



Monthly Musings – April 2019

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On Beauty and Evolution—Alan Mann

Observations on a New York Times article--***How Beauty Is Making Scientists Rethink Evolution by Ferris Jabr***—The extravagant splendour of the animal kingdom can't be explained by natural selection alone — so how did it come to be?

(This article follows contributions to NOWletters 208 and 210 dealing with unexplained aspects of evolution which are not explained by orthodox Darwinian theory. This month's article covers an aspect that I was surprised to find had also exercised Darwin himself. Alan.)

The article describes how certain developments defy Darwinian orthodoxy and remind us that the evolutionary development of what could be considered aesthetic as opposed to survival benefits are not uncommon. I found this particularly interesting in view of my recent research into the various aspects of evolution that remain unexplained by orthodox neo-darwinian theory. Finally, and to my delighted surprise I find that Darwin himself had a Theory of Beauty which was dismissed by his peers and successors as contradictory to his major work and abandoned. It is now being taken

out and dusted down as current research provides evidence of the evolution of characteristics which do not comply with the rules of natural selection.

A male flame bowerbird is a creature of incandescent beauty. The hue of his plumage transitions seamlessly from molten red to sunshine yellow. But that radiance is not enough to attract a mate. When males of most bowerbird species are ready to begin courting, they set about building the structure for which they are named: an assemblage of twigs shaped into a spire, corridor or hut. They decorate their bowers with scores of colorful objects, like flowers, berries, snail shells or, if they are near an urban area, bottle caps and plastic cutlery. Some bowerbirds even arrange the items in their collection from smallest to largest, forming a walkway that makes themselves and their trinkets all the more striking to a female — an optical illusion known as forced perspective that humans did not perfect until the 15th century.

The article contains a number of similar examples and points out that Darwin did not think it necessary to link aesthetics and survival. He thought animals could appreciate beauty—that an innate sense of beauty could be an engine of evolution. An interesting aspect of the article is evidence of the closed-mindedness of the orthodox believers whose resistance to even considering this development mirrors the response to the work of Matti Liesola I reported in NOWletter 210. Unlike natural selection, which preserved traits that were useful “in the struggle for life,” Darwin saw that sexual selection as concerned with reproductive success as opposed to survival, often resulted in features that jeopardized an animal’s well-being.

The arguments for and against are outside the range of this brief summary. One final example is that of the Club-winged Manakin whose wings have developed to rub together at a rate of 100 times per second making what seems to be for the female an irresistible sound, but at the expense of efficient flight.

Here is the link:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/magazine/beauty-evolution-animal.html>

There is a follow-up review by James Gorman at :

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/29/science/evolution-of-beauty-richard-prum-darwin-sexual-selection.html?action=click&module>

These are fascinating articles and beautifully illustrated—they were brought to my attention by Katie Mann, thank you Katie—highly recommended.

Alan Mann

Book Review by John Wren-Lewis

The Little Book of Life and Death by D. E. Harding with a Foreword by Ram Dass.

(We recently had a Harding workshop at the Sydney Nonduality group monthly meeting which was organised by Kim Lai. I thought it timely to reprint this review of a Harding book by John Wren-Lewis).

Major advances in human understanding almost always come from questioning a supposedly obvious truth which everyone takes for granted, and that is why I strongly recommend this book to everyone interested in near-death studies. It calls into question a whole range of common assumptions about life and death, prompting noted thanatologist Ram Dass to proclaim in his Foreword that 'after this gift, the literature on dying will never be the same again'. And while NDE's are only touched upon quite briefly towards the book's end, they are dealt with from a perspective which differs radically from any of the approaches I've yet seen - a perspective which differs radically from any of the approaches I've yet seen - a perspective which I believe could be the clue to significant new discoveries in the field.

