

ONLY ONE MIND: AN ARTIST'S EXPLORATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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The aim of this article is to critique the contemporary scientific reduction of mind to brain and to explore the imaginal realm of consciousness. Through the author's own practice as an engraver, and through the researches and discoveries of free-thinking scientists, philosophers and artists,

this realm of the "One Mind" is revealed to be timeless and universal.

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I believe that the purpose of the universe is consciousness: to produce multiple foci and expressions for all creatures, who are in effect one creature, One Consciousness—a Monad, experiencing itself as self and itself as other—simultaneously, alternately, inextricably.

—Richard Grossinger¹

encapsulating image."⁴ It is an experience that dissolves, in the act, the philosophical dilemma of mind and matter.

INTRODUCTION

Engraving—the process of sculpting copper plate, of driving a line through its surface with a steel burin—has always been for me an act that induces a sense of expanded awareness. It is a "technique of transcendence" during which "an inward relocation of the real" takes place "at the expense of... everyday consciousness."² It is a kind of "ecstasy" in the original sense of the word, "*ekstasis*," the movement out of oneself into a larger self, into "Big Mind." The experience of "*ekstasis*" is both *in* time (as if inside the physical movement of the burin through the copper plate) and also, paradoxically and simultaneously, a timeless activity, as if watching the act with a mind out of time.

Access is obtained to the limpid and pervasive realm of metaphor and imagination—which becomes potent as a living and lived reality or *presence*, ontologically dominant, a zone of tension and energy beyond words and symbols. Consciousness expands outwards, relaxing into a larger field of awareness co-existent with the physical, and which is energetically enhanced, so real as to be populated—"*trouvier than life*."³ Through the imagination, in its deepest and most dynamic sense, a vital metaphorical force bridges eternity with time, a fact of which William Blake was constantly aware. For him, Imagination *was* Eternity. Metaphor becomes a living force; it is "our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separated realms of experience into one illuminating, iconic,

MIND THE GAP

Since Descartes' separation of the mental and material worlds, philosophers have struggled to close the gap and reconcile the two domains. With the rise and dominance of neuroscience in contemporary culture, the trend has been to conflate mind and brain, seeing consciousness as a kind of residue, or froth, effervescing from the brain's neuronal activity: "When mind seems visible within the brain, the space between person and organs flattens out—mind is what the brain does."⁵ For some commentators, like sociologist Nikolas Rose, "we are inhabiting an emergent form of life,"⁵ and "... are increasingly coming to relate to ourselves as 'somatic' individuals, that is to say, as beings whose individuality is, in part at least, grounded within our fleshly, corporeal existence."⁵

Rose⁵ elaborates a vision of the present and emerging future dominated by "the new psychiatric and pharmaceutical technologies for the government of soul." Iconic images of the simulated brain from increasingly sophisticated neuroimaging technologies have become compelling ambassadors for the brain's incorporation of mind. Informing us about our so-called identity, these images, claiming to explain the mind, convince us that the mind is the brain. We are "neurological selves" and these new selves are being progressively layered onto our former selves, whose psychic depth is being "flattened out."

The new style of thought in biological psychiatry not only establishes what counts as an explanation, *it establishes what there is to explain*. The deep psychological space that opened in the twentieth century has flattened out. In this new account of personhood, psychiatry no longer distinguishes between organic and functional disorders. It no longer concerns itself with the mind or psyche. *Mind is simply what the brain does.*⁵ (Emphasis added)

In this 'brave new world' where "... the new truths of ourselves arise, not from philosophy, it seems, but from

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research...,"⁵ personhood is mapped directly onto the body and especially the brain, so that dysfunction, mental disorder, or any kind of mental pathology "is simply the behavioral consequence of an identifiable, and potentially correctable, error or anomaly in some of those elements now identified as aspects of that organic brain."⁵ Psychopathology becomes an anomaly classified as a chemical disorder of the brain to be corrected by therapeutic intervention from pharmacology. It is this doctrine of molecular monotheism that now directs the psychiatric gaze to the virtual exclusion of all other approaches.

