a certain 'no nonsense' feel to brotherhood – one that in no way conflicts with this mood of fraternal love. On the contrary: it is because that brother cares for me that he takes the risk to challenge me. It is because another brother is practicing speaking his truth without apology – even if it contradicts the group consensus – that he says what nobody was daring to say... landing the group in a deeper openness and intimacy. In essence, every brother is saying to every other brother: "Be all you are. Give all you have. Don't half-live your life! I am with you all the way!" Every brother is saying both: "Know that I am counting on you – that your presence in my life is important to me!", and, "I am walking alongside you. You can count on me!" This affirmative atmosphere is almost the opposite of the familiar, mutually-frustrating mood of male jostling and put-downs.

And then there is the question of united purpose – of meaningful action undertaken together for the welfare of the world. Not only does our collaboration open up untold possibilities, and our co-creativity enliven us all, but ‘in the doing’ all we have been practising is tested and strengthened.

By sharing a purpose we place ourselves in a situation in which we have to discuss, disagree, gather information and opinions, make group decisions, depend on each other, and go out into the unknown together.... Then, when one of us loses centre, gets contracted, and starts shouting at everyone (for example), this is not just seen – it is seen by brothers who themselves are working, each in their own way, to hold and flow in centre. The atmosphere is non-judgemental (we are all learning together). The other men (rather than judging) share their own experience while so-and-so was shouting at everyone, and become the mirror within which he can see himself, and choose the return to centre. We self-educate together on the adventure of shared purposeful action.

These are the kind of brotherhoods that I talk about in the introductory piece, ‘The Vision’ – brotherhoods of self-education and purpose. As I say there, my vision is of a ‘viral proliferation’ of such brotherhoods. I can imagine an incredible variety of styles of brotherhoods that could emerge if many (very different) men created brotherhoods – without anything being centralised or standardised. I can also imagine limitless possible ways in which they could connect, and inspire each other, and collaborate.

Brother – spark off a brotherhood! Talk to your friends. Use social media. Connect. Put it out there! Make it happen!

Establishing Group Cohesion

I’d like to offer a few suggestions for getting together with other men, and co-creating a brotherhood that will work. I have seen men gather to form brotherhoods, each say what he’s looking for, inevitable differences result in laborious debate, and, even if they do manage to agree to proceed, doing so with a shaky sense of togetherness, only a vague commitment to a united purpose, and little or no shared methodology (“How are we to structure our meetings? What do we do when we’re together? Is there leadership?”, and so on).

1. A Brotherhood Needs A Shared Vision

I would suggest that if you have been inspired by this book, and therefore want to connect with other men, that you be clear about the source of your inspiration, and

invite them to check it out for themselves. If you don't, and just say to your friends "I am thinking of starting a group for men who are interested in exploring what it really means to be a man" (for example), then each man will come along with his own ideas, ideals, needs and recommendations – and while cohesion is not impossible, the negotiation is going to be uphill.

Sometimes men say, "We just want to come together and respectfully share what we're going through, what's worrying us, or hurting us, or exciting us – we don't want a shared vision!". But that itself is a vision. In fact, it is a quite common vision, and I have known many groups that have gathered around it. Its value, I feel, is that it offers us as men (who have been conditioned into not-feeling), a space where we can articulate our feelings, and thus feel them more deeply, and be heard, and seen, and receive our brothers' empathy.

The problem with this format though is that, yes, men can share their feelings – and that might be enough for some men, and exactly what they need – but because there are no agreed working concepts, like subjectivity (own experience), honesty, centre/conditioning, contraction/expansion, and so on – and no agreed self-educational practices – there often comes a point at which men start to drop out.

Listening to each other speak, without any overarching group purpose (other than emotional expression), and without any stated, shared perspective on our contractions and expansions, can become tedious, and indulgent. One man shares what he's going through – in one sentence more identified with one contracted inner-character, in the next sentence with another – and the others sit, listen, and then say nothing – afraid of seeming judgemental or arrogant. Biting their tongues, so to speak, they are all in a state of disempowerment – and after a while, this becomes too uncomfortable, and they begin to leave.

On the other hand, if freedom, empowerment, and love were to be 'written into' a group's vision of itself, and the group was to cohere around self-educational practices that supported that vision – then we would suddenly have a brotherhood charged with transformative potency. The vision could evolve, the practices could evolve (how could they not?), but even that evolution would be guided by their initial, dynamic cohesion.

2. A Brotherhood Needs Shared Self-Educational Practices

In the end note on 'Self-Education' I make some 'self-educational suggestions'. They are only suggestions, but I would recommend using them as a starting point (otherwise each man tends to arrive at the group with his own suggestions, and egoic, theoretical debate can easily ensue – while you hardly know each other). I don't

believe the practices I have suggested are ‘the best’, and, as I just said, the group can evolve them – or co-create their own – but whatever a brotherhood decides, I would encourage it to include self-educational activities that:

- Encourage us to return to our own experience, and to speak and relate honestly from it.
- Nurture centre and trustful belonging (as part of the Earth, humanity, and the great mystery).
- Bring us awareness of our conditioning, and help us discriminate contraction and expansion.
- Develop our fluency in disidentifying from contraction, and identifying with
c e n t r e .
- Support us in living beyond superiority and inferiority – in equality.

