



Sacred Site and Sound Festival, Tintern

Natalie Tobert

Friday 18th July 2014

Our accommodation at the Royal George Hotel consisted of rooms set around a beautiful garden, on the Welsh banks of the River Wye. On Friday evening we walked to the ancient parish church of St Michael, said to date from 765 AD: it was a place of quiet reflection at Tintern Parva. We walked past glorious overgrown flower gardens, along the banks of the River Wye, meandering along its curves, listening to waterfalls that seemed to be embedded within the rock walls of people's gardens. As we walked, it was as if a doorway had opened, a portal to beyond, as we made this short pilgrimage up the road.

The concert consisted of medieval lullabies from the sacred choir in purple robes (*Cantorian Sanctaidd*), and the Parva Spring String Quartet played 'Reveries on a River Journey'. There was silence after each song, and the church bell tolled solemnly to mark the end of the concert. After the music ended, the vicar in her floor length white robes, stood on the river bank at dusk, from where hundreds of lighted candles were lifted one by one into that river, to float away in white paper bags. We watched as this candlelight flotilla floated downstream in the darkness, around the curving banks of the river. It was a magical sight, taking the light to Tintern Abbey.

Reverend Nora Hill's sermon was about the beginning of the Earth, at a time when humans first arrived. She emphasised the link between cosmology and human existence, about our origins in the universe: in the past, humans assumed the sacred was 'out there', but now we believe it is embedded in the land and in us. Bernard Carr mentioned the symbolism of lighting candles and placing them on the river, a symbol of time. The light contained in this way flowed down the river of time. Each of us humans appeared to be like candles that floated down the river of life. Like the candles that evening, we are lit for a short time, we move along, maybe we get stuck, and maybe we continue our journey.

Saturday 19th July

The following morning, **Dr Madeleine Gray** (Professor of Ecclesiastic History at University of South Wales) spoke to us about the art of dying well in mediaeval culture. She explained Tintern was known as a 'thin place': it was between locations in this world; it was where a person could transcend space and time. She explained that 'thin' places, or places of gentle energy, were places that offered a link between worlds. Death was believed to be where we encountered the divine, at a 'thin' place.

I was lucky, I listened to the talk sitting beside the open doors, where I could look out onto the Welsh valley covered in tall trees, stone built houses, flower gardens and rocks. I could hear cocks crowing, and the mysterious gentle sound of light rain. Dr Gray reminded us that monasteries like Tintern Abbey became burial places: people believed that once buried they would remain in a holy place for the rest of time. Tombstones became a prayer for the deceased embedded in stone, throughout time.

In mediaeval times people were worried about 'judgement' and the need for 'mercy'. However, a person could prepare for death (like we do now with living wills or advanced directives): there were books on the art of death to help a person die well. The mediaeval assumption was of one death, with a rotting corpse: a person needed the prayers of others to release them from Purgatory. There was a fear of bodily decomposition and despair. At that time they didn't appear to have a narrative of the soul or spirit beyond the body, nor of reincarnation. It seemed death was feared, and Dr Gray said saints like St Christopher ensured a person would not die a bad or unpredictable death.



On reflection, it seemed as if we still denied death in 2014. The previous week I had taught a workshop on death and dying for medical and healthcare practitioners.

Although some front line staff had support, many had little supervision or training on the nature of death: one nurse said after a death *"I just go into my car and cry"*. It seems as a society we haven't really addressed existential beliefs about the nature of death itself. I wondered how far we had moved on from mediaeval times. If we keep religion faith and spirituality separate from our training in medicine and health care, is it because there is still a fear of death?

Our next speaker **Paul Robertson**, founder of the Medici String Quartet, had created *Music Mind Spirit Trust*, with his wife Chika. He collaborated with visiting professors of music and medicine at Peninsula School, Exeter. Paul had interviewed Sir John Tavener, whom he considered an authentic mystic. The two men discovered they had much in common including near death experiences, which they discussed with Peter Fenwick. Tavener, who died in 2013, wanted to compose music about near death experiences: *"when I am composing I know God exists"*. *"I have in mind to write music about the dying process for a string quartet. There are four states of 'atman': waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and beyond"*. He said rather than attend church, he preferred to sit or walk in nature, in order to experience God.

Paul played us Tavener's 'Towards Silence', antiphonal music that was like an immersion into sound, like a baptism. Tavener knew what it meant to be both in the world, and apart from it: *"I have become much more indifferent to life now"*. *"All music comes from silence: it is at the edge of sound and silence. We are like a candle in the wind: we are there just for a short time, before we go out"*. Paul told us Tavener had suffered much pain in later life, but he may have found meaning through that pain: *"silence is when the soul finds God, the edge where the nothing is most powerful"*. Paul finished with an anecdote of his own NDE. He got sick, and was letting go of the world. He said his NDE was the most beautiful experience he had, with no desire to come back to life: *"it was gorgeous"*.

Paul Devereux was our next speaker, managing editor of *"Time and Mind: the Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture"*. He invited us to consider how the natural topography became mythologised, and how certain places became the repository of myth and legend. He showed us places across the world which embodied local myths, and told us about the mystic geography of the ancient sites of Cadbury Castle, Glastonbury Tor, and Mount Shasta in California. We heard the story of King Arthur's time: if you were unwell or on your deathbed, then a host of discarnate wild beings would come and snatch your spirit. He had done a project with the Royal College of Art in London on 'Landscape and Perception 2007-2012', with the bluestones of Stonehenge.

