

excerpts

**TENSIONS IN CONVERSION**  
**ECSTASY, HOMEOSTASIS, APOCALYPSE AND APOSTASY**

"The object of the pilgrimage turned out to be a pilgrim."  
Jorges Luis Borges; 'The Approach to Al Mu'tasin'

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Human beings continue to survive and so its clear that as a species they have developed some tactic to cope with gravity. This tactic is human consciousness. The etymology of 'consciousness' comes from con, meaning 'with', and science, whose roots lie in the Latin scire, 'to know, to separate one thing from another, to distinguish'. Scire is further related to the Latin scindere which means 'to cut, split or cleave', and to skaedon meaning 'to divide or to separate' (Partridge).

It requires planning and technique, strategy and foresight, for humans to survive in the world, and this is the basis of science. Science defines and separates that which is wanted from that which is not. Science is the survival tool housed in the imagination. Science orders Being into a pattern which suits its purposes.

Lewis Thomas, in an essay entitled 'The World's Biggest Membrane', wrote that the purpose of any membrane is to edit what it experiences: a membrane receives what is wanted, and keeps out what is not. "It takes a membrane to make sense out of disorder..." (Thomas, 145). This is exactly the role of consciousness in human being. The Greek root of 'pattern' is paradigma, paradigm \*. Consciousness develops paradigms, internal intellectual designs, to order experience in a way that it finds helpful. Consciousness constructs paradigms as a means of acquiring what it desires. These paradigms, as they become entrenched in the human psyche, come to represent not only a method of survival, but a complex of presuppositions which comprise the human person's psychic identity. A psychic identity founded on the accomplishment of certain desires.

\* "...a paradigm is an accepted model or pattern...Paradigms gain their status because they are more successful than their competitors in solving a few problems that the group of practitioners has come to recognize as acute." (Kuhn, 23)

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`Homeostasis', then, does not apply only to human biological survival, the maintenance of physical `internal fixity'. `Homeostasis' becomes a superb metaphor for the psychic life as well. A paradigm is an internal membrane, a homeostat which resists external influences, which strives to maintain its internal fixity.

Milan Systemic Family Therapy, founded on the work of the biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela and heavily influenced by Gregory Bateson's philosophy of cybernetics, sees homeostasis at work in the relationships involved in troubled families. "first order cybernetics pictured a family system ...as a homeostatic machine...[in which] a symptom plays an important part in maintaining the homeostasis of the family." (Boscolo et al., 14). The Milan group believed that "families come in with `maps' of what is going on and that the therapist attempts to challenge or shift these `maps'...They look for a `myth' or `premise' that seemingly holds the behaviours attached to a problem in place and try to enunciate this premise or myth in their message to the family." (Boscolo et al, 19).

Oliver Sacks' extraordinary description of a man suffering from `Karsakov's Syndrome', continuous total amnesia, serves as a startling metaphor of the human need to construct paradigms. Interior worlds to maintain some sense of psychic order and identity in the midst of experiences that do not conform to his desires, or even his desire for order and identity.

"Abysses of amnesia continually opened beneath him, but he would bridge them, nimbly, by fluent confabulations and fictions of all kinds. For him they were not fictions, but how he suddenly saw, or interpreted the world. Its radical flux and

incoherence could not be tolerated, acknowledged, for an instant - there was, instead, this strange, delirious, quasi-coherence, as Mr. Thompson, with his ceaseless, unconscious, quick-fire inventions, continually improvised a wall around him...[he was] ...continually creating a world and self, to replace what was continually being forgotten and lost. Such a frenzy might call forth quite brilliant powers of invention and fancy - a veritable confabulatory genius - for such a patient must literally make himself (and his world) up every moment. We have, each of us, a life story, an inner narrative - whose continuity, whose sense, **is** our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a `narrative', and that this narrative **is** us, our identities.

...A man needs such a narrative, a continuous inner narrative, to maintain his identity, his self."

(Sacks, 109)

Homeostatic gravity suggests the resistance of the human psyche to influences which threaten the paradigms that consciousness has created to achieve its desires. A person's identity is founded on these desires, and so homeostatic gravity is above all the resistance of a person to threat's to his or her identity.