There are so many ways to do all of this. They don’t have to be limited to new-agey, or therapeutic, or growth-work style activities (yoga, meditation, tai chi, expressive dance, and the likes) – they can be anything. You can make up your own! They can be wild, and outrageous. They can be soft and comforting. The crucial factor is the intention, not the form.

Finally, as I said in the previous end note – uniting in the creative execution of meaningful creativity (purpose), is itself a shared self-educational practice, on many levels. And as I have said throughout this book, I feel we are called to unified, loving action not only because it provides us with untold opportunities for our personal enquiries, but because we are in a state of collective emergency. Our utterly irrational, fact-mad culture is ransacking the Earth – and we are called to a massive, unified, global "enough!". And we are also called to propose, and explore, possible ways of living together beautifully on this Earth.

3. A Brotherhood Needs A Shared Structure

Finally, based on my many years of working with groups of men, I’d like to offer some structural suggestions. Needless to say, once again, these are suggestions, not rules!

1. Ideally, meet weekly. If this is not possible, meet fortnightly – but not less often than that. If you meet less often than that, I have found, the vibrancy of the last meeting has often dissipated. Also, should you (for example) agree to meet every three weeks, if I miss just one meeting, then when I next attend it’s six weeks since I last saw you all.

2. I believe that the groups that are the most potent are underpinned by strong commitment. You can't just 'drop in' when you're in the mood. This commitment can be to attend meetings 'come hell or high water' – or something like that! It can also be to attend regularly for, say, six months (after which men can go, and others, perhaps, can join).

It may not be appropriate to ask for this kind of commitment until you've all met each other, and all have a sense of the brotherhood's vision and intended modus operandi. But once that's clear, in my opinion, everyone's stated commitment creates an energy field that is strong, inspiring, and 'more than the sum of its parts'.

3. I recommend dividing each group gathering into a beginning, a middle, and an end. The idea of 'the beginning' is that it be a transitional time – a time to transit from whatever state of everyday consciousness we might be in, into a more present way of being – in order to be able to participate in 'the middle' (the main part of the meeting) with more awareness and integrity and compassion.

We often arrive frazzled by our train and car journeys, or jangled and fretting after a day staring at a computer screen, or operating some deafening machine. This beginning, or 'opening' as some men call it, enables us to collect ourselves in to ourselves, to re-attune to ourselves, to come down from our minds into our actual experience, to soften, to open... what a relief that can be!

In the opening phase I like to include (a) something physical (to help the descent from excessive mind-identification), (b) a centring practice (like conscious breathing), and (c) something to connect us (like the 50/50 practice) – since we often arrive feeling separate, and a connecting practice can help return us to our oneness.

What happens in the main section is, of course, for the group to decide. I have found that it often includes a go-around, a sharing circle – in which each man can speak uninterrupted for an allotted time (the exact time might depend on the size of the group). It might also include some work on a specific theme (anger, sexuality, fatherhood, masculinisation, spirituality, etc.). It might also include something related to that brotherhood's chosen activism – or perhaps that would be for a separate meeting.

Regarding the sharing circle: if there are, say, 30 men in the brotherhood (since each man will need at least five minutes to share, and $30 \times 5 = 150$, i.e. two and a half hours – which would be far too long to all be sitting listening), this can be done in sub-groups of, say, six – and each week everyone makes an effort to sit with men they haven't shared with before, or for a while.

Finally, I have always found that an ending, or ‘closing’, helps wrap up a meeting in a very satisfying way. It is another transitional phase – in which to stand united, acknowledge all that has been given and received during the gathering, perhaps express gratitude, and prepare ourselves to take all we have felt ‘out into the world’ (rather than leaving it behind in the group, so to speak).

4. Regarding leadership: there are no appointed leaders. There might be men whose articulate authenticity endows them with a natural authority – but this is felt, not appointed. However, because each meeting needs a degree of holding, and planning, I would suggest a different man facilitate each meeting – along the lines the group has already set in place. The facilitator of the following week can be decided during the closing. If men don’t feel ready to facilitate alone, they can be invited to co-facilitate with another brother.

5. I also recommend contact between meetings. By this I mean two things. Firstly, connecting formally with one or two brothers (face-to-face, by phone, by Skype...). And by ‘formally’ I mean not just socialising, but rather (for example), if the brotherhood is exploring a certain self-educational practice – each man sharing his own exploration of the practice. Then, afterwards, should you wish, you can socialise....

The other thing is to create a forum, or a WhatsApp group, or something similar – through which everyone can stay in touch. This, I find, is enormously supportive and empowering. You travel through the week with the group alongside you. They are there if you need them. You are there for them, should they need you. And all sorts of wisdom and pain and kindness and creativity gets shared.