Rose sees this change in therapeutic outlook as "a shift in human ontology—in the kinds of persons we take ourselves to be. It entails a new way of seeing, judging, and acting upon human normality and abnormality. It enables us to be governed in new ways. And it enables us to govern ourselves differently."⁵ Rose does not see this biological reductionism as a cause for concern or criticism; rather he views "our bodies becoming ourselves" as the grounds for a certain optimism: it is giving rise to a "somatic ethics," in which individuals are becoming more responsible for themselves and able to manage their own affairs.

On the one hand, our vitality has been opened up as never before for economic exploitation and the extraction of biovalue, in a new bioeconomics that alters our very conception of ourselves in the same moment that it enables us to intervene upon ourselves in new ways. On the other hand, our somatic, corporeal neurochemical individuality has become opened up to choice, prudence, and responsibility, to experimentation, to contestation, and so to a politics of life itself.⁵

While this grounding of personhood in the physicality of corporeal existence is seen by many to be a positive development, the "flattening out" of the psyche and the biological reduction of personhood to molecules is more menacing, with implications for collective soul-loss and profit-driven corporate manipulation on an even more profound and global scale than at present, as the "new style of thought" spreads throughout contemporary culture. Oxford University's *Institute for the Future of the Mind*, for example, makes a clear and unequivocal statement about how the "mind" is formed by brain activity.

The brain is the most dynamic, individual, and vulnerable part of the human body. Although we are born with almost all of the brain cells we will ever have, it is the growth of connections between neurons that accounts for the physical growth of the brain after birth.

Importantly, these connections are highly determined by individual experience and change throughout life. This "plasticity" enables us to move from a view of the world through primary sensation to building our own interpretations in the light of previous experiences. *It is this continuous personalisation of the brain, through individual experience and the development of belief systems, that forms the "mind."*⁶ (Emphasis added)

Similarly, a walk through the Who am I? gallery of the Science Museum in the UK's London borough of Kensington reveals the same "new style of thought" about human identity.

Funded by the Wellcome Trust, the gallery is full of pithy blandishments coaxing parents and children, and innocent others, gazing at prominent slogans and amusing interactive showcases, into believing their minds and identities arise from no more than the mechanical firing of their brain cells. Take, for example, Showcase 14: "Who do you think you are?"

The human brain is a thinking machine with 100 billion nerve cells and 100 trillion connections. This mysterious device creates memories, sparks moments of genius and makes sense of what you see, touch and hear.

And Showcase 11: What do you think you are?"

Three pounds of wrinkly, grey flesh... *Scientists now know* that our thoughts, feelings, memories and reason all emerge from the brain. People used to believe that their heart was the seat of their identity. Do you feel your brain is what makes you you? (Emphasis added)

The emergent utopia inhabited by our brain-based, neurochemical selves may even promise eternal life through genetic manipulation.

Advances in genetics and medical technologies are already saving, improving and lengthening lives. But where might this research eventually lead? Some creatures, such as jellyfish, appear never to age. By studying their genetic make-up, scientists might reveal how we could have not only healthy but potentially never-ending lives.⁷

Thousands of visitors to London's Science Museum read this material, day in, day out, month after month. Yet this myopic molecular fantasy—especially the absurdity of extrapolating from seemingly ageless jellyfish to everlasting life in an unaging human body—goes unquestioned. Taken to an extreme, the vision becomes dangerous: scientists today believe they have the means to engage in "neurotechnological mind-reading." The human psyche becomes irrelevant when technologies like functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) are used "to enter and read the contents of the human mind via its cerebral activities."

The possibilities of neurotechnological mind-reading that we have today allow access to mental states without 1st person overt external behavior or speech.

With the advancement of decoders of cerebral activity (and also of other non-cerebral markers of inner thought) it is very likely that in the near future we will see a rapid progression in the capacity to observe—without mediation of language—contents of the others' mind... we might be able to efficiently use a subject's cerebral cortex for rapid object recognition, even when the subject is not aware of having seen the recognized object. This may be extended as a great promise to the domain of dreams, to observe in real time the content of a visual narrative during sleep.⁸

The ethical menace of this brave new world is plain to see. While the privacy and integrity of selfhood are clearly under threat from the application of so-called neurotechnological "mind-reading," the promotion of this neurotechnology as a means of mapping "identity" inevitably leads scientists into the moral maze of genetic modification and the molecular

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