Perspective is a topic integral to D. E. Harding's original profession of architecture, in which he graduated from the University of London in the years between the two World Wars, but in his thirties he began to apply the principle of perspectival flexibility to the whole of life in quite radical ways; he became a champion 'lateral thinker', offering a fundamental 'paradigm-shift' in the understanding of human consciousness, two decades before either of those now-overworked (and usually misunderstood) terms was invented. Inevitably, almost no-one grasped what he was after when he published his first book, *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth*, in England in 1952; I myself was amongst the uncomprehending then, and wrote him off as just another rather weird religious propagandist, never dreaming that a quarter of a century later the book would be republished as a classic by a prestigious American university press (Harding, 1979; for a full review of this remarkable work, see Wren-Lewis, *Share It* 11.)

In 1961 he tried again, with a much shorter book which attracted attention by its koan-like title, *On Having No Head*; and by then, thanks to the growth of the Human Potential Movement with its demand for new approaches in psychology, a discerning few were ready to pay attention. (One was Professor Huston Smith of Minnesota, doyen amongst contemporary philosophers of religion, who later wrote a laudatory Introduction to an updated edition of *On Having No Head* (Harding, 1986); I, alas, remained uncomprehending. In the 1970's Werner Erhard of EST picked out Harding as a visionary thinker of global importance and sponsored a world tour for him, in the wake of Buckminster Fuller, while British historian Anne Bancroft included him alongside such figures as Martin Buber, Teilhard de Chardin, G.I. Gurdjieff, Thomas Merton and Ramana Maharshi in her book, *Twentieth Century Mystics and Sages* (Bancroft, 1976.) By the time he came to write *The Little Book of Life and Death* at age 79 - a very personal preparation for his own death, which he then, not unnaturally,

assumed could happen at any time simply from fullness of years - he enjoyed the rare distinction of having been acclaimed a genius by leading scholars around the world while also featuring in the pop music charts (in 'The Douglas Harding Song,' performed by the British group The Incredible String Band.)

And perhaps that last distinction is the most truly appropriate for terms like 'mystic', 'sage' or 'genius' fail to do him justice - or, more accurately, tend to do him injustice because of their usual associations. His aim has always be demystification, and whereas a genius or a sage would normally be expected to purvey learning, he employs his own very considerable learning to encourage unlearning of common, deeply-ingrained mental habits which he believes to be not just profoundly misleading, but actually life-destroying. He makes the extraordinary claim that most human anxieties, including fear of death, are not natural and inevitable at all, but the result of completely unnatural limitations imposed on consciousness by social brainwashing, passed on from generation to generation by parental and other training from the dawn of human history. Yet far from being a propagandist for religious or mystical belief, as I used to think, he sees most such belief, including New Age belief in 'higher consciousness', as itself part of the brainwashing, because it accepts ordinary everyday consciousness as a function of individual personality, when in fact separate individuality is only a mental assumption like grid-lines on maps, not part of real experience at all. In fact he takes Gautama Buddha's paradigm of separate - consciousness as illusion more seriously than most Buddhists have ever done, emphatically denying that liberation from the anxieties and 'cravings' of that illusion requires years of spiritual discipline. The illusion arises, he maintains, simply because we've been trained since infancy to interpret our conscious experience, moment by moment, in terms of self-images based on the way other people experience us in social relationship - i.e., as erect-standing, talking and thinking animals. His books—including two new ones produced since his anticipation of dying soon after 80 has been proved premature (Harding, 1990 & 1992)—are constructed around various simple 'mental de-briefing exercises' to enable readers to side -step this interpretation-process and really experience their experience. The result, he insists, is instant realisation that separate individuality is just one special perspective in a living consciousness which is literally infinite, not the victim of time but the eternal theatre in which time happens. And if taken seriously, this is no mere intellectual intuition, but the actual discovery of an unsuspected, yet really obvious, depth-dimension in consciousness itself, which subsumes conflict and fear into equanimity and love.