6. There are, of course, a thousand subtleties to all of this, but the learning is in the doing – the ‘mistakes’ are the learning. So be sensitive, but be bold. Make it happen – and ask for outside help if you need it. The OneforOne project (explained in the last end note), is a co-op we have formed to help invigorate ‘the uprising of Man’ – and one of its functions is to offer just this kind of ‘outside’ support.

Footnote

Each of us must go it alone. My body is my body, my pleasure and pain my own. I cannot see out of your eyes. I can empathise, but I cannot feel your feelings. I can agree, but I cannot think your thoughts. I am not you. I cannot go through your death for you. But your courageous commitment to your aloneness emboldens me in mine. It is easier to walk alone next to you in yours. Your gravitas soberes me. Your humour unburdens me. Your compassion soothes my heart. Your clear intellect is the doctor of my mind. You and you and you and you are the brothers alongside whom I

walk – brothers who intoxicate and sober me, who persuade me astray then set me straight – pragmatic and ridiculously idealistic, irresponsible and devoted – brothers who mock my pomposity, brothers who ennoble me, brothers who serve me and who I am honoured to serve. Without brotherhood I could not walk alone

This does not mean that I can't be a heart-brother to my sisters, or to anyone, however they might define their bodies or their gender. Brotherhood is not about re-segregation, or reversion to any sort of limitation-by-gender. It is about co-creating a global network of radical-evolutionary, educated men who are ready to stand by each other as each one lets go of his self-deceptions, opens to not-knowing, and becomes the unique, gifted, powerful, vulnerable being he already is.

A CHATTY GLOSSARY

- **ALONENESS:** Although we are inseparably interwoven (in all modes) into the fabric of existence, and in that sense, one with everything – simultaneously, we see, hear, think, feel and experience only ever through our own faculties. At any given moment, there is no one on the planet having an identical experience of reality. In this sense, we are all always alone. (See: ‘The Vision’, ‘Self-Educational Suggestions’)

- **ARCHETYPE:** The idea of the Archetype is that there exist, beyond this world, energetic repositories – of which the energies of this world partake. So, for example, there exists somewhere a repository of ‘warrior energy’ – upon which the warrior draws, by which he is surcharged, and within whose sunshine he moves alongside all other warriors.

I do not use this term in the typical way. The typical way is to consider an Archetype a kind of otherworldly blueprint, or eternal essence, or ideal form, of something worldly. In this sense an Archetype is fixed. The Archetype of the King, say, is forever the great King in his majesty. I tend to see the Archetypes more flexibly. The King can be ill. As in the story of King Arthur. And the King can be restored - by us. (See: ‘The Archetype Of Man’, ‘An Uprising Of One’, ‘Nobody is Born Masculine Or Feminine’)

- **BELONGING/ONENESS:** A state of experiencing oneself as not existing in isolation, as being ‘part of’ (in all modes) – a state of trust. This has been key for me in my own strengthening of my capacity to stay in my own experience. The peace and trust of belonging create a sense of unhurried spaciousness in which the restlessness of our contractions – their urgencies, their emergencies, their panic, their loneliness, their self-judgements and self-hatreds, all of it – becomes less overwhelming and less spellbinding. (See: ‘Belonging’, ‘Earthed’, ‘Us & Them’)

- **BROTHERHOOD:** The bond between men that matures as they share their lives, but particularly, in the context of ‘The Uprising Of Man’, the bond produced by mutual support on the path of honesty. The fraternal love that emerges by journeying through life alongside each other in equality and respect. (See: ‘The Vision’, ‘Brother!’, ‘99.999% Pacifism’, ‘For Man & Not Against Non-Men’, ‘The Call to Unity’, ‘Meeting As Brothers’)

- **CENTRE:** The midpoint on the contraction/expansion axis, as well as the point of intersection of all modes of experiencing. The crucially important concept of a centrepoint of the psyche, of our experiencing. From here we can both manage our

contractions, flow through our experience, and open to expansion beyond our self-obsession. Centre is soft and flowing – not hard and fixed. (See: ‘Centre’, ‘Centre As Perfection’)

- **CHARACTER(S)**: I use this word in two senses. 1. To refer to our unique existential, rational, emotional, physical personality: “a character in the cast of humanity”, “the character I am”. 2. To refer, anthropomorphically, to the energetic clusters in the psyche, usually to the more contracted clusters: “the angry, blaming one is at loggerheads with the passive, grief-stricken one”. (See: ‘Path, Fists, Toes, Wings, etc.’, ‘Self-Educational Suggestions’)

- **CONDITIONING**: Culturally-specific inherited constructs (in all four modes), with which we tend to become identified – and thus distanced from the reality of our actual experience. To fight it feeds it. Gentle acceptance frees us from its grip. (See: ‘The Absolute Truth’, ‘Centre’, ‘Relationship As Path’, ‘Anti-Gay’)

