

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A NO-BODY



To Simon, R. I. P., and to Gaston's fingers

Charles Eatson Wentworth
 Marquis of Rockingham, Earl of Malton,
 Viscount Higham of Higham Ferriers,
 Barron of Buckingham, Malton, Wath, and Harowden
 and Baronet in Great Britain,
 Earl and Baron of Malton in the Kingdom of Ireland,
 Lord Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of
 the West Riding of Yorkshire,
 City of York and County of the same,
 Custos Rotulorum of the North Riding,
 and Vice Admiral of the Maritime parts thereof,
 High Steward of Kingston-upon-Hull, Knight of the Garter
 and first Commissioner of the Board of Treasury
 Born May 24th 1730, died July 12th 1782⁹⁰⁵

Ω

To the memory of John Higgs
 Pig killer
 Who died November 26th 1825
 Aged 55 Years⁹⁰⁶

Here lies a Father, who on Earth,
 Was neither rich nor great,
 Yet what he left, surpass'd in worth
 A Nobleman's estate⁹⁰⁷

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Here lie the bones of Elizabeth Charlotte,
 Born a virgin, died a harlot.
 She was aye a virgin at seventeen
 A remarkable thing in Aberdeen⁹⁰⁸

“To be is to be related”, as a wise man once said. The epitaphs above describe some of the deceased’s relations with the community: beloved father, titled gentleman, pig killer, and tart. Epitaphs resemble brains in a sense. They are simplifying devices. Like an epitaph, a brain cannot possibly store every piece of information concerning a person, so it simplifies according to its own sense of aesthetics. Poor Elizabeth Charlotte the harlot reminds us of the human tendency to simplify poetically. Had she been born Elizabeth McBaggis, she might have been remembered for her delicious haggis instead.

The mother of all epitaphs would describe every change in the universe in some way attributable to you, updated constantly whenever anything happened, every time a granddaughter passed an exam or a hair turned grey. Is there anything more substantial to you than this?

How me is my flesh? If I lose a finger, am I less me? My friend lost several fingers in a sawmill, but he was not diminished. It meant the end of a promising piano career, but he switched his attention to feet, and developed the Metamorphic Technique, which he now teaches around the world. And he plays a mean maraca.

Our intestinal cells pass in days, skin cells in months, and nearly everything is replaced in six years; faecal plaque and gallstones last longer than most of our cells. A few tiny bits of bone and some nerve cells survive from cradle to grave, but even within them, the water, ions, and bits and bobs are constantly replaced. Whenever we eat, we spread margarine along our intestines, salt our meat, slot caffeine into receptors. Does a molecule that winds up in one of my cells become me? If it ends up in a sperm, and then in a womb, and in a baby, is it mine then hers then his?

Our interactions go beyond our porous skins, which constantly absorb from and excrete into the air. We release code into the environment. Our pheromones turn heads and hearts, or gestures send semaphore. Our words twang strings of thought, our sweet nothings liberate hormones, our orders send soldiers to their deaths.

We are more than our genes, more than vehicles for their code wars. Genes are the nouns, but not the storyteller, and the storyteller keeps changing. “Andy changes after a few beers.” “Jane was never the same after Bob joined the Moonies.” “I’m not the man I used to be before I lost my mojo / cat / frontal lobes.” Eyesight decays, memories fade, hormone levels change. You are not your personality, any more than you are your body. You’re still you, without that unwieldy opinion that once seemed so important.

We change everything we touch, and everything we touch changes us. What goes in our eyes builds our brains. Porn addicts reprogram their glands to respond to the feel of the mouse, rebuilding their bodies in symbiosis with the Internet. We change as we pass through time and space, love affairs and lengthy divorces, dark nights and fresh rebirths. Cancer swings in on

various vines, and leaves a born-again Christian, a Tour de France winner, a fond memory returned to dust. At least we can imagine that 'flu bugs are independent entities, but cancer is simply our own cells gone haywire, confuzed by a gamma ray or a benzene ring in the wrong place.

