



*What do you see from your ship today Argonaut ?*

## Miniature Truths and the Embracing and Rejection of Complexity

Recently, in a communication with **Andrew Campbell**, I suggested that if I were to be an artist it would be as a portraitist of miniatures, drawing something tiny enough (an aphid, the knuckle of one finger, a bird's eye, a single thread of a spider's web wet with rain reflected by the sun) you could actually hope to really capture the true essence (not in the photographic sense, but in the artistic/metaphysical sense) in the moment, of that instant of '**Now Time**' I've written about that Andrew has also shared through writing and artworks published here and elsewhere; when time 'stops' and *simultaneously* expands to become eternal. I wondered whether if you did this to a sufficient degree you could actually create a "portrait that becomes so miniature that it becomes the truth." Andrew liked the phrase, and we dug deeper into this possibility. I wrote: As a writer, the following comment by ee cummings is, I think, the equivalent to my belief in a "portrait that becomes so miniature that it becomes the truth":

"As for expressing nobody-but-yourself in words, that means working just a little harder than anybody who isn't a poet can possibly imagine. Why? Because nothing is quite as easy as using words *like* somebody else: we all of us do exactly this nearly all of the time - and whenever we do it, we are not poets. If, at the end of your first ten or fifteen years of fighting and working and feeling, you find you've written one line of one poem, you'll be very lucky indeed. And so my advice to all young people who wish to become poets is: do something easy, like learning how to blow up the world - unless you're not only willing, but glad, to feel and work and fight till you die."

One line of one poem; can't get much more miniature than that. These lines are portraits of reality, not imitations, not figments, not representations. They are the truth.

I went on to say: Man cannot grasp, and is intolerant of, complexity. As Watterson says (via "Calvin & Hobbes") it offends us that nature, Gaia, is indifferent to us, that we humans cannot know and understand everything, reduce it to simplicity. Religions, I believe, are of two varieties: (a) humanist religions: those that attempt, absurdly, to oversimplify everything, and fiercely, stubbornly disregard everything that does not fit within that simple model, and (b) spiritualist religions: those that personify complexity by imposing on it something larger that is still uniquely human -- transcendent supernatural 'beings' that represent and reinforce human ethics and behaviours, behaviours that are archetypally and invariably (like "Star Trek" aliens) simplistic and humanoid. The first variety denigrates nature, ignores it, and refuses it. The second variety worships supernature as 'above nature'. Both types are not only un-natural, they are nature-hostile. They both rephrase the understanding of the universe as simple and unnatural, controlled by humans or human-types.

Why are we so desperate to have someone in control, someone or someones who are infinitely wise and somehow like us?

My philosophy is not spiritual, and the Gaia that I believe self manages all life on Earth is not human or human-type.

Gaia is not to be revered or treated as sacred. Gaia just works, in both senses of the word. Gaia is all-of-us, connected, collectively, evolved and evolving to sustain all-of-us, connected, collectively. Gaia is massively complex. Far beyond our full understanding, just as the cells in my lungs lack a full understanding of the workings of my 'whole' body, of which they yet are an integral part. Gaia is real, not spiritual. A brief thirty millennia ago we acquired the insane conceit (based on some short-term modest success) that we could somehow self-manage ourselves, apart from Gaia, and could even control and master Gaia in our self-interest without destroying 'us-all' (I have occasionally called Gaia 'she', but that is blatant pandering to spiritualists and I'm trying to stop -- the only appropriate way to describe Gaia is in the first person omni-plural, not the third person singular).

Gaia aspires not only to maximize the quanta, diversity and balance of life forms on Earth, but their individual and collective joy and wonder. Why? Because the rules by which Gaia self-manages (rules over which 'we-all' have no control) are that creatures who are full of joy and wonder want to live more than those who are not, and therefore do. By contrast, creatures that are fierce, intelligent and/or prolific have a temporary evolutionary advantage over those who are not, but that advantage is not sustainable -- fierce, intelligent, prolific creatures who have no joy or wonder have no felt purpose to stay alive, so they don't. My evidence for this audacious assertion is my personal observation that, except for us dissociated humans, I see and feel joy and wonder everywhere in other species, from aphids to ravens to spring peeper frogs to whitetail deer. Those creatures live in Now Time, and their lives are hence 'eternal', outside of (clock) time. You get closer and closer to these creatures, then just for an instant you become connected with them, with Gaia, and you look and -- there, now -- is reality, the truth, not the representation, not it,

but us-all, Gaia. Our task, as artist, poet, philosopher, is to capture and convey that tiny, instant, eternal truth.