It is from this standpoint that he views the findings of modern near-death research: he sees both the deep tranquillity which characterises most NDE's themselves, and the positive life -changes that usually follow them, as evidence that at the close approach of death, societal conditioning loses its grip and consciousness is able to experience its infinite, eternal reality. In other words, he sees encounter with death as a decisive, albeit somewhat drastic, unlearning process - and my own ability to appreciate

Harding dates precisely from having experiences such as un-learning myself when I nearly died from poisoning in 1983. The event itself (Wren-Lewis, 1985) had none of the heavenly visions that commonly attract most attention in NDE accounts; it was, quite simply, an experience of timeless and infinite aliveness, pure absolute consciousness with no 'selfness' whatever, which focused down into the bodymind perspective called John Wren-Lewis when the doctors resuscitated my brain. Ever since then I've been directly aware that I'm not, and never was, an isolated individual experiencing an alien environment. I am, and always was, Infinite Eternal Aliveness playing something like a game called 'John Wren-Lewis' in a universe which is also That. The terms are abstract and metaphysical, but the awareness itself is so vividly concrete that for the first few months I was often impelled to put my hand up to the back of my head, feeling for all the world as if the doctors had opened up my skull to the dark infinity of space - not just the space of astronomers, which is simply another special perspective, but the infinite consciousness that is the inside story of all possible universes, which Harding calls 'a dark which is the brilliance of a thousand suns'. With hindsight I'm quite surprised I didn't recall Harding immediately, but in 1983 it was more than twenty years since I'd read or thought about him, and I was pretty preoccupied with adjusting to this astonishing new perception of life. When I came to write my story down for publication, the thought did briefly flash across my mind, 'Could this be what that strange chap Harding meant all those years ago about having no head?' But his books weren't readily available in Australia, and I didn't even know if he was still alive, so I didn't pursue the subject. Then, in 1989, he read an account of my experience somewhere and wrote, out of the blue, sending me a copy of the just-published Little Book of Life and Death for comment. Needless to say, my first response was an apology for not getting his point until life forced it on me the hard way.

Like Ram Dass, I found the book 'a delight', especially fascinating for me because it raised directly the very issue about which I'd been puzzling off and on for six years: if, as I'd now discovered, the sense of alienated human individuality is just an illusion, are there less drastic ways of unlearning it than dicing with death? Harding puts his own contention in his own distinctively humorous fashion: why wait for, and risk, an NDE he asks when you can at any time have a PDE (Present Death Experience) simply by following the advice of the medieval Chinese sage Huang Po and observing things as they are instead of believing what you've always been told about them? Harding then reiterates his classic 'No Head' exercise: if you actually look at your experience, you'll find you've already undergone one of the most reliable processes for ensuring death of the self, namely decapitation, because in actual experience there's nothing above your shirtfront but the world presenting itself; your head is something you only think is there as the centre of your consciousness because you've been conditioned to identify yourself with what you see in mirrors or photographs. just take this experience really seriously as the basis for living, he urges, and you already have enlightenment;

you don't have to find eternity, because you've never really been without it, and never could be.

Ah, but there's the rub - taking it seriously enough to make it the basis for life. To me now, eternity-consciousness is absolutely and undeniably obvious, just as Harding insists, but my failure to get his point for all those years wasn't just superficial prejudice, that age-long brain-washing into alienated individuality caused the separate-self perspective to snap back into place no matter how faithfully I tried to do his exercises, leading me to conclude that he was just playing with words to put across a mystical belief. In 1991 I had the chance to quiz him on this point when he visited Australia to promote his new book on overcoming stress (Harding, 1990), for which he was himself the best possible advertisement; an octogenarian breezing effortlessly through a crowded cross-continental schedule of lectures, workshops and media interviews which most people half his age would have found punishing. I asked him how many people he'd found, over the years, who could open to the eternity experience and remain open just by doing his exercises, and he readily agreed that 'taking experience seriously' was the problem. Even he himself, he said, had needed years of practice, but he insisted - and I readily allowed - that this kind of practice is an altogether different kettle of fish from most spiritual disciplines, which are undertaken on the basis of faith and belief rather than direct and simple observation.