- **CONTRACTION/EXPANSION AXIS**: A very simple ‘map’ – a straight line, in fact :) – on which we can plot our state of being (in all modes). Overlaid upon the map of the Four Modes it enables us to track our relationship with reality, and evaluate how receptive we are to the moment, or not. (See: ‘The Vision’, ‘The Dignity of Man’, ‘Belonging’, ‘Centre’, ‘Self Education’)

- **DEVELOPMENTAL /NON-DEVELOPMENTAL**: The developmental idea, i.e. that we can/should develop ourselves – thus ‘self-development’, and ‘growth work’, and so on – leads us into all sorts of philosophical trouble – not least of all, that there is an Absolute direction into which to develop. So, while I do not presume to know this, I do recognise the developmental element implicit in our learning to live more and more fluidly in centre. Finding centre is like learning to ride the bike – then where to go, or whether there is anywhere to go... that is up to each of us to decide for himself. (See: ‘Big Is Not Better’, ‘Centre’, ‘Path’, ‘The Red Pill’)

- **DIGNITY**: That which emerges as one connects with centre, with one’s sense of belonging, and knows what he is ready to die for. (See: ‘The Dignity of Man’, ‘Cosmic Stumpedness & The WMD’)

- **EMOTIONAL MODE**: The feeling faculty. The faculty that allows us to not only perceive reality (through the senses), but to feel it and be emotionally impacted by it. (See: ‘The Vision’, ‘Freedom’, ‘Self-Educational Suggestions’)

- **EQUALITY**: Nobody on Earth is better or worse because we are all unique, and uniques are incomparable. (Unless we imagine an external all-knowing, absolute standard – something along the lines of ‘the will of god’, by which to judge – and simultaneously endow ourselves with the capacity to be ‘all knowing; enough

ourselves to be able to judge, i.e. to also be 'gods'... which presents all sorts of problems when we disagree amongst ourselves!) (See: 'The Experience of Equality', 'Togetherness', 'Self-Educational Suggestions')

- **EXISTENTIAL MODE:** The faculty that allows us a more expanded experience of any situation (an experience of the gestalt, the wholeness, of any situation), as well as of its 'isness', its in-itselfness. This can perhaps best be expressed poetically – as a sense of time and space being suspended beyond time, in nowhere-ness. This can generate existential fear and/or trust. The alternative: when this mode is switched off, existence is excruciatingly empty. (See: 'The Vision', 'Living Beyond Definition', 'Freedom', 'Self-Educational Suggestions')

- **FEMININITY:** A culturally-relative, archetypal concept composed of a value-cluster that usually includes qualities such as gentleness, sensuality, emotionality (as against rationality, strength, intentionality), etc. It is impossible to separate 'femininity' from female/woman, so I would suggest it needs to be discarded if we want to live concept-free, including gender-free – or, at the very least, used with great care. (See: 'Not Feminine', 'Nobody Is Born Masculine (Or Feminine)', 'No To Mother Earth', 'It's A Boy', 'The History of Nipples', 'The Theatre's End')

- **FEMINSIM:** The impulse towards gender equality – ultimately, simply, towards equality – to the equality of the one human family. (See: 'A Men's Liberation Movement', 'Interested?', 'The Ashes Of Shame')

- **FOUR MODES OF EXPERIENCE:** A division of our experiencing into four modalities – as a way of being able to work with our experience. An artificial dividing of experience which in actuality is simultaneously unfolding in all modalities, and therefore none. This dividing is a rational tool to be used without investment in its ontological truth. It is provisional – not definitive, or exhaustive. (See: each of the four modes in this glossary)

- **FREEDOM:** A state of letting go-ness and loving trust into the felt-realisation that there is nothing outside one's own experience, that all concepts are (useful, necessary even, but...) ultimately security/survival concoctions. Life in the 'indefinable moment' – not without contractions, not in some sort of conceptual 'enlightenment', but in gratitude for being a miraculous part of this great miracle we call existence. (See: 'Ecoevolution', 'Freedom', 'A Style of Manhood', 'A Non-Religious Uprising', 'Sexuality, Relationships & The Reshaping Of Society', 'Honest Relating', 'The Couple & Community', 'Self-Educational Suggestions')

- **GREAT MYSTERY:** Everything! Opening in all modes we regain perception. Our own bodies are a mystery to us! And what are emotions? What are they in themselves? Some sort of subtle energy? A mystery! The same goes for thoughts.