In ten or fifteen years of hard work, one line. ----

I met yesterday with Jeremy Heigh of Siftstar fame, and we talked a bit about complexity. We agreed that:

- While children seem to embrace complexity, adults seem to loathe it. We wondered: At what point in our lives does this change, and why?

- As Picasso said, all children are born artists, and those who survive as artists in their adult lives somehow manage not to 'grow out of' that ability like the rest of us do.

It seems to me, therefore, that the idea of great art becoming truth, becoming 'real', and the idea of children starting out as artists and appreciators of complexity, and then becoming inexorably neither, are connected. Also related is the acceptance, as we 'mature', of religions, either humanist or spiritual super-humanist, anti-natural moral codes that reject Gaia and the reality of the interconnectedness of all life on Earth. Perhaps these religions act as artificial, man-made 'hearts' to keep us going, to replace the natural ones that had to be removed because, in civilization culture, they wouldn't stop bleeding.

What deranged madness grips (most of) us, what horrific violence so afflicts us, at some point in our young lives, that we lose our artistic capacity, our capacity for appreciating and embracing complexity, most of our capacity to imagine, and our ability to see and live a third way that is neither rational (scientific, logical, intellectual) nor moral (religious, emotional, spiritual), but rather natural (intuitive, sensual, perceptual)? Why don't we even notice the resultant dissociation from reality? And how can we bear 'realizing' how much we have lost of what makes us 'us' (and 'us/all'), to the point we have to fight every moment of our lives in the hopes of recapturing just 'one line' of it?

Perhaps when Eliot said "human kind cannot bear very much reality", he was telling us that, because we cannot conceive reality (it can only be perceived), we cannot, as we 'mature', understand it, and we therefore resent it, find it unbearable, intolerable, humiliating, terrifying.

A complex, conceptually unfathomable Gaia does not and cannot 'fit' within the rational and moral models that man has constructed in his brain to make sense of his world. In fact, no complex (unordered), adaptive, 'unknowable' system that manages itself and is indifferent to human intervention and even human existence, fits within our rational and moral models. For that reason, complexity (and Gaia specifically) is not only resented, but intolerable, in the same way that the mere concept of Earth not being the centre of the universe was intolerable at the dawn of the Renaissance. We have 'reinvented' prehistory as one of outrageous disorder full of cannibals, fights to the death for no purpose, constant deprivation and suffering, beasts 'red in tooth and claw'. But as Jonas Salk said "If all the insects on earth disappeared, within fifty years all life on Earth would disappear. If all humans disappeared, within fifty years life on Earth would flourish as never before." No matter how we try to destroy, rationalize or moralize it out of existence, Gaia, the real, natural universe all around us (and still, dormant, within us) continues to defy us, defy our understanding and attempts to control it.

You may have read my self-confessional article saying that I believe that I am damaged, a shadow of my former self. Somehow (perhaps there is a bit of artist in me) I sensed this draining of capacity happening to me as it was occurring, and ever since I have been grieving its loss. Perhaps unlike most people I am just unable to get over this grief and get on with my new shallow life living inside my head. Perhaps I am romanticizing this loss -- a butterfly lamenting the loss of those hundreds of caterpillar feet, when I should be rejoicing (re-Joyce-ing?) in the giving up of the ability to dance in favour of the ability to fly. But somehow I feel I have lost these capacities in return for nothing except an increased ability to cope with civilization, its demands and its restrictions. This draining of capacity, this detachment from Gaia, this dissociation from the instincts, from the senses, from the perceptions, from the reality of Now Time, this terrible loss, is what we call socialization.

I'm not angry about having been subjected to this process. We do what we must, and this is the price of maintaining, for a little while longer, our fragile, man-made, anti-nature civilization. Heretics must be converted or suppressed, because the very tenets of the society that 6.5 billion people now depend on are at stake. If we were to accept that self-contained human societies living as much as possible outside of nature, managed by human hierarchies as well as possible, borrowing massively from billions of years of stored resources, were non-viable, when there is now no other possible way to keep those 6.5 billion people alive for even a short period of time, we would have complete social collapse, anarchy, the chaos that our rational and moral belief systems so abhor.

This is unthinkable. Let the artists and the children perceive such realities and horrors, for awhile, if they must. We'll get to them soon enough...