So my own hunch is that we need more research, yet, on the detailed 'psychodynamics' of 'un-enlightenment' in so-called normal consciousness and that's now my own life-work (Wren-Lewis, 1992 & 1993) But in the meantime, I cannot recommend Harding's work too highly; however limited the practical success of his exercises (and you may have better luck than I did), they are for my money the only serious game in town at the moment, and I'm sure his paradigm of consciousness is the key to the future, not just in near-death studies but for the whole of psychology and behavioural science.

The Giant Awakens

(There is an occasional insert in the Sydney Morning Herald entitled China News and subtitled 'All the News You Need to Know' which is essentially all the Chinese communist party thinks we need to know. The Herald has a feeble disclaimer that reserves editorial non-commitment to content but fails to acknowledge it as a propaganda sheet. Ever since this promotional insert stated to appear I have wondered if there is a voice of independent Chinese thought within the large community of people of Chinese descent in Australia. Thanks to a recent ABC programme I was delighted to find that there is indeed a Chinese publication here which provides honest reporting and covers all point of view. I have put their editorial introduction below. Alan.)

A Collection of Insights into Chinese Government Influence in Australia.

<https://www.visiontimes.com.au/the-giant-awakens/>

The Chinese government's vast sphere of influence has been a widely debated topic over the past few months. In many instances, discussions have blurred the lines

between China – a country with a rich history of 5,000 years – and the Chinese government – currently controlled by the Chinese Communist Party.

China's culture, its arts and trade relations with Australia, have had a significant influence on Australia's development as a well-integrated multicultural society. The cultural and economic contributions of the 1.2 million Chinese living and studying in Australia cannot be overstated.

Yet as the giant awakens and the Chinese government flexes its financial muscles globally, its influence seemingly comes with covert and overt censorship, control and attempts to silence dissent, which many perceive as a head-on collision with Australia's democratic values.

Is influence from the Chinese government a problem for Australia? How much influence can Australia accept? Is there a bottom line?

We invite over twenty leading China experts and community commentators to discuss their views on the influence of the Chinese government and the resulting impact on Australia as a nation in this spectacular collection of eye witness accounts, personal narratives, opinions and analysis in *The Giant Awakens*. Enjoy – and let us know your thoughts!

Yan Xia - Chief Editor - October 2017 - Editor@visionchinatimes.org
Vision Times Media Corporation (Australia)

Reality – So Simple Anyone Can 'Get' It!—Colin Drake

Consciousness saturates the universe(s), from electrons (1) to elephants and beyond. This Consciousness exists in two 'modes' at rest as Awareness and in motion as Cosmic Energy of which all matter is constituted (2). Now all motion commences in, and from, stillness; it exists in a substratum of stillness and can be seen relative to that stillness; and finally returns to stillness when it runs out of energy. So, Awareness is That in which all matter arises, abides and subsides, for it is the universal stillness as it is still and permeates all space.

All things are fleeting expressions of This and have no existence outside of This, so This is their 'essence'. The string theory posits that all matter is composed of many 'strings' of energy vibrating at different frequencies and these will all return to stillness when their energy is expended. Living beings are also just ephemeral expressions of This which have the added capacity of being able to 'sense' their environment. All of these 'sensations' appear in Awareness, or they would not be aware of them, and thus they are also instruments (or conduits) through which Consciousness can 'sense' Its own manifestation.