On Saturday evening we all walked down the road to Tintern Abbey, towards the impressive hulk of the ruined stone architecture. We sat on makeshift chairs, together with the people of Tintern in that huge open-air auditorium with its towering stone walls. The orchestra was in a makeshift curved stage at the front. Festival director was **John Clarke**, former chair of SMN, who eloquently introduced the programme. In single file, the Cantemus Chamber Choir started the concert, and processed from the back of the hall on both sides of the audience, singing as they went. The Welsh Chamber Orchestra played tunes by Arvo Pärt (the Estonian composer of sacred music) and John Tavener (known for his religious works and contemplative music). I felt blessed being in such a marvellous location, with these people.

As the music started a flock of swift flew over our heads, and I wondered whether John Tavener flew with them in spirit, to see what was going on. During the performance, one white dove flew in and perched on a high parapet: it was joined by a soft grey dove. I wondered what they made of the music as they sat there listening. During the interval we walked around the extensive stone ruins of the 12th century monastic Cistercian Abbey of Tintern: the ancient walled precinct, the cloisters, dormitories and refectory.

The second half of the concert was dedicated to the music of John Tavener, with the orchestra playing an extended piece: "The Protecting Veil". Then as dusk became night we heard a recording of "Towards Silence", with a digital light show. Sound came from all four directions of the abbey. The swifts returned to fly and glide over the skies above the abbey, just as John Tavener's piece began. I watched the heavens and the stars which started to appear in the night sky. The Abbey walls became black silhouettes as the night sky darkened, and the lights were turned off for the final performance. The throbbing sounds diminished, and became joined with our own group heartbeat, and the heartbeat of that magical, mystical place: it felt as if a portal had opened to another world. At John Tavener's request we didn't clap after the performance, but walked out in silence at the end, quietly up the road along the river, in single file to our hotel.

Sunday 20th July

On Sunday morning, a huge mist lay over the garden and stream, and as it lifted the heat of the day returned. Madeleine Gray spoke again on pilgrimage, an encounter between the therapeutic world and a healing place. We learnt Tintern was constructed in sacred space, where the Virgin and Child had miraculously manifested in an oak tree. People seemed to have an urge to visit a sacred, historical, numinous space, which made the journey itself meaningful.

Paul Robertson talked about the piece "Scatter Roses Over My Tears": Tavener was suffering existential and physical pain towards the end of his life. He tried to find meaning in pain. Excerpts were played of John Tavener and Paul talking about illness and suffering. They both became ill within a few weeks of each other, which took each of them to the edges of consciousness. Beethoven's amazing music had become Tavener's solace: he experienced bliss in suffering. When asked if John could wind the clock back, would he have chosen not to be ill? He replied: no not really, life experiences and suffering are ordained, by atman, or God. You get to trust that space when you compose music.

It was our last sunny day in Tintern, and the trees looked gorgeous as did the flowers and the butterflies. At the end of the session, our chair Bernard Carr gave thanks to all and illustrated how the talks meshed together in a marvellous way. He thanked the people of Tintern, and explained that when the event had originally been planned, Sir John Tavener was still alive. Phoebe Wyss read a poem by William Wordsworth to end the event, written while he was in the sacred space of Tintern Abbey in 1798:

"that blessed mood,
In which the burden of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened: that serene and blessed mood
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and becomes a living soul.
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

Natalie Tobert PhD is a medical anthropologist, whose *"Training Pack"* on Cultural Equalities offers a teaching protocol, to raise awareness of existential spiritual beliefs for staff and students in medicine and healthcare. Her new book *"Spiritual Psychiatries"* brings fresh perspectives to the dialogue about mental health and extreme experiences. She is on the Advisory Board of Mandala Project, California. natalietobert@aol.com <http://www.aethos.org.uk/>



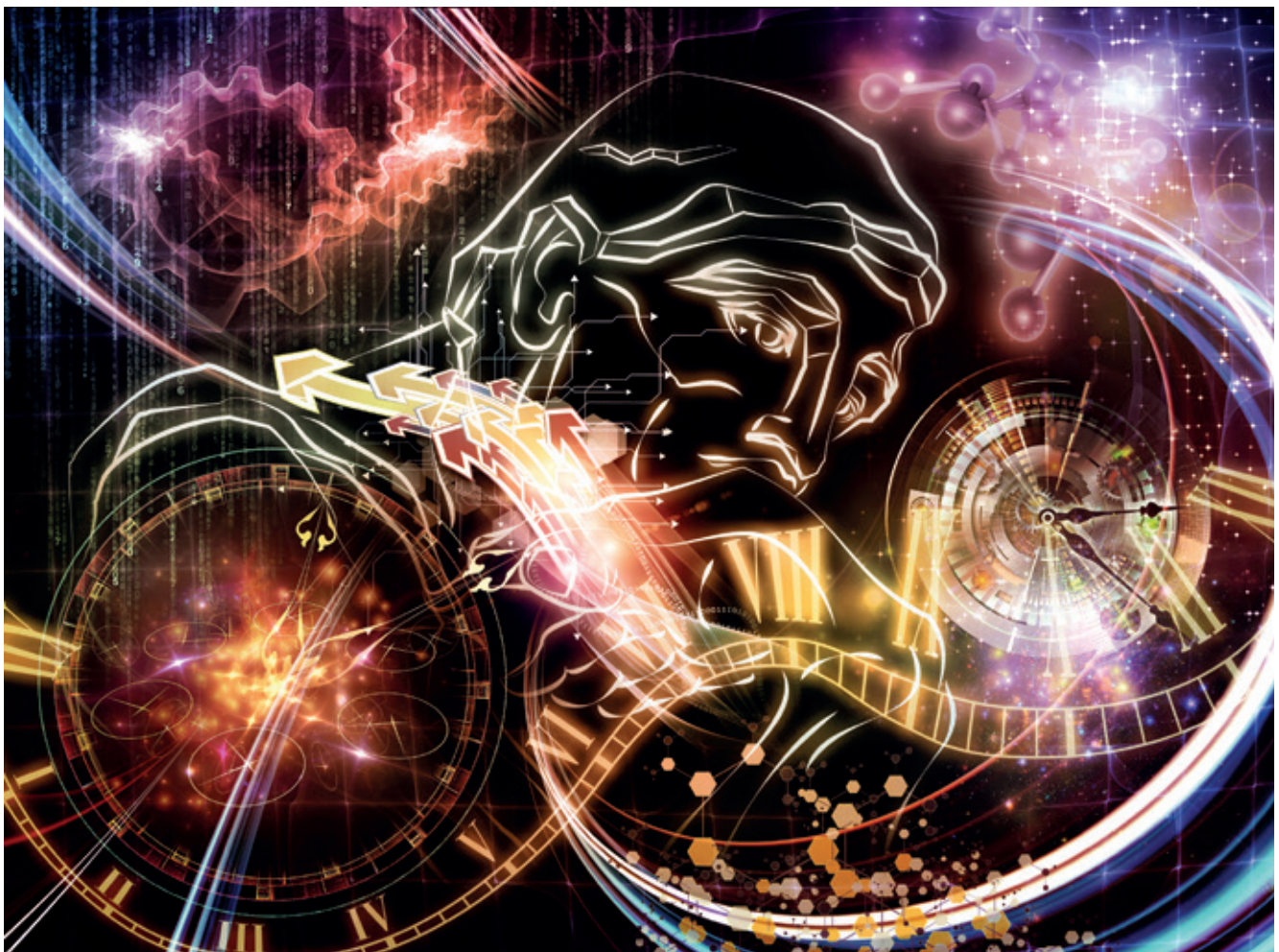
Mystics & Scientists Conference, Warwick, 4-6 April 2014, Warwick University

