

Coherent Light

Bill Isaacs: I recently visited Las Vegas, Nevada. Coming from the east, you fly over Lake Mead. Lake Mead is in trouble. Its condition is very apparent from the air. There is a large and evident gap between where the water level used to be and where the water level is now. Surrounding the lake are layers of exposed rock that were previously under water. Ribbons of color snake around the perimeter, tracing the contours of the rock strata beneath, each layer a different hue of red, brown, and yellow: its hidden past uncovered.

Last week I met an interesting fellow, the CEO of a private equity firm. Private equity investors pool large amounts of capital to place into private companies, with the goal of improving the companies and then selling them at a higher price. They don't want these organizations to be listed on the stock exchange, but instead try to create value in private markets. The private equity universe is notoriously full of people who are extractive in their mentality. This fellow was very different, which is why I was speaking with him. His company is trying to decarbonize the industrial world, and they have made some success of it.

I was warned that he would have only 15 minutes for me, and that his distraction factor would likely be very high. We spent a lot more time than that together. He listened with piercing intensity. I asked him, "Why are you doing this?" He said, "the planet is in desperate shape. I think about it all the time. It's the one thing I could think to do that could make a difference to my kids and their generation."

It's interesting to meet such folks. He's no doubt going to make a great deal of money decarbonizing industrial processes but this is quite evidently not his core motivation. He is quite clear that if his investments don't make money, what he is trying to do won't make any difference, because no one will follow what he's doing. His approach and thinking are, I am quite sure, are not unique.

I recently heard the phrase "PreTSD" as a way of describing the condition facing human beings today. People are aware of a coming something and the trauma that could follow. This fellow is already quite awake to it. Terry Tempest Williams, a remarkable writer and naturalist, recently wrote these words about the Great Salt Lake in Utah:

Dr. Walter P. Cottam, an esteemed professor of botany from the University of Utah, delivered the Reynolds Lecture to reflect on the 100th anniversary of the Mormon pioneers arriving in the Salt Lake Valley. "Is Utah Sahara bound?" he asked. To a public accustomed to the self-glorification expressed by the repeated boast that "we

have made the desert blossom as the rose” he said, “let’s admit that serious range and watershed problems do exist ... and that we can do something about them.” [Op Ed, New York Times, March 25, 2023.](#)

The year was 1947.

Great Salt Lake is located 500 miles north of Las Vegas, and it too is declining, exposing to the air toxic waste which threatens to blow across the state of Utah and quite literally force its evacuation. These are not trivial or disconnected matters. The full implications of what may be coming have not exactly sunk in. People cling to hope that something can be done to stem the tide. The Mormon church, which controls a great deal of water rights, has allocated a significant portion of its share to the preservation of Great Salt Lake. The Lake is viewed by many in the Mormon Church, and among the Native tribes that have settled in the region for generations, and many others, as a sacred being, home to many species and a vital symbol of life. Only as human beings open their hearts to the reality of what is actually happening may there be adequate pressure to move through to a new place in consciousness.

Human beings do seem to be heading for a cliff, a catastrophe. The word “catastrophe” is an interesting, even beautiful word. Its ancient roots mean to “wind down.” Something in human experience, in the earth itself, is winding down, that is for sure. But at the same time, it’s also very evident that through this descent, something else is emerging. The fellow I met is doing his best to play his part. That compulsion and pressure is arising out of people in many places. There is a fair amount of confusion as to what it would mean to “play one’s part,” but the desire to do so is certainly profoundly present.

Meanwhile, the endeavor to garner even greater control over human experience continues unabated. You would have had to be determined not to notice the exponential surge of interest in “Generative AI” in the past few weeks. A company called OpenAI first introduced GPT-3 and then GPT-4. GPT-3 can compose text, write songs, analyze data, summarize transcripts of meetings, take tests, edit, write software code, and much more. There were about a million users within the first week, thirteen million two weeks after that, and now, a few months later, more than 100 million users. GPT 4 can score in the top 90% on a bar exam and get top scores on AP exams. In other words, it is a better test taker than most typical university students. There is a gold rush on, as companies around the world maneuver to position themselves to take advantage of this development.