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The quality of stasis that is such a part of the scientific world view is expressed profoundly by Bernard and Cannon's theory of homeostasis. As pointed out before, homeostasis strives to maintain the fixity of the 'milieu interieur'. And this is exactly what science attempts to do. "Science values static patterns...When non-conformity appears it is considered an interruption of the normal rather than the presence of the normal. A deviation from a normal static pattern is something to be explained and if possible controlled." (Persig, 142).

Stasis, to science, is considered both normal and desirable (maybe this is another attribute of human consciousness; that whatever is desirable is believed to be normal!) but, as Rene Dubos writes, "Homeostasis...is only a concept of the ideal. Living things do not always return to their original state after responding to stimulus." (Dubos, *Man Adapting* 257). James Gleick more or less puts the nail in the coffin when he writes that "When you reach an equilibrium in biology you're dead." (Gleick; 298)

Science, the root of consciousness, seeks to ensure the survival of the human organism by developing strategies and techniques. These strategies and techniques complexify into patterns, paradigms, which come to comprise the identity of the human psyche. The desire to ensure psychic security, psychic invulnerability, results in a resistance to transformation, and an attempt to control anything which threatens identity. Because experience itself is transformative, and thus threatening, science seeks to control experience by forcing it to fit into static reductive paradigms (ie. homeostasis), and by detaching itself from experience by objectifying experience.

Things that are dead are much easier to control than things that are living, and so science, like Medusa in Greek mythology, turns whatever sees it into stone, or like Midas, kills whatever it touches by turning it into gold, psychic gold. Science dissects and analyzes what it encounters and in so doing avoids the vulnerability of real contact and communication. As William Wordsworth wrote in 'The Tables Turned', "We murder to dissect." The detachment and 'objectification' required for the dissection involves a 'split' between the observer and the observed, between mind and reality. With this in mind it is easier to understand the Greek roots of the word 'science', which is schizo. Bleuler invented the term 'schizophrenic' (schizo, split; phrenos, mind) to describe people whose symptoms suggested that their interior mind was 'split' from external reality.

Ultimately the desire to stay glued to the ground, the desire for certainty, leads to impenetrable bulkheads, unbreakable circles, prisons of security.

The roots of the word 'Paradise' are the Iranian 'pairi', meaning 'around', and 'daeza', meaning 'wall' (Daly, 6). Paradise is a wall around, a membrane, a circle of security and shelter. It is the mandala of completion of the mystics, and the closed circle of homeostasis.

Surprisingly enough, it's the same circle. Both circles [science and mysticism, ecstasy and homeostasis] wish to be free of the biases of human subjectivity and perception. Both circles stress detachment. Weil [mystic] believed that God is only present where the imagination is absent. Objective science believes that the only thing standing between human beings and truth is human

bias. So if there was no imagination, no perception, and no bias, everything would be dandy. But there is, and always will be, imagination, perception and bias as long as a human being is alive, because it is these that keep us alive. Both exclude something from their description of reality: human subjectivity, human imagination, human perception, human bias. No comprehension of God can be complete which excludes these. They exist. They are real. We live in and with them every day, every hour, every minute. There is no escaping this.

But every generation attempts the escape: trying to fly to the sun, wax wings burning, blaze to the ground; trying to run to Tarshish, trying to cross an ocean, ending up in the belly of a whale.

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Thus the model has a 'state cycle' which is called a 'dynamic attractor'. The states that the cycle settles into is termed a 'basin of attraction'. "Left to itself a network will eventually settle into one of its state cycle attractors and remain there. Yet if the network is perturbed in some way, its trajectory may change." (kauffmann, 80).

Kauffmann goes on to describe how the network is intentionally 'perturbed'. A 'minimal perturbation' is one that does not move the network out of its initial basin of attraction or state cycle. The network, while briefly thrown off its normal cycle, eventually returns to its original basin of attraction. A 'structural perturbation' is when the change is permanent, the trajectory of the network does not return to its original basin of attraction, but settles into a new state cycle.