A human is a freestyle chaos event, a "transforming wandering", his body "the coagulated, crystallized, or materialised consciousness of the past", as a wise dead guy said.⁹⁰⁹ We are the messages tumbling out of the cortex, riding neurones through the larynx, into the phone line and off the planet, bouncing off satellites, massaging airwaves around a receiver on the other side of the world, defusing into the limbic system of a loved one, riding a tear down her cheek. I am the hand that strokes the cat, I am the ion-flow in her spine, and I am the purr in her throat. 'I AM THAT I AM!' as something likes to scream at me when I eat Magick Mushrooms.

I AM THAT I AM is how God introduced himself to Moses,* and how he presented himself to Catherine of Sienna in a poetic moment:

The more you abandon yourself,

The more you will find Me.

You are that which is not.

I AM THAT I AM.⁹¹⁰

Go looking for the soul, but no one ever found it. It is like a frog swimming in a large bowl of ink. Every flap produces a ripple on the surface, but the frog never surfaces. All an observer here in the world can know about the frog is that it moves water. Collective reality, where we are obliged to conduct our affairs, gives us four dimensions and a bunch of stuff. Whatever we discover, whatever spookiness quantum physicists find, it is found on the surface of the ink, on a dial or a computer printout here in the physical world.

Looking to esoteric techniques, Buddhist practices are some of the most advanced, but the Buddha denied the existence of the soul, because speculation about such things does not lead to liberation from them. There may be occult dimensions, where mediums and magicians swim with cosmic frogs in infinite oceans of metaphysics, but the effects manifest here, as tingles in your palms, images flashing through your visual cortex, ideas popping into your mind, and synchronicities in front of your nose. The physical is already so complex, why complicate it further with ghost stories? Better to calmly watch for patterns emerging on the surface. Nothing else exists. There ain't no frog, man. There ain't no atman.

I got chatting to the owner of a Japanese tat shop in Putney once, and the subject wound round to the apocalypse, as it so often does, and on to the final judgement, and the judge. She asked me if I believed in Jesus. I said yes. She wasn't convinced that he existed. Neither was I. "Well then, how

* See 'Neuro-apocalypse Two' for more on this phrase.



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can you believe in him?” she asked. I drew a circle, and asked if it exists. “Well, the drawing exists,” she said. I wrote $c=2\pi r$, and asked if π exists. “Well, I don’t know,” she said. “It’s like a number.” And do numbers exist? I grabbed a couple of plastic blue robot cats from the twenty-sixth century and asked her what I had in my hand. Was it two Doraemons, or the number ‘2’? Had she ever seen ‘2’? She thought not. But do you believe in ‘2’?

π , as I understand it, does not exist, at least not in the same way as a bit of blue plastic exists. π is, however, much more permanent than the plastic, and if permanence has something to do with existence, maybe it exists more. π is a symbol of the relationship between the circumference and the radius of a circle, and the circle and the radius exist about as much as π . She didn’t ask me if ‘ π ’ existed. I would have been hard-pressed to explain my (non)self.

Jesus describes the relationship between God and us, between spirit and matter. He is a symbol, and a story, like the robot cat, but his magical powers are stronger. I believe in π , and in Jesus, because they both work in the world in fascinating ways, and I even believe in Doraemon, though he has never answered my prayers. But π , Jesus, and Doraemon do not exist. Let’s not be silly now.

We can talk about orgone, *ki*, or plain old electricity, but they are only theories. These ideas explain how lights come on, how little old Aikido masters can throw burly marines across the room, and how faith healers can treat disease, but these things don’t exist. Here in the physical world we have a marine on his back and a patient on his feet, but no *ki*. We may even have a slightly warmer orgone accumulator, but we don’t have any orgone. We have a lit room, but we don’t have any electricity. It is a concept, like gravity, which makes accurate predictions, but it does not exist. Apples exist, and they fall out of trees, but gravity is an idea. Power and force are ideas, the soul and *ki* are ideas, and ideas are something different.

