

Notes on Effectiveness of the Headless Experiments—Why the variable outcomes? August 2008

The Original Enquiry

The experiments are not everybody's cup of tea and I am frequently reminded that even well disposed people who share my interest in these matters do not attach the same degree of importance to the Harding experiments as I do. Following a recent meeting, I was talking to Shane Keher about this and he suggested a workshop of a somewhat different kind, one in which we could explore more carefully and try to get to the bottom of what gives rise to this difference in response. The aim would be to address both sides of the issue, not to impose the affirmative position on the negative view or vice-versa, but to explore in a way that might help representatives of both sides. At the same meeting, Beryl lent me book by Alan Watts. I picked it up after everyone had gone home and the second paragraph of the opening chapter provided a commentary on the transition from observer to participant, the principal consequence of the experiments, which we had talked about at the meeting:

One ordinarily feels that one is a separate individual in confrontation with a world that is foreign to one's self, that is "not me". In the mystical kind of experience, though, that separate individual finds itself to be one and the same nature or identity as the outside world. In other words, the individual suddenly no longer feels like a stranger in the world; rather, the external world feels as if it were his or her own body.

This is relevant to the question of effectiveness as Watts seemed to be a distinguished representative of people who have an intuitive grasp of what the experiments point to but did not appreciate their effectiveness in delivering what he eloquently expresses in the above quotation. It has been suggested I make too much of this question, people either get it or they don't, what's the fuss? Well, in thinking about an answer I realized that my opening statement about it not being everybody's cup of tea is quite the opposite of what I believe to be the case. So, why do some drink and others refuse?

The Responses:

The first responses came back in April-May 2008 and are included here. I expect further contributions and invite feedback from NOWletter readers. Future contributions will be added as updates to the archive copy on the website.

Anne Seward (Response 1)

My response arises from analogous situations I have encountered occasionally when I have been enthusing about something in the interests of improving someone else's physical health, and having that person respond with a certain lack of interest if not outright rejection of my suggestion(s).

Sometimes I have experienced disappointment and genuine puzzlement, being convinced that whatever it is I have discovered to be valuable for me is at least worth the person themselves trying. After all, *it makes so much sense!* Alas (though I'm sure not so in the long run), one's own absolute conviction may not have the effect one expects, at which point awareness of the essential dignity and uniqueness of the person ideally comes into play. In such a case recently I noticed my disappointment was a reflection of my investment in ending the other person's suffering (the kind of insight only disinterested spiritual awareness affords). I realised that what needed healing first and foremost was my own identification with their dis-ease – my own suffering regarding it.

I have also found myself on the other end of the equation, rejecting the suggestion of someone else's cure for physical problems I was experiencing, which presents a different kind of opportunity for spiritually creative engagement. For example, my sister was trying to share a healing strategy which is not at all my style. I had just noticed the temptation to cast aspersions on the route she was suggesting (which simply doesn't make sense – *to me*) when suddenly, suspension of knowing anything at all, and respect for everything just as it was presenting itself replaced the reason-based focus I had adopted – and what do you know? Reason was immediately enabled to play a useful part in restoring communication.

I suppose this is just saying that unconscious motives distort things whatever the context.

An unintentionally apposite remark from my sister on another occasion when we were discussing different 'cures' would seem to sum up both aspects of the subject: "Nothing suits everyone"!

Anne Seward (Response 2)

A few more thoughts on the current topic: Alan says in his notes "..... I realized that my opening statement about (the experiments) not being everyone's cup of tea is quite the opposite of what I believe to be the case." This expresses something that is true of me also but in here somewhere I think may be a confusion of levels.

This that I AM is indeed "everyone's cup of tea" in the sense there is only One in reality, but the way in which the workshop seeks to direct attention to this One involves human levels of communication: the adoption of certain angles and interpretations (out of any number of possibilities), appeals to truth, etc., etc.. Above all, it involves "Seeing", a concept inseparable from the act so long as this human (necessarily conceptual) context is playing its part. (Try Seeing now without seeing.....) Our empirical approach may trap people into agreeing but does not thereby ensure they are ready to release the facts which any particular experiment highlights along with every other thought and drop into free-fall.