Consciousness and the Experience of Time

John Clarke

“What is time?” “What am I”? These two deep questions, intimately linked, were the underlying themes of this conference. **David Lorimer** began by confronting us with the mystery at the heart of these themes, namely the contrast between the outer and the inner experiences of time and of ourselves, the outer experience which measures the world in objective rational terms, and the inner experience which takes us beyond the distractions and discontinuities of our external temporality, perhaps enabling us to discover within ourselves intimations of eternity, of lived experience in the now, of being rather than doing, “the still point of the turning world” in T.S. Eliot’s memorable phrase. It is a process in which, David suggested, we might hope to experience a turning point in our lives, a new beginning in which “the fire and the rose are one”.

Dr Barbara Magnani brought the proceedings down to earth, or rather to the brain, and to what she described as the neural substrate of our cognitions of time and of ourselves. Her particular interest was in the spatial representation of time, in how we come to comprehend and represent time subjectively in spatial terms. Out of this comes the question how we can manipulate spatial attention in ways which might influence variations in subjective time, and what implications this might have for altered states of consciousness, for certain clinical disorders of the temporal function, and for left-right co-ordination of the cerebral cortex. She outlined her sophisticated research work in this area which is difficult so summarise adequately here but in general her conclusion was that the manipulation of spatial attention influences the experience and representation



of duration in ways which have implications for clinical practice. In the discussion which followed there was debate about the construction of subjective time through such factors as ageing, culture, language, personality, and sleep patterns.

The next talk by **Prof. Bernard Carr** radically shifted our attention once again, this time to the cosmos at large, emphasising the mysterious nature of time which – quoting famous words by St Augustine – is both inescapably familiar yet provokingly elusive. For Bernard, however one thing is clear: time is fundamental to the universe, not a mere subjective construction or an illusion disguising the fundamentally eternal nature of the cosmos. The latter view makes it difficult to comprehend our subjective consciousness which seems so real, and sometimes displays tantalising intimations of eternity, yet which also seems essentially temporal and in motion. In a bold attempt to circumvent this dilemma he focused on the precognitive experience of the coincidence between dreams and events in daily life, making use of the idea of the ‘specious present’, the extended sense of the present moment which is fuller than an extensionless point, in which certain kinds of subjective states can seem both temporal and yet eternal. This suggests that our sense of time is on a kind of cusp between the everyday temporal and the mystical eternal, and that our normal sense of time is only a limited aspect of a more expanded or altered experience of temporality. Our consciousness thus hovers between, and looks both ways towards, the timeful and the timeless, a situation which might accommodate precognitive experience.

In some ways **Dr James d’Angelo** also takes us to the conjunction between two separate yet perhaps identical worlds, the manifest world of words, musical sounds and vibrations, and the unmanifest world which underlies and binds these two into a single cosmos. To experience this, James took us beyond the abstract world of words and into a world of more direct experience through the chanting of sounds and rhythms, and most powerfully into the chanting of AUM which is the sound of the complete feeling of being. It is also, we were assured, the echo of the first vibration of the cosmos at the moment of creation – perhaps a pre-scientific anticipation of the cosmological background radiation! These vibrations may be seen as the universal manifestation of unity-in-diversity, the binding together of the cosmos which typically emerges in the case of natural self-organising systems such as flocks, swarms and shoals, and most intriguingly in the synchronisation of a flock of ticking metronomes or pendulum clocks (you can experience the latter by going to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqFc4wriBvE>)

Powerful, unusual experiences as a child left **Narain Ishaya** with a profound and lifelong sense that there is something more than linear time with its moment-to-moment succession

of nows. He explained that for him this understanding of time is superficial, even illusory, and that real time, and hence real mind, is unchanging, perfectly still and silent, and that the most important things in life – love, poetry, music, the creative imagination - arise from a level deeper than ordinary everyday experience, revealing the limitless potential of the conscious immortal ‘I’ in moments of profound self-transformation.