Chat GPT is an example of what is called a “large language model,” meaning it tracks, records and “learns” an enormous amount of language. Language in this sense is quite

expansive, covering many different domains, including software code, images, text and more. People see the results ChatGPT produces and find it remarkable. It does appear to be thinking faster and better than we are. You can imagine that if people were to reflect, they would quickly be drawn to ask themselves, “If AI does all these things that human beings now do, what will be left?” But quite apart from the existential “human beings might be out of a job” problem, if we step back for a minute, we can gain some insight about it all.

First, and most obvious, is that human consciousness is extremely vulnerable and overly responsive to technological advances. Instead of a reflective and thoughtful exploration as something new emerges, people rush headlong towards it. Lurking in this is a strong tendency to give power over to apparently authoritative or “smart” technology, seeking “answers,” seeing only the potential advantages. We not only miss the risks, but also the detrimental impact on ourselves by making ourselves subject to it.

Behind the fascination is a fundamental confusion. Human beings are not supposed to be fast computers. We are creators. The fact that these systems process large amounts of information quickly does not mean they “think.” Some years ago, David Bohm made the distinction between “thinking” and “thought.” Contained in this distinction is a simple way to get the difference between what human beings are capable of and meant to do, and what computers can do. The present moment creative activity of the biological and cosmic computer called human consciousness is *thinking*. While this activity currently is perhaps not being done with the highest quality and at the highest levels that it might, it is thinking, nevertheless. Thinking produces *thought*. The product of thinking is thought. But where does thought go? It piles up. It accumulates as the program of memory.

Thought has the odd characteristic of *simulating* thinking. It presents itself to us as if it is an active process, when it is just a program running out of our memory. It runs both individually and collectively. This said, it's very useful. Think of a freeway where people are driving at 65 or 75 miles an hour in four lanes in both directions. What is driving all those cars? Those people are not re-learning how to drive their cars (though some of them probably need to). Thought is driving all those cars. This is quite functional and helpful. We've all no doubt had the experience where we get up in the morning, get ready for whatever we're going to do for the day, arrive there, and have very little awareness of how we did it. How did we get to work? Or to whatever the activity it is? What drove the car or got us there? Our thought did it. In other words, human consciousness often functions on autopilot.

However, our experience is not that we are on autopilot. It presents itself to us as if things are literally there, just as we see them. Thought hides what it is doing. Bohm at one

point summarized this with a quip: “thought creates the world and then says I didn’t do it.” Thought gradually takes over, and we do very little active thinking.

What is it that computers are doing? Assembling large amounts of thought at very high speed. This assembling and reassembling of thought is not the same as thinking. Because human beings have largely lost this distinction, and forgotten how to think, they cannot tell the difference. Well before Chat GPT, thought took over. We live in a thought-created world, and we are largely hypnotized by it. Now we have the logical extension of this: fast computers that produce even more thought, recycled from the human subconscious, that will very likely hypnotize us even further.

Human consciousness has fallen into a level of function where it doesn't belong, living at the level of thought, and seeking to manipulate forms. One possibility is that these machines, with the right guidance, might be able manage the processes that human beings aren't actually meant to be involved in at all. The fear that we'll be out of a job could be replaced with the possibility that we could be freed up to do our job! But what is that? Our job as human beings is to be creators. At the center of this is thinking. To think is a creative act. Thinking involves sensemaking, explaining, perceiving context, creating context, creating the world. Thinking involves translating invisible energy and design into form. The thinking process has a very distinct flow and feel. Being freed up to play our part entails the rediscovery and reigniting of thinking.

One of the primary reasons human beings are trapped in thought is that thought is infused with a huge emotional component. Reactions to current events activate thoughts (and feelings, or rather “felts”) that appear to us as current experience, but which are actually the resurfacing of memory. This amounts to being dragged back into the past, to reenact one's subconscious reactions from the past. In these situations, thought takes over and thinking becomes impossible. To think one must heal these subconscious past-oriented thought patterns. People are trapped in the past, and do not know it. Our experience tells us things are what they are, but this again is thought in action. And this is the case both personally and collectively.

