

Drought



Public Domain (NASA)

by

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The aim of this online conference is a “global call for community solutions” to the pressing issue of drought, and contributions may draw from four major disciplines, or areas of knowledge: Science, Business, Politics, and Spirit. The editors encourage a broad range of presentation styles, e.g., interviews, letters, poems, posts, mud, pictures ...

This generous “outreach” to the community hints that the time for privileging experts, or authority figures, is over and we are entering an historical moment when we need to tap into something deeper in our being, something wiser, accessible to all.

The *call* for community solutions may be heard as a call to arms, or a call to action: “something must be done!” But, since words convey far more than the surface content of the message, I think it is prudent to develop an ear for the deeper, historical tones that work quietly, even determinatively within the very ordinary words we use to communicate our conscious concerns to one another. This buried or unconscious history in language shapes and informs our real actions in the world much more than does the information we communicate in familiar ways. Because our linguistic heritage lies “hidden”, or unconscious, *as the within-ness* of language, we usually only encounter it, at first, as our perceptions of the real world. The world is a real appearance to us, but its appearance, its contours if you like, is an expression of those long-forgotten meanings in our language. What we have “forgotten”, through force of habitual usage of words, now appears in front of us, as the contours of the real world, but crucially, having no felt connection to us anymore.

For example, we easily perceive the parabolic arc that any object thrown in the air follows in its journey back to earth. But, before Galileo transformed the core meaning of motion, our ancestors perceived a very different trajectory, not parabolic at all, more like a curve for a while, then, straight down. This trajectory was a real appearance to them and we all had to be “taught”, through the new concept, how to see the parabolic curve as the new, real appearance of trajectories. As this new perception became a habit, Galileo’s revolutionary *concept* of motion that gives rise to the parabolic curve became lost to us and it now lies deep in the history of our language, within the meaning of the commonly used word, motion. We now simply perceive the world as it is: a world in which objects follow parabolic paths.¹

We can likewise turn our historical imagination to the little examined, but often-used word, “call”, as in “a call for community solutions.”² What historical determinants lie within our unconscious usage of this word, shaping our perceptions of the world, quite independently of our conscious intentions? If we can allow these “roots of meaning” to rise to the surface, how will they affect our discourse re: drought and the present condition of the real world? What action could follow from such an inquiry, i.e. action that matters?

At bottom, “call” surprisingly hides an ancient meaning of screaming, shrieking.³ Moving “up” through history we also encounter more recent meanings of naming and visitor. Already, from this brief excursion into the historical depths of our being via language, we can see that, through our habitual, unconscious use of the common word “call”, in relation to a world condition of drought, psyche is “intending” to alert us to some deeper resonances at work, “behind the scenes as it were”, in our perceptions of the world-as-drought.⁴ The psyche is thus quite involved in this call to community action, but her involvement may not be quite identical with the understandable sense of urgency we have today, that *we* need to do something, that we need to help the world somehow, in its present plight.

In our use of the word “call”, we invoke buried images of shrieking, screaming, naming, and visitor, which can now rise up to the surface of consciousness from the depths of our linguistic

being where, if we remain open, they can begin to stain our present consciousness, like an alchemical tincture.

We can now imaginatively ask, for example, *who* is screaming and shrieking, without needing to literalize the question by that old habit of thought, or trope—the inner/outer disjunction. If we do succumb to the trope, then we can only conclude that we humans are literally shrieking or screaming, or alternatively, that the world is poetically “screaming” for our help. This familiar move betrays psychic being, which is no longer concerned with the truth of such disjunctions as inner/outer, as Nietzsche demonstrates so forcefully in his opus.⁵ To serve psyche today, it is more important that we *receive* the shrieking and screaming as it comes to us from our and the world’s mutual depths of being. This may be in fact what we are here to do, as Rilke teaches through the example of his own life:

...