Different networks have different levels of resiliency to perturbations. In some networks changing the activity of just one element "may unleash an avalanche of changes in the patterns that would otherwise have occurred. The changes are 'damage', and they may propagate to varying extents throughout the network." (Kauffmann, 80)

Now, you can see that Kauffman's use of language, which is the language of modern biology and cybernetics, betrays his value system. "changes are 'damage'", says Kauffmann. Clearly he appears to value static quality over Dynamic Quality. To repeat Persig, "Science values static patterns...A deviation from a normal static pattern is something to be explained and if possible controlled." Kauffmann describes a 'structural perturbation' as "a permanent mutation", and, in chaotic systems, "minimal changes typically cause extensive damage - alterations in the activity patterns - almost immediately." (Kauffmann, 81). An alteration in the activity pattern of a complex system is described as 'extensive damage'.

For Kauffmann an "ordered network is...characterized by a homeostatic quality: networks typically return to their original attractors after perturbations. And homeostasis...is a property of all living things." (Kauffmann, 81).

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So, what I realised is that blues and folk are just like Kauffmann's 'state cycles'. Certain repetitive chord progressions are like 'basins of attraction', and departure from that chord progression, or from the scale that's associated with that chord progression, is dissonant. It just doesn't sound right.

In many folk and blues songs that are slightly more complex there is a break from the cycle for a couple of verses. This is called a bridge and would usually be associated with a chorus. But after the bridge the song returns to the state cycle, the basin of attraction. So the bridge is a little like a 'minimal perturbation'. After the 'perturbation' the song returns to its original trajectory...

Structural perturbation is a little harder to find, but I realised that one of my favourite pieces of music, Bach's 'Passacaglia in C Minor' was a wonderful example. You'll hear, as you listen to the piece, that the opening theme, which is a single voice, continues to repeat over and over. The repetition of this theme is usually explicit, one of the voices of the organ is dedicated to it. Even when there are many voices the theme can still be heard. There are points, though, where the theme is **implicit**. While you can't actually hear any of the voices stating the theme, all the other voices continue to play around that theme as if it were still there. You can hum the theme to yourself and it is still definitely the backbone, the vertebrae, of the piece. However, as the piece draws nearer to its end, there **is** a departure. You suddenly realise that the theme is fragmenting, structural changes are taking place, and the theme is not returning to the original trajectory.

An even more radical example of structural perturbation is Brian Eno's 'Three Variations on the Pachelbel Canon'. In these pieces the theme of the Pachelbel is stated briefly, after which there is an obvious collapse of the structure and timing of the original. Eno's 'Discreet Music' might be something more along the lines of Persig's Dynamic Quality. There is no distinctive theme at all, and the rhythm of the tones that are heard are randomized.

I've given these examples as a continuation of the dialectic which this essay initially set out, and to introduce some sense of theories which pertain to evolution. Persig speaks of the dialectic between static and Dynamic Quality, Kauffmann between ordered and chaotic networks, and musical structure between harmony and dissonance.

I've mentioned how we seem to innately desire one or other extreme, and that, in a way, the extremes represent a paradisaal state to the human psyche...

### The Land of Nod: Absurdity + Addiction

And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground...you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth..." Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the Land of Nod, east of Eden.

Genesis 4.10-16

So, not only were we thrown out of Paradise, we were condemned to the Land of Nod, condemned to 'Wandering'. Because we're all like Cain, we're all murderers in one way or another, murderously jack boot marching through the rose gardens of experience, sensitivity, compassion and love. Welcome to Nod.

This is how I think we all, deep down, experience our existence. As if we've been 'thrown' out into it, as if we were not quite prepared, as if we were missing some essential ingredient or piece of knowledge, as if we don't quite ever feel at home. I can't get over the lines of Rilke in the Fifth Duino Elegy, about the acrobats who pitch their flimsy tent on the edge of town.

...wanderers, even more  
 transient than we ourselves, who from their earliest days  
 are savagely wrung out  
 by a never satisfied will (for whose sake?) Yet it wrings them,  
 bends them, twists them, swings them and flings them...  
 (Rilke, Fifth Elegy)

Bent, twisted, swung and flung, abandoned wanderers. Icharus and Jonah tried to find methods of avoiding this rather stark reality, this painful and bare awareness. Albert Camus, in a really beautiful and powerful essay entitled 'An Absurd Reasoning', struggled courageously and eloquently with the absurdity of this abandonedness in the face of the fundamental desires of human being.