It seems to me, as an occasional workshop facilitator, that that final step is not God's to take. Now there's a surprise! What I mean is, "I" have created free and self-willed individuals and have to live with that. I must honour my creations for I discover in the end they will not be manipulated however brilliant or direct or obvious or contemporary or unarguable my presentation.

To return to your metaphor Alan: cups all have their shapely limitations, there being many different types for many different kinds of people. As my sister might have said, only the tea itSelf suits every One.

Art Ticknor

This is not a response to my enquiry but an extract from the synchronous appearance of an article by Art in the most recent TAT Forum online magazine. The full article, *Why Do Seekers of Truth Fail?*, can be read at <http://tatfoundation.org/forum2008-04.htm>, and the answers Art provide as follows:

1. Failure to feel their deepest desire consciously. (We all feel it, but we're afraid of the implications, so we distract ourselves from it.)
2. Failure to find and work with a teacher. (It isn't absolutely necessary to find a self-realized teacher, but it's immensely helpful. The Guru is always with us, but many of us fail to recognize him when he appears. Ramana Maharshi related a humorous story about this condition from the Ribhu Gita about the sage Ribhu and his disciple Nidagha that you can find on the Internet and is well worth reading.)
3. Failure to find and work with fellow seekers.

The point about joining with others echoes Douglas's oft repeated advice. In his article, Art points to success of the collective enquiry pursued at the Richard Rose inspired TAT Foundation some of whose members have visited Douglas at Nacton and are, consequently, very well disposed to the Headless way.

On receiving the first draft of the survey Art replied:

I think this is a good project you're working on. We end up with a broader perspective when we attempt to understand the other fellow ... the ultimate goal of which is to love our neighbor as our self.

As one of the contributors mentioned, once something becomes obvious to us it's often hard to put ourselves back in the "before" shoes. And as with something like algebra, some people get the concept of $x = \textit{the unknown}$ the first time they hear about it, others struggle for a long while before they get the aha! experience, and others never do catch on.

There's a natural resistance to seeing the truth about the self built into the mental structure, and the unfolding of the resistance is different for each person. The teacher or the friend has to keep trying to stumble on what may help. I'm sure that's why Douglas continued coming up with new variations on the look-for-yourself exercises. Not knowing the self results from a state of hypnosis ... and his exercises employ an element of counter-suggestion. (He knew that and said as much to me during one of my visits with him; his words were along the lines of "I'm not against using hypnosis to overcome hypnosis.") Recognizing our true state of being is an awakening from hypnotic sleep.

Michael Ireland

Hi Alan, Thank you for the email. I am not sure how clear I am on what you are asking and I am more than happy to help but I am not sure I will be able to provide you with much. For example, the relevance of Headlessness to my life and professional activities is as one prong in a multiple-pronged approach to awakening and dissolving the illusion of self/other. I love the headless experiments because they are so simple and straight forward. I use them as a top-up or as to supplement to my daily practice of Shikantaza meditation and atma-vicharya practices. I also use Ghempo Roshi's Big Mind for this but less frequently.

I guess the question you are asking in your paper is drilling down to the phenomenological core of the practice. It poses the question: what is the immediate and ongoing experiential and phenomenological effect of the practices? This question is fundamental to any medical/psychosocial/spiritual practice and speaks to the core of their efficacy and effectiveness for achieving the desired/stated goal. However, this question is more commonly asked in medical, pharmacological and psychological research and is less common in spiritual circles. I guess this is most likely due to do a fundamental (and often times appropriate) scepticism of the dogma of the scientific method and also due to a lack of resources to carry out the necessary research to answer this question.

As you have observed, the impact of the experiments differs markedly between people. This is a given no matter what you are looking at. If there is one thing you can be certain of in this world it is that different people will have different responses to almost any physical, psychological, or spiritual stimulus. People vary on almost everything possible dimension in life and particularly in clinical

practices (i.e., the effect of drugs like alcohol, coffee, and other chemicals – the bane of pharmacological research, the effect of psychotherapy and meditation – the bane of psychological research, the list is endless).

