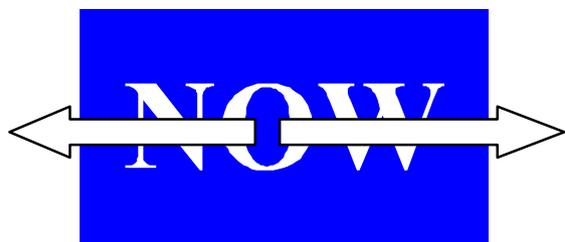


Issue 151—December 2010*Email:* awmann@optusnet.com.au*Website:* www.capacitie.org**Harding Meetings—81 Greville St.****Next Meeting—January 2011****Date to be advised****(02) 9419 7394**

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Editor's Note,

I have been planning to serialize George Schloss' *Letters to Carl* which I self-published with George in 2007. George made an enormous contribution to the work of Douglas Harding and his letters encapsulate his discoveries about the relevance of the experiments to Western thought and philosophical enquiry in general. There are 92 letters and this will take us, at the present publication rate, until 2022. If this seems too long to wait, the book is still available as paperback or download, and the material from which the book is composed is archived in the Schloss section of the Capacitie website. I am reading yet another book which underlines the Schloss thesis, it is called *The Master and his Emissary* by Ian Gilchrist, in which Gilchrist addresses the question, 'why is the brain divided' and the effects of the division on how we individually see the world and live our lives and, collectively, the impact of this division on Western culture.

Earlier in the month I received an article from Floco Tocsin which, coincidentally, follows on from the *Audible Life Stream* input in NOWletter 149. I was intrigued by the contents, which deal with some of the 'unexplained' mental states I have experienced on rare occasions. I explained to Floco that we didn't normally accept anonymous contributions and asked him for an explanation I could offer with his essay. He replied "Thanks for your response and your willingness to publish it in the NOWletter. I work with a pseudonym for two main reasons: It helps protecting the identity of my mentor Nestor, who wishes so. And it helps me to keep a distance to my own work, which is essential to me. To me, the significant thing about my work is the process, not the outcome. While I'm willing to deal with the outcome, I'm not willing to identify with it."

The NOWletter appears between 8 and 12 times every year and is a vehicle for news and views about awakening to what is really going on. The content is based primarily on contributions from readers, either their own writing or examples of what moves or interests them.

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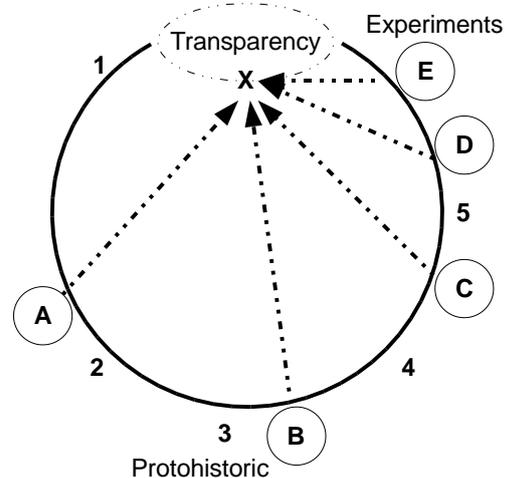
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Letter 1 — January 4, 2003

(The first of the letters from George Schloss to Carl Cooper)

Dear Carl, As we discussed on the phone, enclosed a brief variation on Figure 2 of my recent letter. It seems to me we can chart the course of the Temporal Dimension in even greater detail by incorporating “individual experience”—the workings of a vertical, a radial Grace (the spirit blowing where it listeth)—within the wider context of a horizontal circumference, a seemingly time-bound Providence that, offering direction and limits and operating through a history now revealed as both meaningful and goal-oriented, finds itself no longer bound and limited but delivered. There where so many have arrived singly at the Gap—the X that marks the spot (which journey I’ve indicated by the broken lines)—single vision becomes available to all when the fullness of time meets up with the emptiness of space, two sides of the same coin making in all One. And as promised (whether as First or Second Coming), it is the fullness of time. If it weren’t we wouldn’t have the experiments—a circular argument, perhaps, until we realize because we see it that, open at both ends, the only Self-fulfilling prophecy there is ends up as it began by making sense of what is referred to as the resurrection of the body.