Ecstasy and science seek an absolute explanation, an absolute ground to rest in because, as Camus wrote, "A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world." (Camus, 13) But its not enough, and there are times that these 'bad reasons' are exposed for what they are: inadequate. "in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land." (Camus 13)

Camus recognised, acutely, the strangely unfair, impossible, arrangement of humanity's relationship with the universe.

"The mind's deepest desire, even in its most elaborate operations, parallels man's unconscious feelings in the face of his universe: it is an insistence on familiarity, an appetite for clarity...That nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse for the human drama. But the fact of that nostalgia's existence does not imply that it is to be immediately satisfied."

(Camus, 22)

This essential impulse, this persistent nostalgia, is not satisfied, and yet still insatiable. And this, to Camus, is the nature of the absurd, "What is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart." (Camus, 26)

Experience, existence, does not satisfy the longings of either the ecstatic or the homeostatic. It does not satisfy the craving for the absolute. It is provisional, it is surprising, an answer is immediately superseded by a question that undermines it, a system is challenged as soon as it is arranged. This is baffling, outrageous, unbearable, and drives humanity even farther into inauthenticity and evasion.

Schaeff claims that this unbearable sense of abandonment and absurdity is a root cause for addictions. "The pain of the estrangement from one's place in the universe needs to be assuaged, and nothing assuages better than addictions." (Schaeff: Beyond Therapy, Beyond Science, 203). Because this estrangement is fundamental to the human condition, it expresses itself in the fabric and structure of all relationships; all familial, institutional and social norms. "We have developed a societal system in which addictions are not only supported by the society, they are required." (Schaeff 'Beyond Therapy, Beyond Science', 115) Addiction is the social norm. Addiction is an underlying motivating factor in the design of all social and cultural paradigms. Addiction is genetically selected as an appropriate design for survival in human society. Civilisation is the

superstructure of addiction.

Addiction is a clinging to things which are believed to be empowering for the ego; but it is also the attempt to be totally free from the stresses inherent in the ego. It manipulates, controls, exploits and oppresses in order to secure what it desires; but if this is impossible it allows itself to be the victim of manipulation, control, exploitation and oppression. Its dominant and dominated, sadistic and masochistic, perpetrator and victim...all as a tactic of evasion, all as a method and pathway of denial, all in order to avoid the admission of the terribly bare, fragile, broken, vulnerable condition of being human.

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### Torn Tension at the Crossroads

In the previous section I discussed the absurdity of the human condition, the sense of abandonedness, and the addictive patterns and pathways of evasion used by human being to avoid the experience of that abandonedness. Its a vicious circle, because the more that you become addicted, the more acute your experience of abandonment, and so the more strenuous and violent your strategy to avoid it. That strategy is addiction...and we're all addicts.

...

"Foxes have lairs, and birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to rest his head." So said Jesus, and this is the condition of freedom from addiction. You can't rest your head on the circular pillow of ecstasy, or the circular pillow of homeostasis. You can't build yourself a nice big house with nice thick walls to keep human vulnerability outside. As Weil so rightly writes in 'Decreation', "We must take the feeling of being at home into exile. We must be rooted in the absence of place..." (Weil, 351). Freedom from addiction is not a safe comfortable place. Freedom from addiction is a pathway, a wandering, a pilgrimage. Freedom from addiction is love.

Love, which is a pathway, is caught in a torn tension, suspiring, consumed either by fire or fire. I say that it is torn because there is no neat resolution, no nice harmonious synthesis or reconciliation, to the conflict which is represented by the diabolically opposing ways of ex-stasis or homeo-stasis. This is our nostalgia, this is our desire, but this is not what is given, and this is not

love. There is a break, a crack, in the fabric of our relationship with ourselves, with others and with the world. And it is there, at the wound, that we need to remain. There is a tension there, a sense of discomfort, an uncertainty, a sense of groundlessness.