So we are all fleeting expressions and instruments of This and never separate from This. As with all 'things' we arise in This, exist in This and return to This; so there is

(and can be) no separate self. Once this fact is seen all self-grasping ceases and we cease to see the world through the dark filter of self-image, self-interest, self-concern, self-aggrandizement, self-promotion, self-loathing, self-hate ... the list is endless. When this occurs we see the world 'as it is' and it is much more vivid, alive and friendly when seen like this; for we realize that we are never separate from it and of the same essence (Consciousness) as it. This is especially true of how we view 'other' people for now we see that they are also fleeting expressions and instruments of This, and as such there is no essential difference between us. The outcome of this is true compassion which is much more potent than any version of this which is created as a virtue before this Awakening (to the nature of Reality) has taken place.

This awakening removes all existential angst for now we see our true essence and realize that we can never be separate from This and will merge back into This when the body dies (3). It also removes all mental suffering caused by viewing ourselves as separate and obsessing on self-image, self-interest, self-concern etc. Which improves our interaction with those around us as we no longer see them through this filter, or as the erroneous image we have created of them as separate selves. In this all greed and exploitation of 'others' cease for we see that they are of the same 'essence' as ourselves.

Colin Drake

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- 1 Which change their behaviour when aware of being observed - Google the 'Double Slit' experiment.
 - 2 For Einstein's $E=MC^2$ shows that energy and matter are equivalent and the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima graphically illustrates this. The enormous amount of energy liberated was the result of converting just 0.7 grams of matter into energy during the atomic chain reaction.
 - 3 Although some spiritual paths say we continue to be reincarnated until we awaken to our unity with Consciousness and realize that there is no separate self.

Road-Map of the Heart—Peter Lim

You walked in the past
on the wrong side
of life—you tripped
nothing seemed right—

where's the road-map
drawn by your heart?
every turn then you would know
you'd never fall apart—

every season has its theme
you'd know when and how

to engage—its grandeur to embrace
even at the moment that is now—

no more the lost years of wandering
the dark has fled as light has come
about
in that the fulness and ripening of hours
life is peace, joy, bliss—beyond every
doubt.

Peter Lim

On being drawn to some great thing—Alan Mann

Traherne asks us whether or not we are drawn to ‘some great thing’. Centuries 1-2. Part of my answer takes the form of all this activity, the NOWletter, meetings, reading, writing, discussions, etc. What can I say about the point of it all? I think that all that can be said, or all that I can say, is that it leads to an awareness of the undivided in the immediacy of being. The personal slips into the impersonal only to find that the impersonal is paradoxically, as John Wren-Lewis liked to remind us, the most personal; most personal in the sense of being truly what I am, or more accurately, what is actually the case.

In my late thirties I was reading Jung and keeping a dream diary. I was prompted to start on this enquiry by a dream in which, for the first time, I came upon the name Krishnamurti and an odd aspect of the dream, as I subsequently discovered when I read one of his books, was that it supplied not only his name but the essence of his teaching.

Krishnamurti seemed to have the situation under control and I was impressed by his explanations of the need for humanity to awaken to a transition from the individual to the undivided aspect of being. However, in spite of exposure to his endless lectures the matter remained for me a conceptual possibility and not a realised fact. David Bohm offered some practical help by way of his ideas on the implicate order and promotion of Dialogue as a means of effecting the necessary transition but I remained stranded in doubts.

In December ‘76 I came upon this quote from St. Augustine:

Go not outside, return into thyself: truth dwells in inward man.

I had developed a meditation method of watching 100 breaths without loss of attention. If I lost focus on the breath I had to restart the count. The most interesting example of the successful application of this technique occurred on 23 December 1975. My notes record that on this occasion my concentration broke at 95 so I had the frustration of starting again. On reaching the hundred mark I had earned the right to ask a question. On this occasion I asked:

In view of the presence of Atman in all human beings why can't ‘Atman purity’ illuminate the individual system (organism)? The striving for perfection or illumination in the presence of perfection, i.e., Atman, seems odd?

The response arrived in the following form, “It is in the perfection of creation that we are engaged”.

I can't remember the exact way I framed the question. But I remember the reply exactly, it appeared in my head without any conscious construction. I had thought, at the time that there is a component of the individual system requiring perfection and,

possibly, that if this imperfection is remedied all will become clear. I interpreted the ‘reply’ as a correction to this view, an awakening to the fact that it was not about me as an individual but to do with making plain the undivided.