Thus, Somewhere around designation 1-2 in Prehistory, we find the cave-drawings, for instance, where though the animals—the sacrificial prey—are depicted with heads, the Palaeolithic hunters are not, which phenomenon I’ve indicated by line A-X. And so on as we go down and around the line: B-X, Shamanism; C-X, Yoga in India and comparable methods in China; D-X, the mysticism so characteristic of Near East and Western spirituality; penultimately, E-X, Zen, and finally and ultimately the experiments. It’s interesting to observe how the last—Headlessness, the Omega—consciously approximates and “completes” the “natural” vision of the first, the headless hunters, and so makes the infant Alpha actual and intelligible. And why not since, the one emerging from its place of origin, the other, incorporating even as it supersedes its beginning, can only be fully grasped at its end? And if I’ve omitted prophecy it’s simply because with a few somewhat dubious exceptions (Moses and the burning bush, the testimony of Job), its claims have largely been based on the hearing of the ear—the organ that, by measuring time and then taking, first, story and then history to the end of the line, paradoxically and providentially leads the way to its own apotheosis and redemption. In fact, it was precisely the “failure” and subsequent attrition of its “faith” in hearing—the Word—that proved instrumental in uncovering ultimate vision. Which alone should give us pause as to the nature of Grace and Providence. Though the instances of a Grace, special or otherwise, are as innumerable as sunsets everywhere and everywhen—and who knows how many have gone unregarded and unrecorded?—the fact that the last word (which is no word at all) has been left to a Providence taking the long way round, like the experiments themselves speaks louder than words to our present condition.



Just some thoughts. I’ll be in touch as soon as I return from Nacton.

Is it possible to live in communion with others? from Trisha English

Krishnamurti once said that we learn about ourselves in "the mirror of relationship", and central to relationship is communication - what we say, how we say it, and of course what we don't say - which in many instances reveals to us insights about "*what we actually do*" as opposed to what we "*think we do*". Then there is the meaning that we "*intend*" to convey.

From the above paragraph you can see straight away another K insight: "*analysis leads to paralysis*". If you keep breaking things down into fragments, what you have is a fragmentary response, something that is always incomplete, unfinished, and unsatisfactory.

Perhaps you will agree that communication in our present world loses something almost every day. The TV sound bites have grown more truncated, as if we are all in a hurry to go somewhere or to get something. We want information as fast as it can possibly be delivered. (*Just give us the bottom line is the message. Time is money, time is scarce, and I don't want to be bothered listening to some long-winded debate, no matter how fascinating.*) Sound familiar?

Are you receiving more and more emails these days without any salutations, without any friendly tone, and frequently unsigned? Do you get copies of forwarded messages that have been sent in a block to several people, as if emails are the impersonal extensions of the daily newspaper? Some of these cartoons, pictures, blogs - whatever, are quite entertaining but do they really have the same message as: "How are you? What are you doing with your life? Or even more relevant - perhaps - are you still alive? What are the things that give your life meaning?"

In the mirror of relationship I can see myself becoming infected by what I will call *social indifference*. And the message I am receiving from others is that I am completely unimportant in the scheme of things.

I accept this fact, if it is a fact. What I find unacceptable, is my own tendency to react with the same indifference, because I do not feel indifferent to the people that I correspond with, so why do I imitate this response when I find it prevalent in other people? Is it because I implicitly accept their unstated premise *that time is money, time is scarce, time is valuable* and by implication, *I really don't want to waste it on you?*

Or could it all stem from "fear". If I do not respond in the way you want me to, will you see me as a nuisance and stop corresponding with me on any level? If so, this is an example of the *precautionary principle* that holds that it is "best to be sure than sorry".

Recently I sent an email to a friend for his birthday, and I watched the *precautionary principle* in action. In the original version of the email I had included some poetry by Rumi and a passage by Aeschylus and I concluded the email with an expression of deep affection which I feel towards this person. He is younger than I am, though emotionally I feel we are in the same space. (*But I could be wrong*). That doubt soon blossomed into a rationalization of why I should edit the email. His wife might find my communication a "bit odd"; too intimate for their culture. Perhaps she would find it offensive in some way and her resentment might make things difficult for him. That would amount to unkindness on my part.

So, it wasn't long before the poetry was deleted and the final greeting heavily edited. The next day when I re-read the email I was struck by the coldness of it.