Camus said that the absurd is essentially a divorce, a divorce "between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together." The negation of either of the terms amounted to escaping it, evading it, but the relationship is one of "confrontation and unceasing struggle" (Camus, 33-54). The point is to live with it, to "...remain on that dizzying crest - that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge." (Camus, 50). Tenaciously make that struggle and uncertainty your home; a 'makeshift hut to receive the music', a tent to shelter the sacred, a shelter from the storm. Something sturdy, resilient, flexible - but something that you can dismantle when its time to move on. A Conestoga wagon wheeling west...

## LOVE'S CALLING FROM ABOVE, LOVE'S CALLING FROM THE GROUND

### Dwelling at the Crossroads

Ecstasy and homeostasis, Being and Consciousness, want to be cured. The cure is the escape from the antinomies of human existence. The cure comes in the shape of addiction.

Living with one's ailments, bearing the cross of one's ailments, is setting up one's shelter at the crossroads of antithetical tendencies and opposing demands. This is the only place worth taking a stand, the only ground worth driving your tent pegs into. Soon enough, when the wind picks up, or the floods come, you'll have to pack your tent and move on...to the next crossroads. You can't settle for less...or more.

The best way to set up a tent to keep it from the weather, from the rain and wind, is by driving the pegs in so that there's a fairly high degree of tension. The fabric has to be tight. If its not tight the water will pool in the slack areas, and the wind will catch it, turning your tent into a gigantic sail.

Love sets up a taut tent at the crossroads.

"The pairs of opposites, of which **freedom and order** and **growth and decay** are the most basic, put tension into the world, a tension that sharpens man's sensitivity and increases his self-awareness. No real understanding is possible without awareness of these pairs of opposites which permeate everything man does.

In the life of societies there is the need for both justice and mercy. 'Justice without mercy', said Thomas Aquinas, 'is cruelty; mercy without justice is the mother of dissolution'...Only a higher force can reconcile these opposites: wisdom. The problem cannot be solved, but wisdom can transcend it. Similarly, societies need stability **and** change, tradition **and** innovation...order **and** freedom, growth **and** decay...

The adoption of a final solution means a kind of death sentence for man's humanity and spells either cruelty or dissolution, generally both,"

(E.F.Schumacher in Thompson, 29-30)

Schumacher describes the nature of some of the fundamental antinomies. The polarities exist, and there needs to be a tension between them. The 'final resolution' of this tension, by homeostatic reductionism, or ecstatic union, is a cop-out, a 'death sentence'. Finality implies completion and closure. Existence, human existence, does not offer this closure. Creation itself does not offer this closure. Creation is a process of evolution, and the ground of this process, this continuous transformation, **is** the tension. The result of this very real dialogue is not the final victory of any one party or way, it is a transformation, a communion, in which neither party remains what it was.

Communion does not occur without conflict, without broken-ness. If it did it would require no courage. This is why, of course, an omnipotent God can never be a loving God. That which is all-powerful has nothing totally other to it to overcome and comprehend. That which is all-powerful has no risks to take, no abysses which are not its own, no sense of vulnerability towards what it does not understand. It can have no faith, it has no need of faith, it controls all.

Omnipotence is the ultimate ground of all human desire (and I expect that is why we have come to believe that God is omnipotent; we project our desires and call them God), and ecstasy and homeostasis, religion and science, are possible paths towards its achievement. Real spirituality, real love, calls us out of our addiction to omnipotence, security and control. Calls us not to union but to communion, not to the absolute but to evolution and growth.

But evolution, growth, development, requires the dynamic **and** the static, the ecstatic and the homeostatic. Addiction occurs when either extreme of the dialectic is taken as an end in itself, as a final solution.

To return to Persig's analysis of static and Dynamic Quality.

"Static quality patterns are dead when they are exclusive, when they demand blind obedience and suppress Dynamic change. But static patterns, nevertheless, provide a necessary stabilizing force to protect Dynamic progress from degeneration...Neither static nor Dynamic Quality can survive without the other...A tension between these two forces is needed to continue the evolution of life."