In the middle of all this I came upon Traherne whose wonderful prose and poetry reveal an awareness steeped in the undivided and his descriptions of ‘capacitie’ were the closest match to my own occasional openings to wholeness. Nevertheless, occasions of direct experiencing were few and far between. Then, in 1991, Douglas Harding came to Sydney and demonstrated that the door to the undivided was wide open and ever the case. This, of course, has been the message of the sages of all ages, that you are already and always what is sought. In Harding’s case he demonstrated, as opposed to merely describing, that what I am looking for is what I am looking out of.

What then are the consequences? I think that the best expression I ever came across was Francis Lucille’s reply to a question. His group had been discussing the nature of self and arrived at a general acknowledgement that the self is not an entity but a process, a non-entity. One of the group then asked “if there is no self, then what is it that is enlightened?” After a moment’s consideration Lucille replied—THIS. How very close to the message about perfection being of the whole and not of Alan.

In recent times and in these notes we have considered meditation not as something to be done but as to be entered into as a pre-existing and foundational condition of wholeness--obscured by my intensely focused identification with my identity as Alan.

So, if true and accessible, how is this to come about? Strangely words of my childhood come to mind, “...*the kingdom of heaven is at hand, abide in me as I in you, I and the father are one*”, etc. Removed from their usual religious context and observed through a secular lens these statements can be understood as accurate representations of the perspective of the undivided.

What then is the necessary action? I doubt there is one exclusive and reliable answer, the Harding experiments provide a foundation, a gateway to simply being, and what works for me is to stop at that point for a while. Praying and meditating can become more about self-improvement than self-transcendence—if the matter strikes me as important enough to explore—I just have to learn to be. My response to Traherne’s challenge, his question of whether or not I am drawn to “some great thing?”— is yes, I am and, if I can learn what that ‘drawing’ might involve, the necessary action, or more accurately inaction, becomes clear. Thereafter, it is over to that great thing—
whatever it might be.

Alan Mann

To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand things. —Eihei Dogen (1200-1253)

Religion both Disease and Cure—Douglas Harding

(A couple of days after writing the above note Robert Penny sent a couple of extracts from the Harding writings which, in dealing with the problems we face, directly addresses the matter I was writing about in my 'Great Thing' piece above. Alan)

The world is sick. Sick with the degenerative and dehumanising disease which consists of a witches' brew of bigotry and fanaticism and bitter intolerance which they call fundamentalism. Fundamentalism my Aunt Fanny! It's superficiality run amok. The world's vital organs are so feverishly at odds with one another that they threaten to work their mutual destruction. Douglas Harding. Nacton, England, 1991.

And elsewhere, he writes:

An explorer from outer space, who arrived on our planet, might conclude that we suffer from a foul, mysterious disease, a disease with many symptoms. This disease causes some of us to burn, butcher and bomb our fellows in great numbers, for no obvious reason. It causes others to torture and mutilate their bodies, to hold up an arm till it withers and is useless, to starve themselves almost to death, to perch on top of the highest column they can find. And so, on and on. The list of symptoms, ranging between the harmless and the horrific, is endless. And the disease is deep-rooted, endemic, and old as the species. There's no sign of remission or cure as time goes on. Rather the reverse. The name of the disease is Religion.

One reason for the virulence of the bacterium or bug, is that it takes several antithetical forms, which war against one another. The patient - namely, our species - is the stricken battlefield of struggles, in which followers of particular forms of religion are pitted against people who hold different beliefs.

Among the various proposed remedies, the following three stand out: Doubt, Conversion, and Integration.