Since I still don’t know enough about pain,
This terrible darkness makes me small.
If it’s you, though—

press down hard on me, break in
that I may know the weight of your hand,
and you the fullness of my cry.⁶

Or, as he says further on:

Are we, perhaps, here just for saying: House,
Bridge, Fountain, Gate, Jug, Olive tree, Window,—
Possibly: Pillar, Tower? But for saying, remember,
Oh, for such saying as never the things themselves
Hoped so intensely to be.⁷

Can we resonate with the screaming and shrieking long enough to hear its name, as it names itself to us, in the way that a visitor would introduce herself?

I had a dream recently in which a visitor called at my door. Children, light-hearted and laughing, accompanied it. This visitor rendered me mute. I could not name it. It has a shape of a cat’s head that morphs into the body of a cassowary, an Australian bird from the emu family. This strange being came into my home and washed its face in a fountain. It was friendly and seemed to get what it wanted from our meeting. After the dream, I am still mute and must therefore wait until my marvelous visitor begins to speak through me, as its possible mouthpiece. It is not up to me to name it as if it belonged to my familiar world.

This visitor *could* appear to me only after decades of my dwelling in the “screaming and shrieking”, following its first appearance in my life, at a time when I was *living the drought*, the kind of wasteland that T. S. Eliot’s poem knows:⁸

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.⁹

While we normally think that something has to be done to the wasteland in order to rescue it, or nourish it, I learned that the wasteland itself is the “place” of its own “cure”, if we can stay long enough within it. And so, from within the drought came this life-changing, powerful, dream-vision:

I am working at a thermonuclear facility along with others. It is the central facility of our society. It is regulated and master-minded by a central computer, much like HAL in ‘2001’, even to the detail of the red eye with which we could communicate. This computer is female. Everybody thought of her as an IT! In contrast I would look into her eye and talk to her, subject to subject, with love.

In other words, the feminine regulating principle which is the glue of society, by relating all parts to one another and to the whole has become an IT! But my response alone is not enough. Slowly the lack of relatedness begins to drive her mad with grief. At first, this madness showed up as an increasing, dangerous autonomy in the operation of the objects associated with the facility (society)—elevators going sideways, doors opening and shutting autonomously, etc. Then people began to harm one another in various ways until the social system became frayed and anarchy increased, with civilization and its values losing cohesion and crumbling.

I find myself in a garbage dump, near the central facility. Some abandoned children give me a gun to kill them. I take it away from them. A vagabond is sitting in an abandoned car, sewing a boot for the coming (nuclear?) winter. He also used to work in the facility, he said. A sick woman careens by. A man tries to take his twin boys up a tower.

Then I am standing at the centre of the facility. It is Ground Zero. A large cleared area of gray sand and dirt with concentric rings, like a target, radiating from the centre. The ground is slightly raised at the centre, like a discus, sloping away to the edges. I sense that she is going to explode. I am right at the epicentre. She is going to destroy us all and this means herself in an apocalypse of rage-despair, loathing, hate, and grief because of our stupidity. I must get away from the epicentre now. I sprint across the field, down the slight incline to the periphery of the field and sprawl prone, with my head facing the centre, just as she explodes. The wind starts from the centre and blows out (in contrast to the natural phenomenon which sucks up). It begins as a breeze, increasing in strength and intensity until it becomes an unbearable shriek. Lying face down, I am sheltered by the slope as the wind rips over my back. But I mustn’t raise my head at all—a few inches of protection and that’s it! Then I know the shriek is hers.

I ‘see’ her standing at the centre, and a poem bursts spontaneously out of me as I record the experience:

goddess
flowing
in her agony
awesome!
incomparable grief and rage
divine suffering
excruciating pain
such terrible agony
beauty, sublime beauty
how is love possible?
yet this is what i feel

A bubble of calm forms around me while the storm of destruction rages on outside. She is with me in a form that I can talk to, personally.

Then the bubble collapses and the wind/goddess shrieks again. Gradually it dissipates and as I turn over, feeling its last tendrils whip at my clothes, I find myself tumbling out of this apocalyptic scene into a city street, the everyday world of my daily life. I have been returned from a visionary place to my ordinary life.