His reply was gracious and restrained as all his correspondence tends to be and I was grateful to hear from him. But it still gnawed away at me, why I had felt the need to edit and restrain, rationalize and reflect.

We human beings have the capacity to commune with one another on a much deeper level if we want to, but we are always afraid. So much of human behaviour is ruled and governed by fear. Fear permeates every aspect of our lives. It infects everything we do, which means that we are hardly ever honest, ever spontaneous. Almost all our responses are reactions to things created by the mind.

So, rather than face rejection, I re-fashion my affection and concern for others into something they will find acceptable. What on earth am I doing? And what are we doing to each other, when we are always reacting within some paradigm like “political correctness” or “social indifference” or “responsible restraint”.

Well, I am jumping ship. If you want to sail on this vessel into a meaningless storm of life, I won't stop you. I see what I am doing and have ceased immediately. If you get an email from me which sends you “oceans of love and cosmic protection” and you find it objectionable, then delete it at once. Erase it from your memory. Don't carry it around. I will not be offended. On the contrary, I will understand completely. Communion is not for everyone. Above all, don't worry. I am not going to assault you, steal your money, or your husband, or undermine your security.

I am a human being like you - that is all. The difference - if there is a difference - is that I want to be a free human being not a robotic reaction. So, if we meet, let it be in a field of trust and affection and if you don't want to meet, be assured that my affection for you will not be diminished at all.

Trisha English

Cease practice based on intellectual understanding, pursuing words and following after speech. Learn the backward step that turns your light inward to illuminate within. Body and mind of themselves will drop away and your original face will be manifest.

Dogen

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Sydney Harding Meeting—Feedback from Jeff LeFol

Hi Alan, at the very rewarding August meeting you asked for feedback on how the experiments work for us. My experience has been only with you as facilitator and my approach is simply to follow your instructions and ignore any suggestions and discussion about what experience one “should” have, and to see what happens.

On the first few occasions nothing happened, which didn't bother me (the would-be non-dualist is inured to things not happening) But then came a time when I "got" that atop the shoulders was not “my” head but the world, or at least a model of the world, built by the eyes, ears, etc. Since then I always have this experience whenever we do the experiments and also can renew it at will by grasping both earlobes. It always changes my perspective and cheers me up.

On August 8th you led five experiments. The pointing finger experiment had the above effect.

The closed eye experiment had some effect, but the brief note I made is now too cryptic to decipher. The other three experiments: Tube, Circle of Four, and Big Circle, all had a new and charming result. I realised that my face and head, rather like my name, is there for the use and convenience of the rest of the world, and that my social world need not contain much awareness of my self.

I have always found the experiments to be excellent value with sometimes subtle but always fresh results.

You were talking about perhaps doing more dialogue meetings. I stopped attending because I found the lack of agenda and consequent randomness to be irritating.

I once read a transcript of a dialogue meeting of Bohm and his students. While there was officially no agenda, in fact the group were all focussed on the conceptual side of quantum theory and the discussion stuck to that topic. “Dialogue” seemed to be just another format for advancing an inquiry that the group were pursuing in a mixture of ways.

During the last Greville St dialogue I attended, it occurred to me that you could start with a "round" where people would mention topics which are currently of interest to them. In meetings started this way I have sometimes been delighted that a sort of intersubjectivity can manifest a discussion covering or linking several of the points of interest.

And the loosest unit is unlikely to derail the whole meeting. Anyone else can simply refer back to another discussion point. I sometimes use this trick at the discussion after a Krishnamurti video where people tend to talk about anything but Krishnamurti. I just say something like “It's fascinating that that's what you had for breakfast, because I was wondering what Krishnamurti meant when he said....”. Blunt though it seems, this always works smoothly and I never have to do it more than twice in an hour.

I've been enjoying Nowletter 149 and am very impressed with Colin Drake's piece. It reminds me of Sailor Bob who I am currently reading. I'd like to hear more from Colin. Is he a local lad? (See Below. Ed.) Thanks again and Happy days,

Jeff LeFol

Rumi's Diwan of Shams of Tabriz: the divine vision. Saturday, 9 October 2010 Temenos Foundation 15th Annual Lecture Tour. Comment from Alan Mann

Margot and I went to be Temenos Foundation's 15th annual lecture. It was given by Andrew Harvey at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Harvey's presentation style was unnecessarily theatrical and his overblown delivery detracted from what he had to tell us. He talked about belief rather than seeing or direct apprehension, though Rumi himself was a seer rather than a believer. He created the impression that he thinks Islam offers the highest form of mysticism but everything he spoke about in his lecture can be found in all the major traditions. In fact, at one stage, he quoted Rumi to the effect that mysticism transcends any tradition.