In the talk by **Prof. David Luke** we returned to issues concerning precognition, and to ASCs in general which he believes are closely linked to, and might help explain, ESP phenomena. He outlined to us studies drawn from a variety of cultural sources as well as laboratory work, and, among a number of considerations arising, he examined the adaptive function of ASCs in human evolution, their connection with significant moments in life, and their association with drugs, and he went on to speculate that psi phenomena may be linked to unconscious processes, and may bear a significant relationship to differences in personality type.

The concluding Open Forum was preceded by small-group discussions whose deliberations ranged over a variety of topics, including the intriguing question: what is the future – which does not yet exist – or does it? The rounding-off discussion by the panel of speakers focused mainly on the question of the relationship between consciousness and the brain, whether the latter is a filter for already-existing consciousness or its causal foundation, thus drawing together the two main questions of the conference concerning the relationship between inner and outer experience.

David Lorimer concluded with Plato’s beautiful remark that “time is the moving image of eternity”. This final comment led me to reflect that we still struggle with the ancient question of the relationship between the many and the one, whether in poetic, philosophical or scientific terms. I found the conference especially satisfying in its openness to many different voices, styles and disciplines, from the personal and the expressive to the scientific and the philosophical, and the readiness to engage across and beyond disciplinary boundaries. This seems to me one of the great and continuing strengths of the Network, and the very title of the series of which this conference was number thirty-seventh – *Mystics and Scientists* – carries within it by its apparent contradiction a summons to perpetuate the discussion which Plato and his fellows began.

John Clarke is a Vice-President of the Network and a former Chair. His latest book is entitled *The Self-Creating Universe: The Making of a Worldview*.

MARGUERITE PORETE (1250-1310)

“Being completely free and in command of her sea of peace, the soul is nonetheless drowned and loses herself in God, with him and in him. She loses her identity, as does the water from a river - like the Ouse or the Meuse - when it flows into the sea. It has done its work and can relax in the arms of the sea, and the same is true of the soul. Her work is over and she can lose herself in what she has totally become: Love. Love is the bridegroom of her happiness in enveloping her wholly in his love and making her part of that which is. This is a wonder to her and she has become a wonder. Love is her only delight and pleasure.

The soul now has no name but Union in Love. As the water that flows into the sea becomes sea, so does the soul become Love. Love and the soul are no longer two things but one. She is then ready for the next stage: falling into a trance of nothingness. She then no longer lives in the life of grace, nor in the life of the spirit, but in the glorious life of Divinity. God has conferred this special favour on her, and nothing except his goodness can now touch her.”

John Moriarty comments: Marguerite Porete, the real thing, the genuine thing, and we burned her at the stake.





The New Story Summit

An evaluation by Serge Beddington-Behrens

At the end of September, 325 people from all over the world convened on the Findhorn community to participate in a one-week conference called 'The New Story Summit'. The idea behind it was that the stories we all hold in our head determine how we see the world - how we think and act - and that many of our old stories, such as, for example, those about war and famine being inevitable or that the purpose of life is to 'make it' and get to the top (of what?) are not only becoming increasingly anachronistic but are responsible for much of what doesn't work in the world. The aim was to discover what the new story or rather new stories are, so we may instead touch into what will inspire us and move us forward, help us to think and see the world in new ways, engage in our relationships in new ways. Above all, what we wanted to discover was not just a new story but one at a *higher level*. After all, we can buy a new I-phone with more gizmos on it but it's basically still at the same level. No real shift. We need new stories that will shift and ennoble us, help us realise that as Jean Houston once put it, 'We are born Stradivariuses and must stop believing in the story that we are plastic fiddles.' Were anyone present still to have subscribed to this myth, I feel that this week at Findhorn will have eradicated it for once and all.

The beauty of this conference was that it succeeded in giving us the *experience* of such a level shift, as its organisers wanted to create a structure that not only enabled us to theorise with our minds about new stories, but also to explore tangibly what putting them into practice might imply. One way it did this was to create a 'gift economy', whereby instead of everyone paying a flat fee, each of us paid what we felt we could. Those with more money paid more than those with less, which allowed for scholarships to be available for the low waged and to pay for air fares so that many indigenous people could fly over and grace us with their presence. The conference also moved away from the traditional model of 'teachers lecturing students' - the former telling the latter how to be or what to think - to one where all of us could be students and teachers for each other. After a couple of structured days, the organisers felt we were ready to create our own structures whereby those of us who felt they had something to offer, could advertise their wares. The result was that many concealed sages emerged from the woodwork and not only revealed to us that they knew just as much about the new story as the so called 'experts', but were also beautifully embodying it in the way they lived.



Empowerment

What we clearly saw was that the old story was about giving our power away to authority figures, those whom we believe know what to do - viz., our bankers, politicians and doctors etc. - and then complaining or blaming them for the various messes they get us into. The new story, on the other hand, we realised, is all about our claiming much more responsibility, not only for how we choose to live, but also for the state of the society around us. We learned that if we want to see change happen in some area, then we need to take a stand, speak up, make our own voice heard. And this is what happened at the conference. In particular, I was reminded of the incredible power of the creative arts to make a difference and that the new story is not simply something to be told but it also needs to be sung and danced and painted and clowned into expression. Speaking as an 'oldie', one of the most encouraging things was to see the awesome wisdom and contributions of many of the younger people present, which made me long for them to come into power in the world as they were not burdened by the same limitations and conditioning that has burdened us. For me, they were my teachers and it was a total honour to be in their presence.