Then, I wake up.

This self-presentation of reality did indeed stain my being, like an alchemical tincture. I was brought to edge of suicide, over subsequent months. “Her” screaming and shrieking *became* mine, as it already was from the start, i.e., existing in the depths of being, beyond “mine” and “yours”, beyond “inner” and “outer”. How could I stand the given knowledge that Being itself, in the form of the goddess, has been consigned to oblivion, abandoned, for over 3000 years by the cultural encrustation that privileges the human subject and centuries-long imposition of its various “world-views” *on* Being? The goddess, ignored for so long, is now destroying that which she loves and in so doing, destroys herself. This knowledge “pressed down hard upon me,” as Rilke says, and her rage-despair became the “fullness of my cry.”

Yet the very same dreadful terror carries the “miraculous cure” within it. I was given a poem that worked performatively on me. “Incomparable grief and rage”, if endured by the human recipient, will transform into love, and indeed did so, as I feverishly wrote with increasing astonishment. The *poesis* itself generated love from the depths of rage-despair, all within the human heart.

The “call” begins with shrieking and screaming, and reveals, decades later, an as-yet unnamed friendly visitor who calls upon me. Although this strange and wonderful being did not offer up a name, I am struck by the fact that it came as an animal figure. I can presently only conceive of this marvel in terms of a complex image: a cat’s head and a cassowary’s body. This presentation means that I do not yet know the “speech” of this (way of) being, coming to us from within the despair of the drought or nuclear wasteland.

My “visitor” dream shows there is a clear affinity between this new way of “animal being” and fountains of water. Does this suggest that the drought is brought to an end when we can politely receive the unknown visitor, without imposing yet another “world view” on its presence? Can we become more animal-like, in the way that van der Post advises, concerning bush manners—knowing how to comport ourselves in the face of the unknown, friendly, but possibly dangerous (cassowaries have a lethal kick) “animal” presence?¹⁰

We are not only faced with literal droughts *in* the world; we are critically facing a world appearing *as* drought—a waterless wasteland, now filled only with a self-destructive rage-despair. The appearance of the strange “animal” visitor coincides with the appearance of a fountain—the end of the drought, if this strange being can be received as such by us.

We are presently faced with the end of one entire way of being, a way that has dominated for 3000 years, and the “call” heralds a new way of being. One of its “faces” is that of my dream visitor. To receive this visitor and end the drought is a task that begins with hearing and receiving the abyssal depths of our historical being, in the form of shrieks and screams—the agony of 3000 years of consignment to oblivion. If we can endure, suffer this rage-despair, as it works its will on us, then love may be born in our hearts, the kind of love that can prepare us to receive the next manifestation of being, the strange and wonderful “animal” presence. If we can restrain the Adamic impulse to *impose* a name on this wonderful being, then it may, in time, name itself to us, and in so doing ... name us!

Returning now to the call for community solutions, what effective action may follow when the psychic determinants of our perceptions are brought into relationship to our conscious concerns? There is no compulsion to include *psychic* being as a factor in any analysis of our modern predicament. Most disciplines in fact proceed from a very different *a priori*. They assume that our present set of real appearances—a solid world exterior to human consciousness, having no consciousness of its own—has been the only one for all time. The corollary to this stance is that we humans are solely responsible for our present crisis and its solution—there is only us *human* beings!¹¹

Accepting *psychic* being (as distinguished from *human* being—see footnote eleven), as an *a priori*, is a choice and commitment, usually based on some convincing experience of the reality of the psyche, and not simply an ideological choice, based on personal preference. Once the commitment is made, we become open to what psyche may teach us in regards to the real world’s *being* and our place in it. My experiences with psychic reality have taught me, for example, that the drought, from psyche’s point of view, though disturbingly real, is not simply some event exterior to me, and equally, “drought” is not simply a projected quality of my personal psychological situation onto the exterior world. Drought, or the wasteland, is the condition of the real world in its present *being*, at a depth shared by all of us. Once the human being goes to those depths and becomes a mouthpiece for the rage-despair that lies there, then the world’s being may “speak” through, and *as*, its human representative. Such “speech” may take the form of “art”, new modes of discourse, or cultural forms that can reflect a new human-world configuration.¹² As this new configuration manifests through the creative efforts of many individuals, a correspondingly new set of real appearance will arise, an inceptive moment that, as Heidegger says, will inaugurate an entirely new history.