His focus on the ecstatic aspects of mysticism makes people think it is special, remote, inaccessible to ordinary folk; his audience at the art gallery for example. He spent a lot of time talking about the building of the Taj Mahal as a metaphor for the effort and commitment necessary to reveal what Rumi wants us to discover. Why, for heaven's sake, bring in the Taj Mahal and thus create the impression that the revelation of the divine involves building a psychological structure comparable to the physical effort that went in to the building of the Taj Mahal. Surely, mysticism is about deconstructing the barriers we have accumulated to hide the divine vision which, with our assumed identity and mystical mumbo-jumbo out of the way, turns out to be the so-called secular revealed in full. I think the Taj Mahal particularly unsuitable because whilst it is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful buildings on earth and the workmanship wonderful to behold it is, after all, a mausoleum and the interior comes as an anti-climax after the splendour of its external appearance.

It is this overblown presentation of mysticism that gives it a bad name. Rumi was a great seer, poet and teacher but he spoke to his age, and his audience was largely feudal peasants, artisans, and scholars. He was no different from you and me in the worries and problems of life, as witnessed by his distress at the disappearance of his teacher Shams. He is carried to us in the language of his time with the metaphors that made sense to his audience. The 21st century mystic or person interested in mysticism must enquire into the relevance of mysticism to his or her immediate experience. This involves 'empiricizing the mystical'. And that involves, bringing it down to earth, by whatever means are necessary to re-ground it, thereby freeing it from the heady concepts with which it is surrounded by commentators like Harvey.

The speaker certainly knows all there is to know about the life and times and the works of Rumi but I left with the feeling that whilst he knew what he was talking about he didn't actually see what Rumi and Shams were pointing to. Yet, in the interests of true and fair reporting, I have to conclude with an alternative view, one of our friends and a regular at our meetings thought the talk quite wonderful and inspiring.

Alan Mann

Entoptic phenomena as universal trance phenomena from Floco Tausin

In the mid-1990s I met a man named Nestor living in the solitude of the hilly Emmental region of Switzerland. Nestor has a unique and provocative claim: that he focuses for years on a constellation of huge shining spheres and strings which have been formed in his field of vision. He interprets this phenomenon as a subtle structure formed by our consciousness which in turn creates our material world. Nestor, who calls himself a seer, ascribes this subjective visual perception to his long lasting efforts to develop his consciousness. He explains his vision as an extended perception of a phenomenon for which, in ophthalmology, the collective term “floaters” is applied.

In ophthalmology, eye floaters are generally regarded as harmless vitreous opacities. They are “entoptic phenomena”, viz. optical phenomena which are caused by certain conditions of the human visual system. Entoptic phenomena, whose appearance can be manipulated by selectively induced changes of consciousness states, are objects of interest for both science- and spiritually-oriented researchers. As physical and neurological symptoms, they belong to the physicians’ area of study; as subjective light phenomena they are likely to gain spiritual meanings for people like Nestor. While the Western medical study of entoptics has a tradition of a couple of hundred years, the interpretation of entoptic phenomena like floaters as spiritually significant perception in connection with altered states of consciousness possibly originated in the early days of human art.

Stone age rock art as entoptic phenomena – a study

In the 19th century, European and American opticians, physiologists and philosophers developed a broad interest in entoptic phenomena. To generate and study entoptics, they conducted experiments by stimulating brain and retina, electrically at first, later also with mind-altering substances. Especially in the 1960s and 70s, a number of experiments on subjects were conducted using agents such as THC, mescaline, psilocybin and LSD. A worldwide ban on these substances interrupted the drug based research on entoptic phenomena.