We were very privileged to have the mayor of a large town in Senegal come and say a few words to us about community living. 'I am from a country,' he told us, 'that is very rich, not because of big banks, but because in Africa we share things. We share our joy and our pain. Community is something that can include people with the least capital and cultural resources. Through community, we can learn to live together in a new way. It is a remedy for the global disease of loneliness and separation and it will help us learn to trust one another and so wean us off our many consumer addictions'. Yea.

The Feminine Principle

Perhaps what most moved me was encountering some incredible women warriors reconfirming in me that the Feminine principle had truly come of age, all of them beautiful wise goddesses showing us men that fierceness and strength can be aligned with compassion and tenderness. Some were activists for human rights, others for children's rights, others for abused women, some confronted the evils of 'big business', others were peace activists. All were awesome human beings. One woman who described herself as an 'Earth lawyer' reminded us that we were all earth lawyers and that 'when human law aligns itself to higher law, harm moves to harmony'. A mother suggested that 'We women need to raise our children so that they are never able to kill another woman's child' and a political activist reminded us that 'at all times we need to use our voices at the edge of our comfort zones in order to penetrate the edges of power'.

What we all got to see so clearly was that most of our old stories, birthed as they were by the egoic us which believes we are separate from other people and from our world, all revolve around the idea of separation. This is why, both as individuals and nations, we have behaved so selfishly, never considering the wider implications of many of our actions and have regarded our planet as a lifeless entity whose resources we can plunder for our own gains. And for the ego, difference equals separation. In that domain, what is of paramount importance is what class, race, colour, religion or culture we belong to, how rich or poor we are, how influential we think we are, what tribe we belong to, whether or not we think we have 'made it' and 'know the right people'! In that world, we need to be right and others wrong. And of course, all these divisions lie behind so much of the inequality and violence all around us.

Respect

For me, the great gift of the conference was spending a week in a culture where none of these old divisions existed and where differences could be celebrated. Despite all

of us coming from many different walks of life, there was nonetheless a spirit of deep respect for one another, a powerful awareness of our shared human unity and with it, the sense of how powerful we were as a unit. I felt that in the same way that we might visit the ashram of an enlightened Master in order to have our spiritual vibrations accelerated, so we need to go to gatherings like these and be in an energy field like this in order for our social and cultural horizons to be similarly expanded. I felt very empowered to relate to everyone with the love and respect with which they related to me and in this new space I found that I learned something from everyone present as well as being synchronistically drawn to connect with particular people whom I needed to learn particular lessons from.

New stories require new behaviours. Remember Gandhi telling us that we needed to be the change we want to see happen? Well people at this conference *were* the change. I had the profound sense that the days of individuals going it alone - i.e. stories of the old heroic macho myth of our needing to have dragons to fight to prove how strong we are - needed burying, and that we would succeed in our mission to create a healthier society for ourselves only if we all joined forces and moved forward as a collective. Yes, I thought, if each of us takes responsibility, realises we are part of a larger planetary consciousness, we really *can* make a difference, we really *can* create a world that works for all concerned, and that very possibly the days of our being in thrall to the corrupting or rogue forces in the world may well be numbered. They are, after all, only as strong as the power we ascribe to them. Sadly, our media is still, on the whole, enmeshed in the old ways and loves pushing out the same old scare stories, telling us that if Ebola doesn't wipe us out, terrorists, floods and storms or total economic collapse will! This sells newspapers. I realised, too, that from the perspective of the old story, scarcity abounds everywhere - there's not enough food, water, money, happiness, love, etcetera.

From the perspective of the new story, however, abundance reigns supreme, and when we feel abundant - this being born out of a deeper connection with our hearts leading in turn to a recognition of our integral wholeness - there is no longer the need for us to act out all our many 'pain games' centred around the myth of insufficiency. (For example, if we didn't spend our money on weapons of mass destruction and organised things more effectively, everyone in the world could be fed. Similarly, if fear and greed did not predominate, the financial system could be made to work for all concerned.) From the perspective of the new story, we are all conscious agents of evolution and being there to help and support those less privileged than ourselves is not going out of our way; it *is* our way. From the new perspective, we don't always have to be striving all the time - 'working 'til we're wrinkled and grey' to have bigger houses and bigger cars, for we can see what a futile game it is, what a huge price we pay and we know it doesn't make us happy. If we are connected to a self that is more than our egoic self and that exists at a higher level of consciousness, we can live simply and genuinely and no longer need to be consuming all the time to fill our inner emptiness. Why? Because the new story is one that recognises our substantiality. When a new consciousness opens, we see that so much of our greed comes from the belief that we don't have enough which in turn relates to the old stories about our not *being* enough.

Multiple Stories

What I learned was that we need many new stories to serve a new emerging culture. We need stories predicated upon the importance of our having peace in the world, stories giving us a deeper understanding of the universe, stories that see life as beautiful and worth celebrating, stories that empower both the elderly and the very young, stories that help us value the fact that we are all artists, stories that recognise that there are many other currencies in life in addition to money. One beautiful young South American rap artist suggested that

'We want a vision where earth won't be sold to the highest bidder and where profits will no longer be made from other people's toil and where every banker will be an artist of fair play...'

I particularly liked that last line, as part of the new story, I felt, is for us to move away from our old blame games of just trashing our bankers and politicians, and instead try to honour them as people as much caught in a system/old story as ourselves and where more could be gained by infecting them with a new vision of a world that works. What came up strongly for me and for many others whom I spoke to, was just how infected many of us still were with the old stories as they had been drummed into us over so many years. Our challenge, we realised, is to get to recognise them, see how and where they manifest themselves in our lives and then choose to drop them. And the more we work at consciously activating the new stories, the easier this becomes. But we need to be careful and be very honest with ourselves. For example, I saw that while I talked haughtily about how addicted we all are to oil, that I too, came into that category. I don't yet have solar heating and I still drive around in my gas guzzling, environmentally polluting extremely ancient diesel car. In that area I certainly do not walk my talk.