So the second question is: what accounts for the variance in response to the first question? The answer to this is more complex. There are likely multiple interacting variables that can account for this variance. You have listed a large number of possible variables that could account for the varying response of people to the experiments (prior experience, attitude, expectations, level of experience, etc). And I guess the task is to attempt to explore and gather reliable evidence on these variables and their level of influence. It sounds like a very interesting topic and quite related to my PhD work on meditation.

Richard Lang

Hi Alan, It's a bit of a mystery to me why some people go for Seeing and others don't. Whenever I try and guess if someone will get turned on by Seeing, say in a workshop, I'm usually proved wrong.

I don't think any amount of argument, persuasion, reason, good sense... will interest someone who is not interested. It will just put them more off.

I'm reminded of something Douglas once said to me - you can't talk people's heads off, you can only love them off.

Alan to Richard.

Dear Richard, Yes, it is a mystery. I know I have a bee in my bonnet about it and I am aware of the danger of antagonising people with my enthusiasm. However, there are types who intuit the significance without letting it happen for one reason or other and they, the well disposed but mystified, are my concern. I usually think I haven't been clear in leading the experiment or maybe talked too much. Douglas's comment is particularly interesting as I have recently been talking to a Canberra poet who agreed to me posting an article he wrote about Traherne on the website. He quoted a poem Judith Wright wrote about Traherne:

...the man who knew
how simply truth may come:
who saw the depth of darkness
shake, part and move,
and from death's centre the light's ladder
go up from love to Love.
("Reading Thomas Traherne")

The shift from lower case to upper case is particularly relevant to us I think. That is, if we can talk of third person love as lower case and first person love as upper case, then it is not so much a matter of anyone getting it but of IT embracing them.

Robert Penny

Robert replied by pointing out that Douglas has addressed my questions comprehensively in his writings and referred me in particular to Section 4 of Chapter 4 in *On Having No Head*. I take the point and the issue is very comprehensively dealt with by Douglas but, as Robert realizes, this exercise is a "*what sayest thou!*" event. (George Fox's famous challenge when castigating a congregation for constantly quoting the scriptures instead of seeing and saying for themselves.) I found it a refreshing experience to go back to Douglas again even though his eloquent coverage of the question made me wonder for a moment or two whether this enterprise is really necessary. (But only for a moment!)

Sam Blight (message 1)

Hi Alan, That an excellent wrap on the most common "objections" to Seeing and accords strongly with my own experience in attempting (and occasionally succeeding) in sharing it.

I would add one more factor that I've come across that can be a serious impediment and that is a lack of genuine curiosity about Who one really is. The experiments seem to only "work" in a deep and useful way in the context of real enquiry. Whether or not the its subject is formulated consciously as "who am I really?", the enquiry in some form seems to be a prerequisite. I notice in several of the presentations on video by Douglas I've seen that he tackles this issue up front: ie, "Why should I be interested in who I really am?" He generally goes on to list a few reasons towards invoking a sense of (at least) curiosity about it in the audience.

It's important to note that seeing "Who am I?" as a kind of "technique" or *means* to enlightenment also misses the point. One actually has to want to know in a fairly bad way. People can be quite keen to "get enlightened" (I know I was) without realising that being "unenlightened" is nothing more than mistaking what you look like for what you are. There's a current crop of excellent and popular teachers including Tolle, Adyashanti, Byron Katie and Gangaji who all place this identity issue squarely at the heart of their teaching so hopefully this is helping to increase the general susceptibility to noticing the Bleeding Obvious. Cheers, Sam

Sam Blight (message 2)

Hi Alan, Thanks for including me in the loop. It really is important to take Seeing (and the sharing of it) and run with it for ourselves in my view. A very important part of that is looking at how to make more effective and inclusive the marvelous and unique means of sharing Seeing that we've inherited from Douglas and that in turn must entail going into why the Experiments often *don't* "work".