What faculty larger than thought do we have to define thought?! I don't mean what they do – I mean what they are. What are they made of? Again – 'subtle energy'? Just another meaningless label – giving us security, perhaps, but telling us nothing. All is truly a mystery – indefinable and miraculous. (See: 'Brother!', 'Above the Law', 'Self-Educational Suggestions')

- **HONESTY:** By honesty I mean honesty-to-self – not rational honesty, or even moral honesty. I feel it would be presumptuous of me, as well as rather unworldly, to suggest 'we all need to tell everyone everything'. No – I mean admitting to ourselves what we know and don't know, how we judge, what we sense, how we feel, what we intuit, how we behave, etc. This honesty is the compass, the ultimate inner reference. I don't know if there is 'a path' through this existence, but I do believe there is a way to walk – which is what I mean by the 'path of honesty'. Honesty is the commitment to stand naked-before- life. It is the supreme challenge. All realisation (in all modes) is evoked by honesty. (See: 'The Vision', 'The Absolute Truth', 'The Big Honesty', 'In Honesty I Relate', 'To My Religious Brother', 'Not Easy', 'Self-Educational Suggestions')

-**HONEST RELATING:** 'Self-love expressed'. In its fullness: both people remaining a hundred per cent interested in themselves, while at the same time not resisting in any way the impact on them of the other. It is, of course, a delight to meet all sorts of people in this way! (See: 'In Honesty I Relate', 'Honest Relating', 'The Couple & Community', 'Togethered', 'The Science Of Relating', 'Self-Educational Suggestions')

- **I (ME, SELF, MYSELF):** The ultimate provisional truth? What is it? That I exist! Do I? The world is in flux, constantly. None of it is within my control. This includes not only my seeing, my feeling, my thinking and so on, but also my very sense of existing. (Which I didn't choose, nor understand.) Is my sense of self-consciousness, my sense of myself, an illusion (as some spiritualists say)? Is it 'an epiphenomenon of our neurology' (as some scientists say)? I don't know! (And neither do they!). But I do experience myself as existing – 'I experience, therefore I am' – and so I accept it as a provisional truth, a working hypothesis. I am me. I am not you. Ultimately we might be one, but right now I am me. And, as I have said elsewhere: what happens on the other side of centre on the contraction/expansion axis is not the subject of this book, or, to be frank, the most urgent question facing humanity! (See: 'Centre', 'Self-Educational Suggestions')

- **IDENTIFICATION:** In contraction into, for example, hatred, one becomes identified with that part of one's personality (inner-character). One believes, for whatever duration, that that is who/what one is – and acts-out from that character. This is often underlain by a conceptual identification (believing oneself to be one or other limitedly defined self). By cultivation of centre, one's identifications loosen up,

and one becomes more steadily, flowingly identified as centre. (See: 'Centre', 'Path', 'Nor Feminine', 'Self-Educational Suggestions')

- **LOVE:** Love between people is the felt-experience of equality. It is the resonance between two points of freedom and power. Without freedom and power there is no love, only mutual manipulation. Love of life (and death) swells as we experience belonging – to the Earth, the ancestral flow of the generations, and to the 'Great Mystery' itself. (See: 'Ecoevolution', 'The Vision', 'Brother!', 'Greatness', 'The Red Pill', 'Not Easy', 'Honest Relating, The Couple & Community', 'Sister, Breast Implants Aren't Cool At All')

- **MAN(HOOD):** 'Natural and nurturing' influences combine to give us the label 'man'. There is a biological component (chromosomes, penis, etc.), and a cultural component (gender conditioning, socialisation). The particular flavour of one's 'masculine' gender conditioning will depend on the nature and state of one's culture's 'Archetype of Man'. If we acknowledge the presence of both influences (and such acknowledgment is implicit in, for example, culture acceptance of gender transitioning, or in traditional initiation rites into manhood), then it is quite possible, as the saying goes, that "she is more of a man than he".

This book is addressed to those of us who have a penis. It is also addressed to anyone who is, to whatever extent, identified with the Archetype of Man – that is to say, with masculine conditioning (regardless of biology). If you have a penis, this book is addressed to you. If you experience yourself as a man/masculine – this book is also addressed to you. The first is a biologically-based identification as man, the second is more emotional/existential. In short – this book is addressed to anyone who identifies as a man (and even: to any part of anyone that feels itself to be male). (See: 'The Dignity of Man', 'A Style Of Manhood', 'The Archetype of Man', 'Man, You Are Free!', 'The History of Nipples', 'The Theatre's End')

- **MASCULINITY:** An archetypal concept made up of a value-cluster that varies from culture to culture (and within cultures), but that often includes qualities such as strength, courage, solidity, detachment, rationality (as against emotionality), etc. Because it is near-impossible to separate man/male from masculinity, this is a term to be used with great care – comments like, "Oh, John, you were so masterful in that situation, so masculine!" reinforce the doctrine that men should be masterful. (See: 'A Men's Liberation Movement', 'Nor Feminine', 'Nobody Is Born Masculine (Or Feminine)', 'A Style of Manhood', 'Greatness', 'It's A Boy', 'Life Purpose', 'The History of Nipples', 'The Theatre's End')

- **METAFOCUS:** A reality-focus with which we can align our lives without any loss of personal authority or sacrifice of existing individual focus, but through which our individual focus is affirmed and enhanced, and through which we can experience a

sense of expansion and empowerment by standing in unity with others who also choose to align with the same reality-focus. (See: ‘A Men’s Liberation Movement’, ‘Metafocus’)