In 1988, two South African archaeologists referred to this heritage of the 1960s and 70s when they presented an alternative interpretation of stone age rock art of a certain kind. In a sensational publication, David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson observed that the rock and cave art of the later Paleolithic (about 40,000 to 10,000 BC), the time when man (*homo sapiens*) developed abstract thinking and art, is characterized by two main themes: vivid depictions of animals on the one hand, geometric figures such as dots, circles, lines, curves etc. on the other. Ever since the discovery of the European Paleolithic caves, archaeologists have been wondering about the importance and meaning of such geometric representations. Attempts to explain them in terms of totemism or magical rituals were hardly convincing to the research community.

Lewis-Williams and Dowson brought forward the original thesis that Paleolithic art is inspired by subjective visual phenomena, seen and depicted by shamans or spiritual men and women during altered states of consciousness. As subjective visual phenomena they understand, on the one hand, visual hallucinations, and on the other hand, entoptic phenomena which are colored or bright moving geometric shapes and patterns. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, as well as the researchers following their train of thoughts, focused on the entoptic phenomena. For while the visual hallucinations are shaped in an individual by cultural factors, entoptic phenomena are said to be

culturally independent, generated by states of the visual nervous system only. Moreover, two kinds of entoptics are distinguished: the phosphenes, light phenomena whose origin can be traced back to physical stimulation of the eyeball, and the so-called “form constants”, geometric shapes that occur in altered states of consciousness.

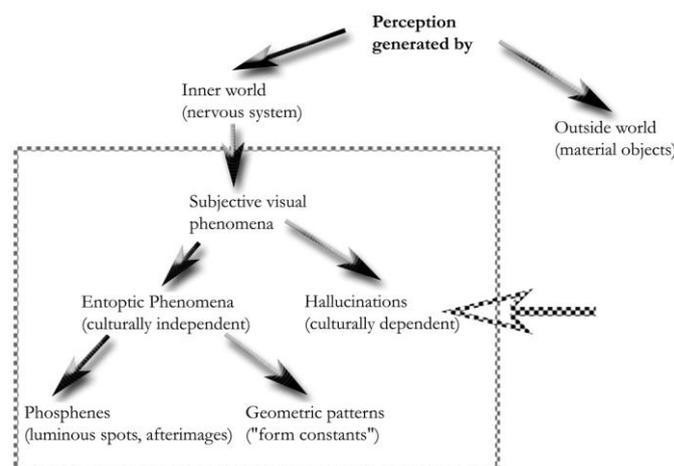


Fig. 1: Types of subjective visual phenomena.

The researchers developed a neuropsychological model to classify the geometric forms in six types – grid, lines, dots, zigzag lines, catenary curves, and filigrees – and to describe the progressive stages of the visual trance experience, starting with abstract entoptic forms that gradually transform into iconic images corresponding with the everyday or mythic reality of the shaman. Lewis-Williams and Dowson emphasize that our nervous system does not differ from that of prehistoric man. This means that we can perceive the same entoptic phenomena as people did 40,000 years ago. This circumstance allows the researchers to carry out comparisons between past and present art in different cultural contexts in order to support their argument. They tested their model, analyzing the art of two current shamanic societies: the South African San and the US American Great Basin Shoshone community Coso. Finally, the authors applied their model to carved and painted stone age rock art, and affirmed their hypothesis that this art, too, was created in the context of shamanism and altered states of consciousness.

	ENTOPTIC PHENOMENA		SAN ROCK ART		COSO	PALAEOOLITHIC ART			
			ENGRAVINGS	PAINTINGS		MOBILE ART		PARIETAL ART	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
I									
II									
III									
IV									
V									
VI									

Fig. 2: similar patterns of entoptic phenomena in different times and cultures (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, p. 206 / 7).

Critique of the model and further studies

The study by Lewis-Williams and Dowson inspired researchers beyond archaeology to further investigate the relationships of (prehistoric) art, shamanism and entoptic phenomena – and found them in other regions and times as well. Critics, on the other hand, refuted the relationship between the rock art geometric figures, entoptic phenomena and shamanism. Abstract art, they argued, is not an evidence for entoptic phenomena or shamanic practices, as abstract forms appear also in non-shamanistic communities or even in doodles of young children.

Today, the topic is somewhat abated. The thesis of Lewis-Williams and Dowson could not be wholly confirmed or refuted. To me, the thesis seems plausible if we draw attention to the present: the anthropologist Erika Bourguignon notes that of 488 societies, 437 know institutionalized forms of change of consciousness states. It is exactly these altered states of consciousness that form the intersection between the perception of entoptic phenomena and intense religious experiences. Thus, the probability is very high that most societies that lived and live on this planet not only were aware of entoptic phenomena but also gave them cultural or religious significance.