1. By Doubt, I mean a thorough-going and atheistically based skepticism, that aims to root out the bug in all its forms, with the scalpel of reason. With what result? Though it's been energetically tried out for at least 3,000 years, this remedy shows no sign whatsoever of succeeding. And even if it were to do so, would mankind be better off? Or worse off? The problem is that, bound up with the disease, is something like a hormone called Meaning, without which the patient world just curl up and die. Better a life riddled with the disease of Religion—a purposeful condition of ever there was one—than a purposeless existence, which is no life at all.

2. The second would-be remedy is Conversion. Though perennially popular, it is even less likely to come about and to work. The hope is that one form of the bug - one's own religion, of course! - will triumph, by persuasion or force or some combination of the two. But again there's a snag. Even if a particular religion were to win, peace would certainly not follow. Its sects would be sure to continue the war. All along, in fact,

conflict between the sects of one religion has been as unremitting as conflict between religions.

3. The third would-be remedy, I call Integration. The idea is that we can - magically, if you like - turn this pathological condition into a wonderfully healthy condition. So that the warring forms of the bug declare a peace of which each contributes its special gifts, and what was the curse of mankind becomes its blessing. My aim here is to show that each of the world's religions is a necessary organ of Religion as a whole, of an organism that is strictly indivisible. And that our vivid awareness of this fact creates a climate of opinion in which the only way to harmonize the seemingly discordant noises, that the great religions are making, is to listen carefully to what each is really saying. When we do just that, I say, we shall hear a music that is truly divine.

A tall order, you may say. What on Earth are the chances of this third 'cure ' working? I reply: The important thing is that it shall work in and for the individual, whoever that might be. The reason is that there's more to each of us than meets the I. When anybody is cured of this disease, it isn't as an individual patient. When a person sees Who he or she really is, and Integral Religion tells of that person's true Identity, it is Who we really are that does all the seeing, and there's no way of preventing this seeing from spilling over into all the world. (*My underlining. Alan*)

Douglas Harding, Nacton, England, April 1995

Form the preface to his *Religions of the World* now available on Kindle \$11.99.

True religion is to be grounded transparently in the power that constitutes one. Kierkegaard

Gebser—Letter 75—George Schloss

(This one of George Schloss's letters to Carl Cooper from June 29, 2006. I am including it here as an addition to recent exchanges involving references to Gebser. The complete set of the Schloss letters can be accessed through the capacitie website at: www.capacitie.org/schloss/articles.htm Alan.)

Many thanks for your reminding me of Gebser whom I've been hoping to bring into the conversation anyway along with his seminal notion of "concretion" which, of course, linked though it may be to its derivative, "abstraction", is, as you pointed out, the absolute distinction we've been looking for that separates the experiments from anything ever seen before on the face of the earth (and on its no-face too). The only other notion I can think of that even remotely corresponds to it is one I mentioned in one of my earlier letters where, following Huxley in his *Perennial Philosophy*, who, in turn cited Shankara, I brought up the distinction they'd both made between the two classes of scripture: what orthodox Hindus recognized as the Shruti, the inspired writings which, the product of immediate insight into ultimate Reality, are based on