One factor that can make this difficult for us for whom the penny is dropping is the *obviousness* of Seeing once it's noticed. It seems really hard, post wake-up (or whatever you want to call it) to remember just how impenetrable we made the whole matter prior to noticing What we're looking out of as well as what we're looking at. As Adyashanti often points out, enlightenment is no big deal and is seen as quite inevitable once "got" -- it's the protracted period of unenlightenment that's impressive. How did we manage it?

Incidentally I strongly agree with you about the usefulness of Seeing in conjunction with other approaches to Self-Realisation. While the Headless Way is a stand-alone path, it can certainly enrich and be enriched by other traditions as well as contemporary methods -- with the caveat that Douglas appends in one of his essays to the effect that any such approaches must accept from the outset that we already *are* what we're seeking.

Sam Blight (message 3)

Hi Alan, The profoundly non-transactional aspect of Seeing does seem to be a deal-breaker for many. Just looking to *see what's actually there* (whatever it might be) and not in order to attain some preconceived spiritual or psychological advantage seems to be devoid of value for many, perhaps most.

Nearly all so-called spiritual practice seems to be in the form of "Do/believe/put up with this in order to get that". People will do any cockamamy thing as long as "that" is considered desirable enough, all the way to flying airliners into buildings and worse. As Rajneeshes, for instance, we kept rationalising the most appalling behaviour in the leadership (including in Rajneesh himself) as the whole movement descended into madness, degradation and criminality because (certainly in my own case) we didn't want to risk "missing" enlightenment by severing our connection with the "Living Buddha". Almost unbelievably there are still to this day followers, who were present and well-placed to observe the entire debacle, who refuse to acknowledge that Rajneesh might actually fall some way short of being the gold standard for Realisation. These people tend to be scandalised by any former "sannyasin" having the gall and sheer disloyalty to get the point for him/herself.

When I pointed out to such a friend recently that Buddhahood can only be a First Person experience ("If you meet the Buddha in the road, kill him") he gave me a frightened look and suddenly remembered a previous appointment.

It would be hilarious if it wasn't so sad. Actually it's pretty hilarious anyway... I'm sure you will have had similar exchanges while attempting to share Seeing.

Jim Clatfelter

Hello Friends, This is just a story. It's about seeing, and it's based on a few thinks that Douglas said and on some things George has said about history and seeing. I'm just putting it out for reactions. It's meant as much as a question as a statement. I'm wondering where we are going with headless seeing, what we really think of it.

Part 1. Douglas said that everybody is doing it right. The headless design of awareness is always on view even though it's not noticed consciously. If it is consciously noticed, a natural reaction could be fear. I base this on my own reaction to seeing the headless plan when I was eight years old. I realized that I would never see myself as others saw me. I would never know directly how I came across to others. Maybe the reaction wasn't fear as much as disappointment. One could adjust one's behavior if one could see and react to oneself as one sees and reacts to others. I suspect that seeing a movie of oneself would provide this kind of feedback that is missing in the headless design of the first person. In any case, I know that the design itself didn't ever mean much to me until I read *On Having No Head*. I was 33 years old by then. For 25 years I had surely been aware of the design subconsciously.

I bring up the personal story because I think it may be true of everyone to some extent. As children we must all have moments where we see the headless design. This must have been true for all peoples from the beginning of human time. Before mirrors, did people even reflect on their own appearances? Was there a primitive headless age? I think it's possible that there was. In any case, even after humans were aware of, and became identified with, their reflections, they were at least subconsciously aware of their headless design. Each one had assumed an identity as a human appearance. They thought of themselves as identical to the other humans in their group. They assumed the appearance they found in their reflections. Appearance trumped essence. But essence was still essence. Everybody was still doing it right, yet there was deep dissonance between their conscious identity as a headed human and their true headless essence.

Part 2. This dissonance must have been troubling. I think of my own rather extended period of 'growing up.' There must have been questioning that unconsciously centered around this puzzle. Words arose to account for what was no longer obvious and consciously seen. People searched for solutions to the fracture that false identification brought upon them. I certainly did that. So what words and ideas arose in the search? Here's where George could contribute a lot more to the story than I can. I know little about most of the history of Western religion and philosophy. But here's what I think in very broad terms. God arose in the West. Void arose in India. Tao arose in China. These three words refer to the inner dimension that was no longer consciously lived. They are three different flavors of the attempt, as Alan Mann once put it, to add the missing ground back into our being. Our lives are not whole when the infinite-eternal and empty yet living center is not counted. We feel cheated, fractured, and diminished.

