

Ohlsson/Dit-Cilinn
Hibernaculum

Are we here? Here inside ourselves, a focal point in consciousness, agency radiating, indivisible?

Or are we there, between things, constituted by relatedness, adrift and entangled?

Pondering these questions finds us buffeted by cross-currents of insight disturbing the river of habit. On the bank of this river, the atomised soul of civilised religion still keeps us bound within the city walls it built around the psyche. As this city of walled-off identity grew, it incubated a colonising mania: where it was, there shall go be. The urge to control, going out of control.

But deeper than this, our animist instincts: suppressed but tenacious, forged by myriad living encounters with the textures and gestures of the world's flesh, in the interplay between our social intelligence ('people skills') and the immediatism of Palaeolithic economies. Ancient, alien – and deeply familiar.

Tools and architecture form strange loops of alienation and relatedness winding amid these currents. Self-extending, other-appropriating. Not a point of human exception – corvids, cetaceans, and cephalopods also use tools. But we do excel. Our extrusion of artefacts has encased most of us within a technological cocoon. A species-scale exoskeleton. We're cosy here; some dim corner of our minds recognises how wonderfully close we are to the unstated *telos* of civilisation: the complete banishment of wild, alien space.

But then the paradox: bereft of alien space, we are alienated. We need the other to relate to, to be something that can relate. Our comfortable immersion in our self-extensions quickly goes stale, has to constantly renew itself in tightening cycles of stimulation. Or we cultivate attention, mindful of the arms race with advertising, trying to discern otherness in the cracks – literal or otherwise – of our cocoon.

So we find ourselves... Wandering the labyrinth. Constantly grappling with alien familiarity, constructions utterly beyond us which emerged from our fellow creatures. Grateful and thrilled with awareness when our attention opens to a trace of non-human sentience – scurrying, or creeping, or rooted and implacable. Later, wondering in numbness if there *is* non-human sentience after all. Then a shiver of the uncanny when a machine manages to replicate the signs of sentience. Then acceptance. Boredom.

And soon, machines begin to nudge us towards tricky ontological thresholds. Was that just the *signs* of sentience? Just replication? Can they be told apart from the 'actual' subjectivity we assume in humans? Does it matter? Echoing archaic animism, this new world may be governed less by metaphysical speculation, and more by the pragmatics of relationship.

As the city matures, bringing forth its own internal wildernesses; as the machine complexifies, threatening to escape the rationality that desired it with such icy passion; as the biosphere aches and spasms, ignorant of our laments and assured of a far longer life than ours... Our millennia of striving for dominion begins to crumble, then slips through our fingers.

And the only thing left to do is begin again, each moment, in our presence as an ephemeral facet of this tangled world.

Here we are.

- *Gyrus*. South East London. December 2016.