their own authority, and the Smirti which derive their authority from an authority other than themselves, what we would characterize as commentary and/or interpretation—for what it's worth God bless it, precisely what we're doing now. What's not so obvious, however, and only serves to emphasize the absolutely radical nature of what Douglas has unearthed and will, no doubt, raise howls of protest, at least in certain quarters, is that a good part and maybe all of what up to now has passed for scripture East and West, for Shruti, has, in the blink of an eye, literally been, if not knocked into a cocked hat, at least on the evidence, demoted a notch to Smirti. With all due apologies that, at least in English, this almost sounds like a comedy routine but is, nevertheless, the truth of the matter, we've only to note that in light of the visible and palpable proof inherent in a pointing finger or a paper-bag, both the Bible and the Koran, for instance, as well as their opposite numbers, the Gita or Tao (not to speak of the distinction itself between Shruti and Smirti), totally rely on the word whether spoken or written and to that degree can be defined as abstract. And not to confuse the ridiculous with the sublime however "near allied" they may be and recognizing that comparisons may be odious, if it be argued that in Zen at least, there's no talk of talk at all but only a slap and a tickle and, except for one last cry of despair, even less on a cross, they too, in some degree, are either related to or dependent on or directed towards the action or re-action of others, however intimate or close those others may appear to be at the time. Only the experiments by their very nature have the "capacitie" (to use Traherne's term and Alan Mann's favorite), to express and so clarify, rather than merely reproduce, the original one-to-none equation at the very heart of all existence. As for the distinctions Gebser draws between the various stations on the way, if you haven't checked them out lately just take a look at his absolutely brilliant, unsurpassable and, as a result, almost completely-ignored-by-the-intellectual-establishment tables he's drawn up as an appendage to *The Ever-Present Origin* and see if you aren't as flabbergasted for the umpteenth-time as I am as to how on target they are. In fact, if I didn't know better, I'd almost be tempted to claim along with the rest of the world the possibility that, as with others, in his case too there may be such an aberration as genius which, thanks to the very presence of the experiments I can't admit for one minute, at least in this regard, they being precisely the one instance in which genius is not only not required but, by reason of their absolutely unexceptional nature, out of the question because unnecessary. And out of the question, too, as regards its role in illuminating all things great and small, the birds and bees and—who knows?—the whispering trees as well. Nevertheless, how else account for his arriving at virtually the same conclusions we do without the aid and imprimatur of these built-in yet anonymous instruments? Until we realize, of course, that, very much like John the Baptist who, like the horse that's been led to water but alas, won't (or can't) drink, he, too, offers yet one more testimony to the absolute uniqueness of the experiments. Just to give one for-instance: take, under the rubric he designates "forms of realization," the categories he so brilliantly distinguishes in their ever-increasing differentiation as Imagination, Abstraction and Concretion, to which first, for

example, we can consign a Dante or a Milton or a Blake or a Rilke, to which second, beginning with Plato, we can add among others a Hegel or a Nietzsche and to which third—Who? Jesus? The Buddha? The legions of spiritual masters and mystics and magicians, both named and unnamed? Maybe as a concession a Nishitani or even Gebser himself? Yet can any of them be said to provide a word-free differentiation at once so simple and so obvious and so absolute that all it requires is an immediate and conscious about-face where even the answer, the very tertium quid itSelf—that third something or somewhat capable of escaping a dichotomy supposedly exhaustive (the right thing being right for the wrong reasons, the wrong thing being wrong for the right ones)—and that can, indeed, must be delivered in silence? At which suggestion, leaving myself wide open to the obvious hint that I, too, could use a little, I’m tempted to stop right here and practice what I preach. I mean when dealing, as we have been, with that one degree which beyond degree is no degree at all how much further can we take it within the limits of language? Which, of course, even to ask is to answer. Frankly, if it didn’t sound so damn pretentious and leave me even more wide-open than I am to the obvious charge of having, not so much no head at all as a swelled one, I might almost be tempted to follow Aquinas who, when granted the vision, put down his pen forever with the now famous “All I have written up to now seems to me no better than straw.” But not being an Aquinas and somehow having to get through the day (and night too) as best I can, forgive me if I just take a rain-check. George Schloss

Greville Street Meeting Programme

Due to conflicting events the May and June meetings have been switched from first Sunday of the month to the second Sunday.

Sunday 12 May Second Sunday ‘Why Thomas Traherne?’ Alan Mann

Sunday 9 June Second Sunday. Garry Booth.

Sunday 7 July First Sunday—Spread Consciousness Theory — Dave Knowles

Byron Sophia Philosophical Group

Marvell Hall, 37 Marvell Street, Byron Bay, Beyond Sports-Fields

Open Meetings: every Thursday from 1.30 pm to 3.30 pm

Celia – 02 6684 3623 / byronsophia@gmail.com