The 1991 master thesis by American anthropologist Linda Thurston supports this claim. Thurston provides a number of examples of anthropologists examining the hallucinogenic art of indigenous people and explaining it in terms of changes in the neurophysiological visual system. Even if most of these anthropologists are not explicitly referring to entoptic phenomena, it's not difficult to see similarities in the abstract patterns of the Indian art in Peru, including the famous Nazca lines, the art of the Tukano societies of the Colombian Amazon region, the yarn paintings of the Huichol Indians in Mexico, the so-called "grecas" of North American Indian art etc. Thurston herself points to the entoptic patterns in the art tradition of Australian Aboriginal Dreaming. All these societies are or were working with altered states of consciousness which were brought about in religious rituals through various techniques and means.

Entoptic imagery in (religious) art most probably spread beyond indigenous cultures. Some of the symbols of more elaborated and institutionalized religious traditions might originally trace back to entoptic patterns seen in altered states of consciousness. For example abstract representations of the Egyptian sun god (Re/Ra) and the Mesopotamian sun disk and winged sun, the Hindu and Buddhist yantras, mandalas, and abstract representations of chakras, the Indian sun wheel (swastika), the arrangement of the ten Kabbalistic Sefirot, as well as certain representations of the Christian cross. In Western modern societies, some artists are working with subjective visual and entoptic phenomena, though not necessarily in a religious or spiritual context.



Fig. 3: A Tukano shaman (Barasana group) draws entoptic shapes in the sand after a visionary experience, (Reichel-Dolmatoff, Fig 30).

Conclusion

Entoptic phenomena have been significant for many societies throughout history. They have been observed, recorded and interpreted by spiritual women and men over and over. This way, entoptics entered into particular cultures, as a source of inspiration for artists, philosophers and religious thinkers and believers alike. However, there have always been societies in which entoptic phenomena had no wider cultural significance, as it is the case with industrialized Western societies. Since the early modern triumph of Western materialism, the physical world is the exclusive object everyday perception and concentration. Anything that goes beyond that, like dreams, hallucinations, visions and entoptic phenomena, has no obvious benefit to society and economy. Common sense, therefore, deems perceptions like that as “disturbance” or worse, to be treated medically and psychologically. I find this problematic in an age in which the negative effects of a one-sided focusing on materialistic ideals are evident. Modern society has caused global, social, and individual problems, but cannot deal with these by its own means of technology and rationality – not as long as the same ideals govern the minds of the people. Many people have recognized the problem and orient themselves to new intellectual and spiritual values. The visual path conveyed by consciousness researchers of past and present societies is a possible approach to literally focus on the “spiritual” rather than

the “material”. The mobile dots and strands called “eye floaters” offer themselves as a particularly suitable meditation object. Unlike other entoptic phenomena, floaters are visible in our everyday state of consciousness, and we can move them in our visual field anytime, play with them, focus on them and try to hold them in suspension.

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The author:



The name Floco Tausin is a pseudonym. The author is a graduate of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of Bern, Switzerland. In theory and practice he is engaged in the research of subjective visual phenomena in connection with altered states of consciousness and the development of consciousness. In 2009, he published the mystical story “Mouches Volantes” about the spiritual dimension of eye floaters.

The book:

,Mouches Volantes. Eye Floaters as Shining Structure of Consciousness‘.

(Spiritual Fiction. ISBN: 978-3033003378. Paperback, 15.2 x 22.9 cm / 6 x 9 inches, 368 pages).

Floco Tausin tells the story about his time of learning with spiritual teacher and seer Nestor, taking place in the hilly region of Emmental, Switzerland. The mystic teachings focus on the widely known but underestimated dots and strands floating in our field of vision, known as eye floaters or *mouches volantes*. Whereas in ophthalmology, floaters are considered a harmless vitreous opacity, the author gradually learns about them to see and reveal the first emergence of the shining structure formed by our consciousness.

Mouches Volantes explores the topic of eye floaters in a much wider sense than the usual medical explanations. It merges scientific research, esoteric philosophy and practical consciousness development, and observes the spiritual meaning and everyday life implications of these dots and strands.

»Mouches Volantes« – a mystical story about the closest thing in the world.