New Values

Essentially what the new story is telling us is that the great American dream is over and we all need to recognise this and start embracing a whole new set of values. For example, no longer must we believe that we'll create a better world solely with science and technology or that we can move forward effectively if we are saddled by debt. We also saw that engaging in inner work is of paramount importance and is as, if not more, important than outer work, a) because if we are to shift to a new level, effort needs to be put into it (making the transition is by no means a 'given'), and b) because we can only have a changed external society if we will have shifted internally, i.e., as within, so without! Put simply, we can't embody a new story and thus bring it to bear in how we 'do' our relationships, our politics or economics etc., unless we are a space to receive it. If we are still full of unresolved hatreds and angsts, if we still believe in scarcity and are greedy and competitive and don't mind succeeding at other people's expense - if these considerations are still central in our lives - we are no space for anything new. Put simply, if we want peace in the world, we need to work to create it inside our own hearts in the realisation that our tendencies to want to wage war against everything - terrorism, drugs, cancer, crime, you name it - never works. As Elisabet Sahtouris, one of the conference initiators put it: 'It is cheaper to feed your enemies than try to kill them!' Similarly, if we want stories about co-operation to take root inside us, we need to ensure that we operate cooperatively. And that was what was so moving about this conference. We were all 'there' for one another, to help and support each other and when people manifested symptoms of egotism, it was easily spotted and

handled, as in this conference, big egos were the exception as opposed to being the norm.

Our challenge, I felt, is for all of us to stand up and be counted, to stop being ostriches hiding our heads in the sand but instead be courageous and outrageous and stick our necks out giraffe style and take stands for those causes we wish to champion and never be afraid to speak our truth but always to do so in ways that honour people. Gandhi modelled this beautifully in his doctrine of Satyagraha. When dealing with the English in India, he would bow to the Atman (God nature) within them, that is, honour their inherent essence while at the same time speaking his truth. This is why he could say things like 'I honour you but I hate what you are doing to my people' without in any way invalidating their humanity. There is much we can learn from him today. I will finish with a quote from my recent book on Spiritual Activism as perhaps it sums up the spirit of the conference.

'Today those of us who want a better world need to be what I call an 'enheartener', that is, a person able to lead from the heart, to move through life in a wakeful, tender, gentle, wise, loving, honest and strong way, so that wherever they go and whatever they do, wholesome energy flows out of them and into whatever part of their world they are seeking to engage with. What enhearteners do is they 'enhearten'. They bring a new story into expression on the wings of love. They may do it via the spoken word, through actions they take, through words they write, songs they sing, paintings they paint, and dances they dance, and what characterises all these stories is that they have a positive vision of the future. They see something glorious lying ahead of us and are concerned with drawing this new future down into our present and infecting as many people as they can with it. Enhearteners don't put life down; they don't see the worst in everything, they don't reduce or marginalise. Enhearteners raise life and regardless of whether they are a politician, a banker, a housewife or dustman, whoever they are and whatever they do, in their presence the environment around them becomes elevated and ennobled.'

Over that week, I felt surrounded by many enhearteners and my life has been subtly changed by them. Thank you Findhorn and everyone who put such effort into creating this conference. Though small (relatively speaking), it was a world event.

Serge Beddington-Behrens, PhD, is a spiritual educator, psychotherapist, couples counsellor and life coach who has worked in the area of healing and transformation for most of his life. He takes a deeper approach to life based on recognising the importance of growing our heart life, which in turn enables people more easily to integrate spiritual practice with psychological self-enquiry into a concrete and fundamental transformation of their lives. For further information, see www.spiritual-activism.com

OBLIVIOUS CAT

*You shake your fur
and a firework display of dust
erupts around you
illuminated by a single shaft of sunlight
slicing through the room.*

by Peter Anthony Davis



*Each floating particle, like an astronaut
now on its weightless way,
slows to drift in silence through the air.
I concentrate my focus, spellbound
by a single speck of drifting light,
extend my gaze and behold a galaxy in miniature:
now each lighted speck of dust a star
in flux with every other star
travelling the six directions
of gravity's despair*

*...and there you sit,
yawning with indifference,
as if nothing has happened at all.*



Frontiers of Science & Spirituality – The SMN approach to Holistic Education

Mark O. Mathews

I am grateful to **Edi Bilimoria** for inviting me to take part. He made a very good job of coming up with the idea and organising this conference. There were 16 presentations of about ten minutes, which were split into four sections. The conference took place at Imperial College London.

Nichola did a great job of putting together a presentation for me using some of our material. It was nice to be included as a speaker at a conference at Imperial College, together with all kinds of high profile professors and academics. I was relieved to discover that the whole lecture theatre, full of delegates to the Scientific Medical Network conference, were willing to play with me. Our contribution to the proceedings, which was the penultimate contribution, was much more interactive than all the others, and was very well received.

There were four sections:

1. Humanities and life science
2. Science and Spirituality
3. Consciousness and changing paradigms
4. Changing Paradigms in medicine

It was all filmed. As I am a member of SMN I should receive access to all of this in good time.

Most of the speakers gave very eloquent, well-referenced expositions relating to the individual titles of their contributions. (See attached copy of the programme below).

Much was made of the schism that seems to have arisen in recent history between the material/scientific aspects of knowledge and intuitive/experiential/philosophical aspects of knowledge. Much was made of the historical evidence that nearly all the greatest scientists/philosophers throughout history, and from different cultures, have also been highly spiritual/religious people.