The ability to heal these patterns is available to human beings, because we are not just thought-driven computers. Here is perhaps the most significant difference between human beings and artificially intelligent machines. We can heal past trauma in ourselves and others, as we operate from ourSelves, from true Being. We can think, an ability that is hardwired into every human consciousness.

A first step towards thinking is stepping back from the ceaseless flow of thought to see the impacts we are actually having as we operate this way. We are often quite oblivious to it all. The fact that people are starting to notice more and more the pain that the planet is in, for example, is very helpful. An open heart here could raise the question (an activity central to thinking), “What would it take to heal these things?” The answer is not more artificial intelligence to manage water use, although that will certainly be one thing people come up with. Instead, what is needed is discovering what it means to be a creator again. There is a reason these technologies are called “artificial,” which for some reason doesn't seem to occur to anybody as a huge clue about its limitations. This isn't to say that these developments shouldn't be accommodated or couldn't be made useful. It's very easy to be very simple minded and either enthusiastically embrace or despairingly reject what is occurring here. It's neither bad nor good; it is just presenting a certain pressure and opportunity.

The real shift needed is to develop the maturity to play one's part in a larger order of creative function—in other words, to grow up. The last week or so, this phrase in the Bible has been going through my mind:

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” *Corinthians 11:13*

Human beings have been extraordinarily childish. This doesn't just mean acting out in emotionally reactive ways, although it does mean that. It means to be caught up in thought, and to not notice that one is. It means being focused in such a way as to deny one's creative function, to be unaware of the larger invisible order of Life, of which we're naturally and obviously a part. It is childishness to seek to operate without regard to any of this; childish, and arrogant. The obsession with form, with creating pleasing circumstances for me, is the central individual and team sport of humanity. It's really quite amazing when you step back to look at it.

Las Vegas is the poster child for this kind of function. Being there, I could feel the ground under the glitz and lights and crowds, the earth beneath the human playground. There couldn't be a better symbol of what's actually going on. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child. I understood as a child and I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” Being distracted by technological advances because one doesn't know one's own creative authority and identity is childishness. Rejecting the developments that come out of the subconscious as if they're irrelevant, is just as childish.

The obvious change needed is to allow an intensification of light through a point of clarity in oneself, which begins to open a way through. Then the radiation does the work. The childish orientation insists that there is some shift of form that will be the answer, or some computer that will tell us what to do. But the answer is not at that level. This can seem too abstract for people if they derive significance from what they organize around themselves in terms of form. The bigger, the better— or sometimes for the more intellectually oriented, the more meaningful, the better. We glow in the praise that's heaped upon our collection of form versus someone else's. But this is just not where the action is. The attempt to let thought make the world hasn't worked, and yet it's all human beings seem to know. So, we keep at it, and meanwhile the earth suffers. While there's a winding down at the level of human civilization, there is also a creative and inexorable movement that will eventually prevent this current level of thought-focused functioning from persisting.

This movement will prove creative in the range of human experience only as there is an increase in the coherence of the light that does shine through at least some human beings. I suspect there is as yet less coherent radiation than might be needed. The difference between ordinary light from a light bulb and laser light is its coherence. Laser light is coherent, meaning it's focused. A narrow beam of laser light can ignite a pile of wet leaves. Human consciousness is a bit like a pile of wet leaves. Ordinary light won't shift it. Diffuse light won't produce change. "I'm shining my light," you might say. "I'm playing my part." But is it aligned with a larger coherent pattern? In other words, is it united with the tone that is already coherent and organizing everything everywhere, and with others who are likewise carrying a similar understanding? It's an interesting question to consider: how must I function in order to allow that greater coherence to be present?

Meanwhile, the water continues to recede from the lakes. The tundra is defrosting, and while the west of the United States just had an extraordinary amount of snow this year, there really isn't a lot of relief in sight because the overall control pattern that would allow this situation to change has not yet been adequately provided. Perhaps we will see increasing open-heartedness emerging from within each one who begins to awaken to these things, as people sense a new direction of movement towards alignment with the radiation that is also present. Something's winding down, but something is also dawning. They are occurring together, as we each play our parts.

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Pre-Service Music*Peace Piece*

Composed by Bill Evans and performed by Igor Levit

Concluding Music*Sing Gently*

Composed by Eric Whitacre performed by VOCES8