Could this account for the rise of religious and spiritual thinking? I don't mean that this is the sole origin of philosophical speculation. But could it be the primary reason? George has written that the purpose and true end of history was reached with Douglas and the experiments. The advent of the experiments, and the ability to share seeing with everyone, marks a tidal change in human existence. I think, in some sense at least, we might all say that the discovery of seeing was central to our lives, the big event in our thinking and perception. Of course we all have experienced other important events that we cherish. I don't mean to diminish any of them. They all have made us what we are. But seeing is what corrected the old reversal of fortune that has made us less that whole consciously.

Part 3. So are we living at the very beginning a new headless age? Is the new headless seeing a true turning point in our personal and collective lives? Does seeing replace speculation once and for all? If it does, can we say, as George has said, about the old religions and philosophies: "Close, but no cigar." Does seeing itself heal the wound and make us whole? Is seeing enough in itself? Should we take it absolutely seriously? I think we should. But I don't see us doing that. Why not?

As Douglas said, all the religions refer to seeing at their heart. But they go way beyond that. Can we cut to the heart and drop the rest? I think we have done this in the religious quotations we have chosen to illustrate seeing. These come from all the traditions. But it seems like most people want to blend seeing with one tradition or another, as an aid to that tradition. Seeing isn't an aid or a helper. It's the core.

Does God or Tao or the Void trump the invisible core we all see? Or does seeing explain God and Tao and the Void? I choose the latter.

Alan again:

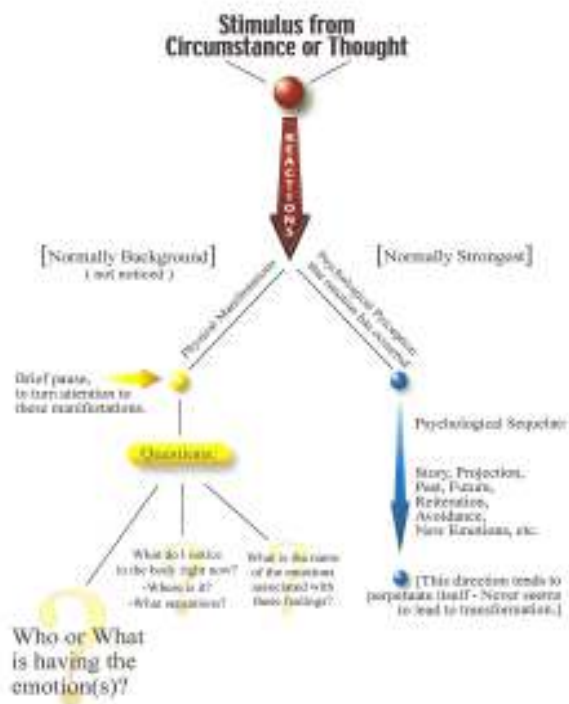
I queried Jim about attributing the quote to me, thinking it might have been from Alan Rowlands, as it completely slipped my memory. His reply underlines what I think is an important but easy to forget aspect, which my apparent forgetfulness demonstrates on this occasion.

Jim replied, "Many years ago you announced a workshop in Sydney (that Richard was going to give) by saying that it would add the infinite and eternal back into awareness. I just remember thinking that this was exactly what headless seeing does".

Jim's reminder came as a refreshing insight. I had forgotten I had ever said this but it explains why I find George's work so important in revealing the underlying context of time/history as eternity and how the experiments opened a door to this under-standing. And how true the Krishnamurti claim that, in this field, there is no continuity to understanding—(that which stands under) it is ever fresh or not at all; the attempt to capture it at third person level being one of the likely obstacles to effective outcome of the experiments.