- **NOT-KNOWING:** The first realisation on the path of honesty as one moves towards the centred state of humility and (non-religious) reverence. Can we know anything absolutely? We don’t know! (See: ‘The Vision’, ‘Living Beyond Definition’, ‘The Absolute Truth’, ‘The Unexpected Life’, ‘Collective Constipation’, ‘Ceiling Dwellers’)

- **PATRIARCHY:** The cultural mode based on male dominance. This mode was finally thrown into disarray by the critique of feminism in the twentieth century, but millennial indoctrinations, and the social structures they spawn, don’t dissolve overnight. We can expect centuries more of the death rattle of patriarchal beliefs, values, behaviours and societal structures. The Uprising of Man is a proposal as to how as men we might rise from the rubble of discredited patriarchal conditioning and reconfigure our own sense of what it means, to us, to be men. (See: ‘A Men’s Liberation Movement’, ‘Honest Relating, The Couple & Community’)

- **PHYSICAL MODE:** By the ‘physical mode’ I don’t only mean our bodily experience. It is our bodily experience, but it is not just what’s going on inside our bodies, or in our immediate surroundings. It is the weather, the birds, the centuries of buildings being built then demolished, our tables and chairs, our plates and mugs... It is the entire physical experience – at the centre of which we stand, and of which we are part. (See: ‘The Vision’, ‘Freedom’, ‘Self-Educational Suggestions’)

- **PURPOSE:** I have defined purpose a couple of times in this book – as “the expression of our uniqueness in service of existence”, and also as “creativity backed (or charged) by meaning”. (See: ‘The Vision’, ‘Life Purpose’, ‘Action’)

- **RATIONAL MODE:** The mode of the mind. This mode is the co-ordinator of the other three modes. If we become too identified (as is, by and large, absolutely everyone in the globalising culture), then we live ‘life by numbers’, life in black and white, life as a series of tasks – as something not to be lived, but to be survived. This can be ‘corrected’ (i.e. brought more into balance) by giving more attention to the physical, emotional and existential modes. (See: ‘The Vision’, ‘Freedom’, ‘Self-Educational Suggestions’)

- **(R)EVOLUTION:** Evolution with an “r” for radical’ edge. In different drafts of this book there was more revolution; in others, more evolution. In the end, as you can see, I have opted for both! On the one hand I want to sound the call to revolution: we need to grab the steering wheel of the careening juggernaut of our downhill civilisation – and turn it around. On the other, as per the Gandhi-attributed

catchphrase 'be the change' – unless we ourselves can drive well, then what is the point of grabbing the wheel? We ourselves need education. And that is gradual – evolutionary. Not only that, but my sense is that the task upon us is multi-generational. (See: 'You Are A Product', 'Scribbled on Serviettes: Global Civil Disobedience', 'Above the Law', '99.999% Pacifism', 'Sexuality, Relationships & The Reshaping Of Society')

– **SELF-EDUCATION:** Practices one can take upon oneself in order to explore concepts experientially. Conventional education is extremely hierarchical – teacher knows, student doesn't. That's why he (the teacher) is there – so that we can learn from him. By putting the word 'self-' at the front I mean to imply an adjustment to this teacher-student power balance – to put the accent not on learning-from (someone outside of oneself), but on exploring one's own thoughts, feelings, intuitions, etc. about what that person is presenting. Of course, one is guiding the process and the other is being guided, but in self-education the so-called 'teacher' and so-called 'student' do this as equals. (See: End Note on 'Self-Education', 'For Men & Not Against Non-Men')

-**UNIQUENESS:** That we are all unique (in the physical mode), would be corroborated by fingerprints, etc. Each of us is also a unique emotional and rational configuration, and has a unique relationship with reality: nobody ever stands exactly where you stand, or sees or feels exactly what you see and feel (or ever has, or ever will). Everything we are, everything we think, feel and do, therefore, is unique. (See: 'A Men's Liberation Movement', 'The Vision', 'Earthed', 'To My Religious Brother', 'Life Purpose', 'Honest Relating, The Couple & Community')

PEOPLE TO MEET

I have chosen not to include a bibliography, but rather to name some people I recommend getting to know. I suggest checking them out online. There's something about all of them on YouTube, to start with.... Then let your curiosity take you where it will...

1. Alan Watts. There are few teachers within the existential mode with whom I find myself completely resonant. I find Alan Watts erudite, down to earth, congruent, and very funny. Best book? For me: *The Watercourse Way*.

2. Barry Long. I find Barry Long a mixed bag of deep existential realisation and fantastical notions. Although a lot of what he says about sex I find odd, it is also lucid. He is an extreme teacher with an extreme perspective, and I value his contribution. Best book? For me: *Making Love*.

3. Eckhart Tolle is a must for those who are setting out on their existential enquiry. He is an ABC man. Many people have said to me he's not very sexy, or gutsy, or political. Perhaps. But he is what he is, and the simplicity of his teaching, I feel, is its power. Best book? For me: *The Power of Now*.