(Persig, 121)

"Dynamic advance is meaningless unless it can find some static pattern with which to protect itself from degeneration back to conditions before the advance was made. Evolution...must be a process of ratchet-like steps in which there is a Dynamic movement forward up some new incline and then...a static latching-on; then another Dynamic advance, then another static latch..."

The increase in versatility is directed toward Dynamic Quality. The increase in power to control hostile forces is directed toward static quality. Without Dynamic Quality the organism cannot grow. Without static quality the organism cannot last. Both are needed."

(Persig, 146-147)

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I want to keep on moving now, down the road. And where are we going? We're going down to the crossroads. And the crossroads is a pilgrimage, because the cross is an evolution, a growth, which is

nailed onto the crux where ecstasy and science, chaos and order, shape and change, cross.

The crossroads is in this world but it doesn't belong to it. The crossroads is where heaven and earth meet, where you walk with God in the land of the living. Its where an angel and a puppet meet and marry, with their heads on fire, and the earth covering their feet.

### Finding God in Nod

One of the most important elements in this essay is that it brings us back to the world. Addictive pathways lead us away from the world, away from the self, away from self-knowledge and thus away from the knowledge of others. Addiction seeks to escape the vulnerability of the self and the body; love does not. The point, then, is not to tear ourselves away from the temporal to fix our eyes on an eternal God or an absolute objective truth. The point is to discern the eternal and the absolute **in** the temporal. To devote ourselves to God in the world. Its a mistake to make a fundamental differentiation between God and the world as if they were mutually exclusive. It is not the world, matter, temporality that is a condition for God. Temporality and death are no barrier to God. The only conditions for God in this world are inauthenticity, dishonesty, lovelessness, which are all rooted in addiction. Wherever there is love in the world, wher-ever there is a courageous heart struggling to learn to love, God is in the world, in the temporal.

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### SPYRING UP ROUND THE DIVINE GYRE

If we ground ourselves in the world, into our bodies and selves, we have to deal with transience, change and evolution. Ecstasy and homeostasis avoid this, seeking a changeless absolute, or a changeless interior fixity. Change is challenging; it challenges our world views, our sense of identity, and so it is good to begin to have some sense of the way in which we experience change. In this way maybe we can be better prepared for it: more open to it where necessary, or, more resistant to it. Either way, its good to be able to see where we stand and how we're proceeding...

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`Verwandeln' means `to change, to transform', `to turn into something', `to change from one thing to another'. `Wandeln', its root, means `to change', `to walk', and `wanderung' means a `walk' or a `migration'. I like the idea of a `migration'. It means to me that we're not alone. I like the idea of a great migration, a pilgrimage of the soul, out of the enslavement and oppression of addiction... There's a migration always happening; its always available to anyone.

In Western civilisation, the civilisation which is, at present, technologically, economically and militarily dominant, a homeostatic world view prevails. This world view is based on the success of science as a method for the control of environmental threats and, I believe even more significantly, the control and dominance of other human persons or societies. Science and the homeostatic world view is a winner, its got the competitive edge, it'll take you to the top. What's at the top is, of course, a question that's rarely asked. It **is** security and control, or at least some degree of it. But its security and control bought at the cost of isolation and exploitation. The top is a radical evasion of love.

..... Homeostasis is a world view well adjusted to maintain the status quo. As Ann Wilson Schaeff writes, "Nonrecovering systems seek to maintain the status quo as a closed system; they are static." (Schaeff: *Beyond Therapy, Beyond Science*, 193). Western civilisation (and I would argue, civilisation itself, as a superstructure of desire) is a non-recovering system, and homeostasis is a well insulated paradigm by which it can evade recovery.

Heraclitus wrote that you never step into the same river twice. This is only half true. Its equally true that it is never the same person who steps into the same river. The river has changed, and so has the person, and so has their perception of the river. Even if the water hadn't changed in the slightest, it would have changed for the changed person. So its not just the river that has changed, nor is it just the person that has changed, nor is it just the person's perception that has changed. All have changed, and all have changed on their own account because the others have changed on their own account, because the others have changed on their own account...