About the Author

I hold a doctorate in Consciousness Studies (1999). My thesis concerns the theme of "the end of the world", based on my own personal experiences lasting twenty years. At first it seemed to me that I was undergoing a purely personal psychological crisis but over time I discovered that I was also participating in the historical process of a transformation of the soul, as reflected in the enormous, even apocalyptic, changes occurring in our culture. During this difficult period of my life, I wrote two books: *Living in Uncertainty Living with Spirit* and *Poems of Making, Poems of Death*.

My next three books, *Mouthpiece*, *The Imperative*, and *Hearing Voices*, explore the meaning of "the end of the world" more fully. My subsequent books, including *Animal Soul* and *Manifesting Possible Futures*, establish a firm theoretical ground for the claim that the soul is urging us towards the development of new inner capacities that can help us face the uncertainty of modern life and, as well, address the unknown future. My book, *Overcoming Solidity*, continues this exploration in terms of our current structure of consciousness and its correlative world of empirical reality. *Making New Worlds* begins the work of articulating the art form that is emerging in response the soul's intention to incarnate in the real world. I develop this theme more fully in *The Coming Guest and the New Art Form*. I have also written an unusual book, *UR-image*, which tells a story of four friends whose lives are interrupted by an intrusion of four possible futures, while *Oblivion of Being* is a story of three friends caught up in a transformation of being.

I currently live with my wife Anita in Sydney, where I teach, write, and consult with others concerning their own journey through the present "apocalypse of the interior", as it has been called, in my capacity as a practicing Jungian psychotherapist. Anita and I also work with couples in a therapeutic setting.

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End Notes

- ¹ Bortoft, H. (1996). *The Wholeness of Nature*. Aurora. Lindisfarne Books.
- ² The term, “historical imagination” is from Owen Barfield and is a method of participating with past consciousnesses.
- ³ Old Norse kalla “to cry loudly;” Proto-Indo-European base *gol- “to scream, shriek.” From *WordBook*. (2012).
- ⁴ From the psyche’s point of view, the “past” means “psychic depth”, or the depths of our being.
- ⁵ Paul de Man, reading Nietzsche, asks: “are the axioms of logic adequate to reality or are they a means and measure for us to *create* the real ...” de Man, P. (1979). *Allegories of Reading*. New Haven. Yale University Press. 120.
- ⁶ Rilke, R., Barrows, A. & Macy, J. (tr). (1996). *Book of Hours*. New York. Riverhead Books.
- ⁷ _____ Leishman & Spender, S. (tr). (1967). “The Ninth Elegy” in *Duino Elegies*. New York. Norton.
- ⁸ For a fuller account of this period of my life, see Woodcock, J. C. (2015). *The Imperative*. CreateSpace.
- ⁹ Eliot, T. S. *The Wasteland*.
- ¹⁰ “Human beings ... are so deficient in the essentials of bush education such as having a proper sense of smell and hearing ...” From van der Post, L. (1978). *A Story Like The Wind*. New York. Morrow.
- ¹¹ Our present cultural practices reflect a definition of human beings as isolated centres of consciousness over and against a material world whose meaning can only be *posited* by these centres of authority—if *we* don’t endow the world with this or that “world view” then the world holds no meaning at all.
- ¹² My book, *Oblivion of Being*, narrates a story of three friends who, following an inceptive moment, engage in the effort of developing a new cultural form that can reflect a transformation in the definition of the human being and world.