“What is the Great Tao?” Uncle Al used to ask, with a dramatic upturn of his palm.

“The result of subtracting the universe from itself!” he would answer, wagging his finger, worshipping his devil.

That something that exists behind the physical world is a “moot point”, as my old chemistry teacher used to say when unable to delve further into the mysteries of molecular structure. “Hmmm,” he would say. “Moot point.” Jesus, π , electricity, gravity, and your soul are moot points. These things exist in



the way that an elephant exists on the page of an encyclopaedia. There is a description, and a photo of a thing that wouldn't fit in a bookcase. There may even be corroborating descriptions in other books, but there is no elephant. It may exist, but we cannot establish its existence from inside the library. Whether it exists, however, or is an elaborate ruse by the Kenyan Department of Tourism, the effect on the books is the same.

So what about you? Are you your consciousness, following events, identifying with and rejecting bits of the universe? Are you your thoughts? Are we infinitely small spots in pineal glands, making tiny adjustments this way and that, seeking the sweet point where all worlds come together? Or are we something else, joining up the dots? Is there any difference between the you that **is**, the you that **does**, and that which is **done**?

The best metaphor for a human stopped me in my tracks as I was cycling at high speed through the Imperial Palace Gardens of Kyoto, late for a lesson, a rice ball in my hand and my tie in my pocket. A six-foot vortex of dust was dancing above the gravel in front of me, twisting from side to side, disappearing into nothingness and reforming as I watched open mouthed (and then chewing the rice ball). A dust devil is just on the edge of reality. It exists. You can take a photo of it, and the dust will screw up your camera if you get too close. It is the dust, and also the edge where two bodies of wind meet and twist into a helix. Dust is a thing, and bodies of wind are things, in a manner of speaking, but is the interface of two things a thing?

A dust devil is an action in action, a gerund, a noun-verb, like a happening or a shooting. A dust devil is 'a picking up and spinning around of dust'. A human is human **being**. A flesh devil meanders as she twists, wandering from place to place and plane to plane, picking up possessions, diseases, ideas, turns of phrase and memories, smashing them together, dropping bits off later somewhere else.

Uncle Al suggested we consider every act and every event as two sides of a dialogue, watching to see what the universe approves of and what it objects to. For Uncle Al, the great obstacle was lust of result. We act best when immersed in the present, unconcerned with success or failure, free from our expectations or those of others.

Trying to change things is often like pissing in the wind, and occasionally like pissing on live circuitry. Better to sit back and watch the patterns form. Non-action often means doing less, but it is not doing nothing, standing still and holding your breath. As Jupiter leans slightly out of his orbit as Saturn passes by, before returning to his course, react, but don't overreact. Let the Tao move through and around you, and occasionally it might move you to act.

There is magick in every step if we pay attention. The CNS is at the cross between the worlds, between free will and fate, between the magick

of the mind and the dynamics of matter. It is the alchemist's crucible, and into it goes despised matter, *terra negra*, which could be either soil or shit depending on the alchemist, but shit makes for better poetry. The raw material is the shit that happens, the shit we go through, and the shit that goes through us. The alchemist takes the raw data of life and the knowledge of books, he mixes imagination into matter, skimming off the scum to purify the essence of his own cosmology. He proposes and tests theories, discusses and assesses, predicts and recalibrates, dissolves and precipitates. He tirelessly watches colours changing and crystals forming. Fumes cloud his vision and muddle his mind, but he finds patterns behind observations, and patterns behind patterns. Gradually the self merges with the process in the crucible, and the work becomes the Great Work of the master alchemist working through him.

The energy moving through us is never destroyed, only transformed. We fear death because we identify with the body and with the personality, both of which cause as much pain as happiness, but something survives. We die, and leave our crooked backs, our regrettable tattoos and mind-loops behind, but something survives. The body dies all the time, and it is rebuilt. The personality dies all the time as well, unless you are very boring. But something survives. The code you twist, the waves you set in motion, these live on, and span the universe.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.⁹¹¹

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