A very good case was made by **Dr Oliver Robinson**: 'Science and spirituality: Friends not Enemies', comparing the twin advancement and revolutionary changes from the 16th Century to the present day. The changing discoveries and scientific advances were paralleled by coherent revolutionary changes that were being reflected in the creative arts and endeavours by people to be free and to express their own feelings in a humanitarian ethical way.

Many speakers highlighted the degradation of mechanistic science to a kind of dogmatic fundamentalist religion of 'scientism' where any one making a case that did not fall within its extremely limited remit was condemned out of hand. This very restricted way of thinking was obviously floored by many of the wonders of modern science. This was well demonstrated by the fluidity and elasticity of energy and information where rigid lines of distinction were not to be found at any level from the subatomic molecular level right up to the astronomical level of observation and anything that is not understood is simply called 'dark'.

At the same time, it was amazing how the vibratory frequencies associated with harmony of music, colour and the orbiting relationships of the planets and the stars, which excited the earliest thinkers, astronomers and scientists, are as evident today as they were in those earlier days.

Sadly, these observations only tend to serve as an embarrassment to the current scientific establishment. It seems to prefer to pretend that they do not exist. In the same way, they choose to ignore much of the incontrovertible evidence for the fact that the mind is more than the result of the mechanistic functioning of the brain, and is in some instances able to demonstrate an independent existence, that cannot be explained in any materialistic way.

Dr Peter Bowman gave a good account of contrasting the changing paradigms in 'Economics as a Relationship'. Without any reference to concepts of fairness and morality, the materialistic model based on greed and exploitation simply could not stand up. Why should carers such as nurses be regarded as being less valuable than having bankers and businessmen in relation to the services that they were offering for the good of society?

With respect to medical ethics and the contrast between orthodox mechanistic medical approaches and rules regarding health and safety, it was interesting that CAM approaches to healing were disregarded as being unscientific and unsound. There are now over 7,000 published papers of evidence that much of it works, which seems to be completely ignored. Most of the evidence that is used today in medical circles was originally adopted because it was found to work. This was long before experimental science was able to unravel some of the mechanisms.

The cost of carrying out the currently accepted form of double blind trial amounts to more than a million pounds; this is not something that CAM institutions can afford, unlike the pharmaceutical industry, who regard CAM as competition. In any case comprehensive statistical correlations may not apply to the individual. In my opinion, this is the reason why they use every bit of influence and propaganda to cast doubt and suspicion on all kinds of natural therapies the fall under the CAM umbrella. Ironically, the third largest cause of death in this country at this time is from the side effects of drugs prescribed by medical doctors. Those from CAM you would probably find it difficult to count on your fingers.

The matter of CAM being more widely accepted is not that straightforward. There are also cultural differences within the EU as to how well CAM is generally accepted. Homeopathy, for example, is very much more generally used, even by conventional doctors, in Germany and France.

In the UK, it is clear that there are massively increasing costs of looking after people suffering from chronic illnesses that orthodox medicine has done much to facilitate and can do little to help; they can only quash symptoms in a way that is often responsible for the development of even more chronic conditions. For economic reasons, and hopefully out of political necessity, politicians and those in the NHS may be persuaded to take the contribution that CAM is able to make in these instances very much more seriously.

At this time, over 5 million people in Britain are taking advantage of what CAM practitioners of different kinds are able to offer. There are already a few hospitals where orthodox doctors and CAM practitioners are working together successfully in the greater interest of the patients. I hope that this model that can be expanded much more widely.

Much was made of the dualistic relationship that can be seen to exist between the right hemisphere sensitive/creative/imaginative/intuitive way of thinking and the more dualistic, digital mind sets that seem to be dominating many aspects of life at this time.

The point was made that, as was proven to be the case from the past history of science, there is a third way. That is one that encompasses both of these aspects. It does require a degree of what one might call transcendence; something that has been a discipline in the East for thousands of years. Even some enlightened psychiatrists are now discovering how Mindfulness, like meditation, can have much better results in people with mental/emotional problems such as the increasing numbers of people who are now being found to self-harm as compared to the use of drugs for treating this condition.

Health is, after all, the harmonious relationship between all aspects of a human being; the structural, physiological, neurological, mental and behavioural aspects as a whole. Prevention is the best policy. This partly relates to educating people to take personal responsibility for making informed choices about managing their personal life styles in relation to sleep, diet, exercise, healthy relationships, and stress management. It is much easier and cheaper to stay healthy than to try to fight diseases once they have already occurred.

We also need to remember that human beings are essentially social beings. Healing as a natural innate tendency of all living

things usually occurs more readily in the context of a caring, sensitive and sympathetic personal relationship. It is not just the result of a number of technical procedures carried out in a dispassionate, detached, statistical way.

CAM therapies are essentially based on the study of health. Much of what has now become conventional medical practice is based on the study of disease and the repression of symptoms of imbalance.

At the end of the day, we need to remember that we are essentially emotional beings driven by how we feel. Anything that helps people to be more integrated and well must be of benefit. Doing this in the safest, most economical, least invasive, safest way possible, in the first instance, is by far the best option. There is of course an important place for the role of modern medicine; it is able to do to fight disease, save lives and reduce suffering.