4. Richard Tarnas is a philosopher. I don't see eye to eye with him on everything, particularly his use of the terms masculine/feminine, but his book *The Passion of the Western Mind* is a tour de force – a marvellous, accessible-yet-learned telling of the evolution of western philosophy.

5. Jay Griffiths. I particularly want to recommend her book *Wild: An Elemental Journey*, and the journey it will almost certainly take you on of questioning our culture's (and your own) relationship with our most beautiful, beloved Earth.

6. Leonard Cohen. I love Leonard Cohen's lyrics. I recommend him, above all, as a poet. I find him profound, raw and flawed, and delightfully ironic. Best lyrics on which album? For me: *Ten New Songs*.

7. Terrance McKenna. I do not use the word 'genius' lightly, but I would for this man. I experience his every spontaneous sentence as sparkling with insight, sense and humour. A lot of what he says is 'out of the box', but his insistence, when all is said and done, on 'the primacy of direct experience' I find tremendously inspiring. No best book, but lots of brilliant talks on YouTube.

8. Noam Chomsky. Rarely do I hear values like liberty and equality taken to their logical, political conclusion with such calm intelligence – and the man is a library! He is to me in the political field what Alan Watts is in the existential. Best book(s)? For me: *Understanding Power, and Necessary Illusions – Thought Control in Democratic Societies.*

9. George Monbiot. Another generation of activist from Noam Chomsky – a continuation of the same morally mature, incisive intelligence. A realistic-idealistic political commentator who loves the natural world, and community. He'd have my vote! There's a selection of his articles on his website.

10. Arnold & Amy Mindell. I particularly value their concept and application of what they call 'Deep Democracy' – the introduction of presence and self-awareness into the arena of community, national and international conflict. Here is how to do politics! Best book? For me: *Sitting in the Fire.*

11. Paul Hawken. As an eco-activist/educator, I find his latest project, *Drawdown* interesting, but include him here for his book *Blessed Unrest* which bears testimony to the global groundswell of soulful people devoting their lives to soulful endeavours – and 'the one heart', the singular intention, that beats within them all. Full title: *Blessed Unrest – How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World.*

12. Mary Oliver. I find Mary Oliver's poetry magnificently ordinary, gloriously simple. Through her I feel I look with 'the eye of love' upon the Earth. Have a look through her *New and Selected Poems (Volumes 1 & 2).*

13. Kahlil Gibran. Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* is mystical poetry. This is eloquent, bible-free, biblical authority of a most profound nature.

14. Jalaluddin Rumi. Another mystic, another poet – but with a completely different tone. The translations of Coleman Barks have made him available to the modern, English speaking world. Wry, perceptive, love-sick, uncompromising devotion. Best book? For me: *The Essential Rumi.*

15. Jill Bolte Taylor. The neuroscientist who, while having a stroke observed "this is my subject – now I can study it from the inside!" I include her here for what, for me, are her fascinating experiences of, and observations on, the nature of perception. Best book? For me: *A Stroke of Insight.*

16. Rob Hopkins & Naresh Giangrande. These two men kick-started the Transition Town Movement. I am not sure about their focus on peak oil, but the concept of co-creating local, community ecological and economic resilience I feel is a

wonderful contribution to the question of how to relax our dependence on distant, disempowering, centralised government. Best book? *The Transition Handbook*.

17. Rupert Sheldrake. So many scientists, it seems, are not that interested in science – that is to say, in scrupulously honest investigation – as per the Sherlock Holmes maxim: “Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth”. Scientists are the priesthood of the modern era, holding down the era’s dogmas – so to free up evolutionary possibility we need men like Rupert Sheldrake to dislodge them into a deeper honesty. Best book? For me: *The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry*.

18. Robert Anton Wilson. For me, a hilariously brilliant, anarchic intellectual – presenting that rare commodity: honesty with wit, love and insight. I don’t know what to recommend – the fiction, the non-fiction, both. All is iconoclastic and illuminating.

19. Vandana Shiva. A passionate and brilliant activist working at the most essential level: food and water. Some of the things she says about men and women irk me, but I feel her work on biodiversity, corporate genetic modification, etc., and above all, ‘seed banks’, goes to the heart of re-empowering local communities – not only with the capacity to self-sustain, but with kindness and dignity. Best book? For me: *Making Peace with the Earth*.

20. I would also like to recommend investigating the so-called ‘transcendentalists’, particularly **Thoreau**, **Emerson** and **Whitman** – for their homage to the individual, and their faith in nature. Best books/essays? For me: Thoreau’s *Essay on Civil Disobedience*, Emerson’s *Self-Reliance*, Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*.

21. Finally, no list of mine would be complete without a nod in the direction of that old friend of mine, the ‘**Mythopoetic Men’s Movement**’. Many soulful books come to mind: Robert Bly’s *Iron John*, Michael Meade’s *The Water of Life*, Malidoma Somé’s *Ritual: Power, Healing & Community*, and Sam Keen’s *Fire in the Belly*, and also Robert Bly, James Hillman and Michael Meade’s inspiring poetry collection *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: Poems for Men*.