Janice Hamer

This diagram was originally offered as a way of exploring our reactions to any stimuli that evoke emotions. It explores the difference between the most common response, on the right side of the diagram (instant reaction, development of "story," establishing connections between stimulus and past and future) and a background response, not usually sought or accessible, on the left side of the diagram (a pause for observation of bodily sensations, emotional feeling in the present, and their source.)



I am using the diagram here as a possible explanation of different responses to the experiments.

The response stimulated by one of the experiments might follow the right-hand side of the diagram and thereby reinforce 'my story'. If that happens, the experiment becomes just something else I have done and the meaning could be completely lost.

But if, in a moment of consciousness, one allows oneself to proceed with the left-hand column instead—first the brief pause, or maybe quite a long pause—to check what is actually going on here in the present--the bodily sensations, the label of the emotions attached to them, the question of to whom or to what they are happening, then meaning has a chance to unfold.

Alan Mann

And as far as going back to the scriptures (Earlier reference to George Fox above) is concerned, the heart of what I believe this to be about is Douglas' challenge:

“To realize this instantaneous Now, to live in the present moment, taking no thought for tomorrow or yesterday must be my first concern. And my second must be to find in this Now all my to-morrows and yesterdays”.

I think the experiments do a great job of opening me to the first concern, the revelation of headlessness. However, it doesn't necessarily follow that the second concern is met as an automatic consequence of this revelation. There can be a revelation of headlessness without dealing with time. That, I think, might be the greatest stumbling block as step two involves a total dismantling of the consensus framework, which embeds me firmly in a context of time past and future.

So perhaps the revolutionary aspect is too daunting, we are confronted with a new paradigm in the true sense of the word. Third person Alan shrinks back from timelessness into the embrace of the familiar. I recently had to write a review for George's *The Language of Silence* which I think might help explain what I think is going on. This is an extract:

In these letters and essays we are shaken out of the habitual, and our world is turned inside out. It is not a matter of acquiring yet more knowledge but a way of seeing which transforms the usual relationship of observer and observed, replacing it with a participative integration with that 'in which we live and move' or, perhaps more accurately as we live and move. My sense of existing as an entity in time is suddenly supplanted by a sense that past and future exist, not exactly in me, but in a wholeness from which, whatever I am, I am not separate. The revelation of a first person perspective is made plain by the Harding experiments. That is the 'end' which George Schloss constantly affirms and demonstrates and, when the full implications become apparent to our third person perspective, the present blockages to progress dissolve revealing a first-person perspective on meaning, not the meaning we ascribe to things and events but the meaning which gives rise to things and events. Due to the difficulty of going beyond thought, this field, formerly regarded as the province of the mystic—remote and inaccessible to 'normal' consciousness—is now directly apprehended.

In meeting Douglas's second concern, 'Now' is no longer understood as a fleeting moment in time but as eternity's ever-present unfolding. I feel this whole business is more about changing the world than changing the 'me'. That might sound grandiose but isn't that the experience of the experiments, a dissolving into what is and, thereby, completing the picture?

I was wondering about a time experiment to cater for this aspect. I was never very happy with Douglas getting me to poke my wrist watch into this aware space here. It seemed to me to be a very effective disposal of the timepiece but not of time itself.

What about:

Ask: What time is it? Friends check their watches or the position of sun and respond.

Discuss the answers and note that the answer, i.e., correct time, assumes a time and place. If it is noon, for example, it is noon for this body here in Sydney or wherever I happen to be. It is my corporeal time.

Time has put me in my place.

But what about my earth body, my earth time.

Well, that covers the full 24 hour range.

And my planetary time?

Then my solar time?

And finally, my universal time.

Through this progress the result is reversed through the increasing obviousness of the relativity of time and, whereas time at first put me in my place, I now discover time in its proper place, in this aware space here.

Does it work? I think it is similar to Douglas' "Where am I?" question. What do you all think? The difficulty with this approach is the danger of it becoming a thought experiment rather than a direct perception exercise. I asked George about this and he commented as follows:

George Schloss

Briefly, beginning with that marvelous quote from the Hierarchy which in effect says it all ("To realize this instantaneous Now"....etc.), followed by the necessary distinction you make between the revelation of the experiments vis-a-vis their significance - in effect the distinction we make and must make between the experience and their meaning—couldn't be explicated more clearly. All of which leads by extension of course - and as you touch upon - to the differences we have to draw between Time past, Time future, and Time present, this last mistaken for millennia as the be-all and end-all till the experiments come along and establish the ultimate and decisive distinction of Time as Presence, of the 1st Person Revelation in which we move and have our being as distinct from 3rd Person Observation.