If we are to find a way forward, by far the best way would be to find an approach that combines the knowledge and skills of what each has to offer. By cooperating in a spirit of mutual care for those who are in need of our help, everyone can be a winner; including the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

After all, it must be obvious by now that **“It just makes common sense”**

PROGRAMME

The speakers and topics for the day are (in order of appearance):

Introduction by Bernard Carr (Chairman) and Janine Edge (Chairman of Trustees)

Morning: Session 1 - Humanities and Life Sciences

Prof John Drew - *How to Live and What to Live for*

David Lorimer - *Consciousness, Changing Paradigms and World Views*

Dr Sheelah James - *The Cutting Edge*

Dr Fiona Bowie - *The Role of Experience in the Origin and Development of Religion*

Morning: Session 2 - Science and Spirituality

Prof Jim Malone - *Schrödinger: Risk, Mystery, Creativity and a Contemplative Spirit in Science*

Dr Vasileios Basios - *Complexity Science*

Paul Kieniewicz - *The Harmony of the Spheres*

Dr Oliver Robinson - *Science and spirituality: Friends, not Enemies*

Afternoon: Session 3 - Consciousness and Changing Paradigms

Dr Peter Bowman - *Changing Paradigms in Economics: Economics as Relationships*

Prof John Poynton - *Why I'm interested in Psychological Research*

Prof Kevin Gurney - *Deciding what to do Next: how does the brain make up its mind?*

Prof Brian Lancaster - *The Dimensions of Consciousness: an encounter between mysticism and neuroscience*

Afternoon Session 4 - Changing Paradigms in Medicine

Hugh Standish Harrison - *The Relevance of Complementary & Alternative Medicine Today*

Brian Isbell - *A Journey from Bones to Energy*

Mark Mathews - *It Just makes Common Sense*

Dr Peter Davies - *Does Complementary and Alternative Medicine have a Role in Today's Health Care System?*

ATTENTION MEMBERS!

Personal Numbers and Office Procedures

Please help your administration office to run smoothly and so help you efficiently:

- when your details change (address, telephone number, email address etc.) please make sure we know
- use your membership number whenever you contact us, and write it onto all correspondence, conference booking slips, subscription forms and orders for books, services etc.
- book early for conferences - it helps you get a place
- ensure cheques are made out correctly to Scientific & Medical Network; for conferences and orders: always add (legibly!) details of what it's for and membership number on back, even when accompanied by a booking form
- remember we're a network, and it often takes time for all relevant people to be contacted so when making requests give us time to respond helpfully (and always remember to tell us who you are - we sometimes get forms back with no name at all!)
- help us save money; whenever possible pay in £ sterling, use autobill and gift aid for your subscriptions - it maximises funds available for more important things

Office hours are 9am – 5pm Monday – Friday and there is normally someone to answer the telephone between those hours, with an ansaphone otherwise.



Report on the SMN Approach to Holistic Education – frontiers of science and spirituality

November 1st 2014

John Kapp

On November 1st, 124 of us gathered at Imperial College, London, to hear 4 sessions in which 4 speakers made presentations, each of 10 minutes, plus 20 minutes for questions and discussion. The presentations were videoed so that they can be accessed on the website when edited.

The first session was on humanities and life sciences, chaired by **Janine Edge**. **Prof John Drew** spoke on how to live, and what to live for. He used Venn triangles to illustrate relationships between what you value. **David Lorimer** spoke on consciousness, changing paradigms and world views, quoting the 'hard problem in science', which is where is consciousness? Out of body, and near death experiences show that it cannot be generated in the brain. Psychiatrist **Dr Sheelagh James** spoke about the modern epidemic of depressed people self-harming as attention seeking. The College has recently been promoting mindfulness meditation courses as a remedy and prevention. **Dr Fiona Bowie** spoke on the role of experience in the in the origin and development of religion. She had a near death experience 4 years ago, and quoted Einstein that reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.

The second session was on science and spirituality, chaired by **Prof Bernard Carr**. **Prof Jim Malone** spoke on Schrödinger, risk, mystery, creativity, and a contemplative spirit in science. He showed a picture of a hell fire atheist. **Dr Vasileios Basios** spoke on the charm of complexity science. He quoted fractals, and the new science of autopoiesis, (self-making of a self-organising system). **Paul Kieniewicz** spoke on the harmony of the spheres, as written by Pythagoras and Kepler, which is inborn (not learned) coming from the planets, which are unique to our solar system. **Dr Olly Robinson** spoke on science and spirituality being friends not enemies, quoting the four elements, fire, air, water and earth. The questions delved into whether astrology was psychological or cosmological.

The third session was on consciousness and changing paradigms, chaired by **David Lorimer**. **Dr Peter Bowman** spoke on changing paradigms in economics and economics as relationships. He said that money has no intrinsic value, but gets its value in relation to contribution made. **Prof John Poynton** spoke on why he is interested in psychical research, and said that he sees no incompatibility in out of body experiences, or non-physical existence in life after death. **Prof Kevin Gurney** spoke on deciding what to do next; how does the brain make up its mind? He said that there is a central switch in the basal ganglia, like software, which causes the flow through the hardware of the neural pathways. **Prof Brian Lancaster** spoke on the dimensions of consciousness.; an encounter between mysticism and neuroscience. He related the religious and mystical experiences of qualia to resonance and code language.

The fourth session was on changing paradigms in medicine, chaired by **Dr Olly Robinson**. **Hugh Standish Harrison** spoke on the relevance of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) today. He believed that CAM (such as homeopathy) should have a place in the NHS, as adverse drug reactions are the third highest cause of death in the western world. **Dr Brian Isbell** spoke on a journey from bones to energy.

He supported traditional medicine, and said that minds are like parachutes: they function best when open. **Mark Mathews** spoke on 'it just makes common sense.' He founded the Sunflower trust for children with learning difficulties, and led us to drop our shoulders on the outbreak. **Dr Peter Davies** spoke on does CAM have a role in today's healthcare system? He answered: 'yes'. The discussion questioned whether or not Prozac works, and the promising role of mindfulness courses instead.

John Kapp is a retired engineer, whose papers are published on section 9 of www.reginaldkapp.org