ABOUT ME: THE ONGOING UPRISING OF MARK

All writing, in fact all creativity, is autobiographical. It might not be about oneself, in terms of content, but the values it upholds, and the tone with which it upholds them, are like a trail the artist leaves, a signature in time that will echo on after their death, for as long it is felt to be of value.

Seen in this way, this book could also be entitled, 'The Uprising of Mark'.

Born in London into a post-second world war Jewish family, I soon believed I was Jewish. My penis was clipped, conditional affection was rained upon me, and I was nudged towards the success, and therefore security, it was self-evident every Jew required.

But 'you are Jewish', although ancestrally correct, didn't hit the existential spot. Nor did the possibility of economic success ignite my ambition. At 17 I screamed "stop!" and, almost overnight, replaced my cosy, suburban bedroom, my luxury and my comfy mediocrity, with the intoxicated, directionless quest of a young, idealistic, would-be hippy.

Seven years, many countries, many nights under the stars, and much marijuana later, I met a bald man in orange robes who told me matter of factly, "If you want to know The Absolute Truth, the only way is to chant the Hare Krishna mantra. If you are sincere you will at least give it a try." I had a pretty good crack at it. Ten years later, I emerged spiritually bedraggled, emotionally exhausted, as embodied as a ghost, and as enlightened as a smiling skull.

I needed healing, or so I thought. And so began the next fiasco – the crowning fiasco of my journey to myself – my immersion in new age syncretism. I put on the colourful outfit, ate the health foods, found evidence for homeopathy and kinesiology and non-violent communication, took on the vocabulary, became emotionally expressive, and for almost thirty years lived convinced of my identity number four.

From 'jewished' child, to dazed hippy, to cult monk, to waffling new age wise man – I now somehow managed to fabricate a fanatical, perfectionist understanding of gender and relationships; and teach it, and write books about it, and finally, be struck down by it. More accurately, I was struck down by my own conceit and pretension.

(I speak briefly about those books in the next end note, 'My Previous Work'.)

Today I am onto Mark, version five! He's the one who's written this book! Oh dear... :) Should this autobiography have impressed you with my qualifications? Or at least with authority acquired by virtue of some near death experience, or Bodhisattvic epiphany? Should it have been a tale of incremental awakening – or of medals and honours and applause – rather than a trail of wrong turns and dead ends?

This, brother, is my story – the story of a man in a dark room, getting bashed and bruised, desperate for the door, for the answer, for the garden path – getting nowhere. This image reminds me of Rumi's poem:

"I have lived on the lip of insanity,
wanting to know reasons,
knocking on a door.

It opens. I've been knocking
from the inside".

I wonder who me number six will be!

MY PREVIOUS WORK

I have written three previous books. The first one, *Sex, Spirit and Community*, was more intellectual than experienced, but there's some beautiful and some solid stuff in there.

The second and third books, *Intimate Freedom* (subtitled 'The Masculine, The Feminine and Social Transformation'), and its companion volume, *A Call to the Revolution of the Heart* (which had the strapline 'the feminine must not compromise, and the masculine must find the dignity to look into the feminine mirror'), were written in another phase of my life.

In both books I see a vague, limping, hypothetical sense of 'the masculine', and of the worthiness of men, and a profound, resounding adulation of 'the feminine' – of the heartfelt, erotic, mystical glory of woman. The subtext I read is of man – ashamed and disempowered – working on becoming 'good' by letting himself be guided by woman – back to Gaia, to paradise on Earth, to a pre-patriarchal, matriarchal world resplendent with feminine (i.e. womanly) values. Woman is seen as salvation – she through whom man can connect with his heart again – she through whom he can be returned from empty-doing to the fullness of being. Her rôle is to guide. His to be guided.

I feel both books over-encourage male identification with the patriarchal inheritance – burdening men with its weight, and an almost inescapably negative self-image – thus being counterproductive to the liberation of men from that inheritance, as well as encouraging of inflation in women.

More fundamentally, I now believe the imposition of 'the masculine' upon man, and 'the feminine' upon woman, is an intrinsic error that leads to a dangerously split psyche (in us all), and therefore, to a civilisation led by the psychologically split. In fact, I now feel these two books' implicit and explicit, historico-archetypal, binary gendering is not only unhelpful, but actually obstructive of both our unique individual explorations, and our search for new social structures. Clearly, I am a strong critic of these two books. Nevertheless, at the same time, I want to add, I feel there's depth in them, courage, sincerity, and beauty. They are expressions of a phase of my own evolution, for which I am thankful – but I cannot recommend them.

The three previous books, countless articles, interviews, workshops, and so on, have all served to bring me here, today, to the opinion that there is probably little as important for the evolution of civilisation, and the guardianship of our planet, as men finding their self-worth. That is what this book is about.