It's as if to ask the Question in light of the experiments is to answer It and your claim that "due to the difficulty of going beyond thought, this field, formerly regarded as the province of the mystic - remote and inaccessible to 'normal' consciousness - is now directly apprehended." How could it be said better?

I would certainly encourage you to further explore earth time, planetary time, solar time but with the sneaking suspicion that they're all going to end up at the same 'place'.

Alan again

There are associated issues arising from this enquiry; the perennial issue of sudden and gradual. My approach to what I call revelation 1 of the experiments was very gradual yet the realization sudden. I now find that apprehension of what I am calling revelation 2 is also very gradual. And the matter of 'backsliding', the desire to retain and maintain the 'seeing' revealed by the experiments, which I view as an attempt to squeeze eternity into time. However, I realize this is starting entirely new subjects, so I'll defer.

John Hawkins (Response 1)

To me, headlessness (i.e. existence) is, by nature, playful. So the idea of varying a standard workshop, and finding out what happens, instinctively gets my vote. After all, this is how the experiments were evolved – by trial and error at open-house week-ends at Nacton. I remember rocking up one time in the 70's. The previous 'shift' had had an hilarious time attempting to convert the banquet scene in 'Macbeth' into a workshop activity (Macbeth being the only one who can see the ghost, while the rest see an empty chair, must have had something to do with it.) Of course I was madly jealous at having missed out on the fun. However, those who were left from the session were unanimously agreed that, as a workshop activity, it was rubbish. Any newcomer would have been thoroughly confused, it just didn't make the point clearly enough, if at all.

Any workshop must fulfil the needs of its participants. For newcomers, or a mix of newcomers and a few 'old hands', the standard workshop does the business. If the majority are experienced, then variants can be refreshing. At the annual Gathering in Salisbury, which lasts several days, optional, headless-related activities have become an accepted fixture. Straying from 'the point' isn't a problem in this setting, when all the best loved experiments always get an airing. It's also worth noting, uniquely, that this is the one occasion in life when 'new' and 'experienced' has no meaning – given that headlessness can only be experienced now and, as such, it is always for the first time.

John Hawkins (Response 2)

The headless insight is replete with paradoxes, so we shouldn't be surprised at the ease of its sharability and the paradoxical rarity of its take-up. Despite decades of Douglas' erudite enthusiasm and the continued efforts of friends linked through the 'world wide window' by a fabulous and highly popular website, headlessness remains a minority sport.

I can't surf.

I didn't learn to swim until I was eighteen and am tall, thin and not very buoyant. I'd never be a strong enough swimmer to be one of those stand-up surfers who everyone admires on the beach. I can, however, body-board.

It's easy.

You just stand almost waist-deep in the tide with your back to the ocean. You clutch a thick, wide, polystyrene float to your front and when the right wave wells up behind you, you tip forward. There's a moment of elation if you catch one right. Instead of being buffeted by passing swells and staggering for footholds, your world is suddenly in motion as you are propelled forward, swept along as if by a previously unseen horizontal escalator. In between these peak moments, to be fair, there's a lot of ungainly blundering about: the buoyant board flipping about in the water, the long trudge-wade back out to sea, and the countless times when the wave just isn't right.

Once caught, there's a skill in staying with a wave. You're on a tipping point. Get the balance slightly out and the force is no longer with you, the world's un-motioned and you flounder in the wave's eddy.

Headlessness is very like body-boarding (I am certainly equipped, glancing down now, with a handy body-board!). All the action, of course, happens up here in this world-filled openness.

In the supported attention of a headless workshop, it's self-evident that this openness contains (for example) the carpet, furniture and other people; and that sensations (tickles, aches), thoughts and feelings are also present. It makes sense that each of us has a unique mix of content which serves to highlight the universality of our shared, 'glassy essence'.