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Awareness a No-Brainer! from Colin Drake

In reply to a recent article a critic wrote: 'There cannot be any awareness unless there is one who is aware and, what/who is it that is aware? The brain of course! Before the brain existed & upon its death there was no, & will be no awareness.'

This is the mind's central argument against the realization that deeper than mind/body (which is experienced as a flow of thoughts/mental images/physical sensations) is pure awareness. (Further than that, this is what we are at this deepest level!) The argument goes that without the brain 'we' would not be aware (of anything), therefore upon its death there will be no awareness. This argument is based on a misunderstanding of the word 'awareness', which is quite understandable as I use this word in a very particular way. Which I hope will be made clear by the following excerpt from *Beyond the Separate Self* :

Before starting we need to discuss the nature of awareness itself. It is obvious that we would not 'know' (be aware of) our own perceptions without awareness being present. This does not mean that we are always conscious of each one of them, as this is dictated by where we put our attention, or upon what we focus our mind. However, all sensations detected by the body, and thoughts/mental images occurring in the mind, appear in awareness, and we can readily become conscious of them by turning our attention to them. So awareness is like the screen on which all of our thoughts and sensations appear, and the mind becomes conscious of these by focusing on them. Take, for example, what happens when you open your eyes and look at a beautiful view: everything seen immediately appears in awareness, but for the mind to make anything of this it needs to focus upon certain elements of what is seen. 'There is an amazing tree', 'wow look at that eagle', 'what a stunning sky', etc. To be sure, you may just make a statement like 'what a beautiful view', but this does not in itself say much and is so self-evident as to be not worth

saying!

The point is that the mind is a tool for problem-solving, information storing, retrieval and processing, and evaluating the data provided by our senses. It achieves this by focusing on specific sensations, thoughts or mental images that are present in awareness, and 'processing' these. In fact we only truly see 'things as they are' when they are not seen through the filter of the mind, and this occurs when what is encountered is able to 'stop the mind'. For instance we have all had glimpses of this at various times in our lives, often when seeing a beautiful sunset, a waterfall or some other wonderful natural phenomenon. These may seem other-worldly or intensely vivid, until the mind kicks in with any evaluation when everything seems to return to 'normal'. In fact nature is much more vivid and alive when directly perceived, and the more we identify with the 'perceiver', as awareness itself, the more frequently we see things 'as they are'.(p.14-15)

So I differentiate between becoming 'conscious' of something which means the mind 'seeing' it, which requires a brain, and awareness itself which is the substratum in which these 'things' occur. So when there is no mind (brain) there is indeed no 'consciousness' of thoughts, mental images or sensations.

In fact one of the great values of having a sophisticated mind is that it can become 'aware of awareness'. So a human birth is indeed fortunate for it gives us the opportunity to achieve what the Buddha calls 'the first factor of enlightenment' which is 'awareness of awareness'. This is easy to see by sitting quietly and noticing how thoughts and sensations come and go, whilst 'awareness' is a constant conscious subjective presence.

However, even if you reject this concept of awareness, at the level of 'becoming conscious of something' it is easy to demonstrate that this does not necessarily require a brain; for all living things rely on awareness of their environment to exist and their behaviour is directly affected by this. This does show some ability to process incoming data and act (or react) according to this, but does not imply a 'brain' in the normal definition of the wordⁱ... At the level of living cells and above this is self-evident, but it has been shown that even electrons change their behaviour when (aware of) being observed! Thus this awareness exists at a deeper level than body/mind (and matter/energyⁱⁱ) and at the deepest level we are this awareness! About this Sogyal Rinpoche says, 'In Tibetan we call it Rigpa, a primordial, pure, pristine awareness that is at once intelligent, cognizant, radiant and always awake It is in fact the nature of everything'ⁱⁱⁱ.

My book *Beyond the Separate Self* aims to provide a simple framework in which one can directly investigate the nature of one's moment-to-moment experience which readily reveals 'awareness of awareness'. This may be sampled, and purchased, at www.nonduality.com .

Colin Drake

ⁱ ‘Organ of soft nervous tissue contained in the skull’, or ‘intellectual capacity’ (OED)

ⁱⁱ The theory of relativity, and string theory, show that matter and energy are synonymous.

ⁱⁱⁱ S. Rinpoche *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 1992, San Francisco p.47