Outside of a workshop, daily activities: filling in a tax-form, putting off filling in a tax form, *picking up a note of alarm in the voice of a loved-one in conversation with who? on the phone and guess-dreading from the bits you can pick up, what life-detonating news might be seconds away.....* can tend to keep us more in the 'unique mix' and less in the glassy essence.

None-the-less, if you're kitted up and ready, the right waves do come along - expanding doorways; the faces of others addressing this-way nothingness with benign idiocy; emails from headless buddies in Australia. The singer Sting wrote a number, the refrain of which is 'love is the seventh wave'. Amongst expert surfers there's a belief, apparently, that the seventh wave to come along is often exceptionally powerful. Occasionally the experience of headlessness is exceptionally powerful. One's absence is utter, there's a physical falling away to alert limpness and all things are suffused with generosity. As with the experience of suddenly being wave-borne, there's a deep

awareness that this Ocean is ever-present; and that one has only to let go and ride the tipping point to be of its nature.

There may be only a few of us practising headlessness, but expert surfers are also pretty rare. The cause of the scarcity is the same – it's a really challenging skill. In both cases, years of practise elevates it to an art form – certainly for headlessness, riding out the ripples of meaning never stops.

Our opening paradox can only be resolved by clashing it up with another. Next time you're on a beach noticing your world-full openness (don't expect gasps of admiration from on-lookers, it's not that kind of skill), do a no-head count. It's quicker than a head count and there's less chance of going wrong and having to start again. Paradoxically, it's comforting to know that the total will never expand beyond the single digit required to do the count; and that its reliability holds true from Bondi to Brighton.

Appendix – The original discussion note

NOTES FOR 'A DIFFERENT KIND OF WORKSHOP'

If, as I believe, everybody sees what is to be seen, or gets what is to be got or apprehended—why do so few people consider what the experiments reveal to be highly significant?

It must be a matter of interpretation.

Can we experiment with one or two of the experiments and thereby explore the response of a person doesn't 'get it'? Maybe this has been tried. Has it, and has it been written up. If so, where? Anybody know?

Example: POINTING FINGER EXPERIMENT

Do the standard experiment.

Discuss results.

Then return to the pointing position and focus on what they, **the experimenters**, are experiencing, **not on what the presenter is seeing.**

Is it really a matter of interpretation:

- What then, are the various interpretations?
- What significance does the experimenter attach to what they are seeing?
- Have the experimenters done any homework? Does what the experiment reveals have any relevance to the path that brought them here? Is their homework getting in the way? (See John Hawkins comment below)
- Have they asked the right question? Not what am I going to learn here or get out of all this but 'what am I'?

Objections to the process

- I already know I can't see my head; you don't have to tell me.
- So what, I always see like this?
- Fear. It seems empty, pointless, the window on nihilism rather than a window of eternity.

Explanations of different responses

- Simply not interested.
- People want something new not something they already have.
- Some prefer a teaching rather than an experience.
- It is an answer to a question they have not asked themselves.
- Holding fast to the **observer** position and resisting dissolving into **participation.** (maybe the resistance is quite unconscious)

Preparation—things that can prepare the ground.

- Spontaneous openings
- Meditation
- Psychedelics
- Teachings
- Other experiential methods, e.g., Big Mind,
- Are Emily and Eliot right about too much reality?

Why worry about this, why make a problem of it? Two reasons:

1. 'They either get it or they don't' response has never appealed to me. It strikes me as very unheadless. Headlessness is about sharing, it's very foundation is what we share. If this foundation of what we share is not showing through as a result of the experiments I think we should consider why not.

2. And why make a problem of it. Well, maybe a question rather than a problem, then at least we might find an answer.

We met John Hawkins on his recent, swift passage through Sydney and talked about this matter. He made the comment that perhaps Headlessness is wasted on the spiritually inclined, this was offered in the spirit of 'youth is wasted on the young'.

Finally, is this so-called enquiry into the reasons for not 'getting it' simply evidence of the fact that I want everybody to see things my way?