The biologist Humberto Maturana, in an article entitled `Everything is Said by an Observer', wrote that "Adaptation is the constant." (Maturana in Thompson, 77). Living organisms neither remain the same, nor are they static. An organism is always in a medium, and is always not only influenced by that medium, but itself influences the medium. Thus, not only are all organisms in a medium, all organisms are a medium. Francisco Varela, a colleague of Maturana's, described an organisms relationship with its environment as `structural coupling' via `tinkering'. "The medium selects the structural change in the organism, and the organism, through its action, selects the structural change in the medium." (Varela in Thompson, 52).

Maturana goes on to say that, "The problem [for evolutionary theorists] is how to handle the problem of structural change and to show how an organism, which exists in a medium and which operates adequately to its need, can undergo a continuous structural change such that it goes on acting adequately to its medium, even though the medium is changing." (Maturana in Thompson, 74).....

Imagine an acrobat on a tightrope. At first observation one might assume that the acrobat must respond, adapt, by a complex of movements, to the vicissitudes of the vibrations of the tightrope.

However, one can readily see that the tightrope is vibrating as a result of the movements of the acrobat. Without the acrobat the tightrope would not be vibrating. And yet with every new adjustment that the acrobat makes to adapt to the vibrations of the tightrope new vibrations are created, to which the acrobat must respond.

This is the simplest model possible, and suggests pure feedback from one medium to another, and with only one active agent, the acrobat, initiating the transformation. In reality there could never be just one acrobat and one tightrope. There would be a web of tightropes, an infinite web, and an infinity of acrobats, all adjusting, responding. The balancing act(ion) of every one affecting the balancing act(ion) of every other, and all proceeding towards.

To return to Varela and Maturana: the most important thing here is that both Maturana and Varela take **structural** change as a given. This is really new ground, ground that would absolutely petrify a true homeostat (but, then again, a true homeostat is already petrified, and petrification is called health). The French biologist Henri Atlan takes us further into the new terrain. He recognises the standard homeostatic view, that "Random perturbations, in general, have been considered as something which is not good for an organised system; they were thought of as only being able to disorganise a system, to cause more disorder in it." (Atlan in Thompson, 117) Atlan, however, suggests that random perturbations, while resulting in disorganisation, may also result in a change in the organisation which is fruitful in terms of adaptation.

"Random perturbations...will untie the constraints within a network...", but this detrimental effect, viewed from a higher level of organisation, may result in "a different organisation with more diversity, and this new organisation may have different and stronger adaptive properties." (Atlan in Thompson, 117). Thus the increased complexity resulting from the chaos can be utilised as an opportunity for what Atlan calls 'transcendence'. We perceive then that organisms are not organised to return to a steady homeostatic state.

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An organism, or a society, is permanently changed by its encounter with a perturbation or challenge, and the organism has permanently changed what it encountered. The organism is itself a perturbation to its environment, a perturbation to the organisms with which it connects. They must respond to it, and it must respond to their responses, interresponding. Organisms, then, are in a process of adaptive transformation, and, further, this transformation occurs through a rhythm of responses to perturbations or challenges. This response will be enacted towards achieving a balanced form, a maintenance of identity which is itself a transformation. This is really important: the organism must transform its identity in order to maintain its balance. Balance is not a steady state, but an orchestrated response and adaptation of identity.

All good harmony explores discord, and the organism is frequently thrown out of balance, erring in its adjustments. But while these errors pose a threat to the organism, they also open up unexpected possibilities, unexpected pathways, surprising opportunities, that are not available to the homeostats desire for infallibility. ( Thomas considered 'error', whose root 'err' means to 'wander about in search of something', to be an essential driving force in evolution). And when we say thrown out of balance, or thrown off balance, its hard not to imagine the organism somehow straying from a fixed parameter. But the parameter itself is changing, influenced by the errant gyration, adjusting, responding to the surprising new possibility instituted by the error. The only constant parameter is adaptation.

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So, I hope that its accepted that there is this `motion'. But what's it towards, what's the point? Atlan, in a somewhat surprising statement for a biologist and evolutionary theorist, writes that "everything seems to happen as if the development of the egg towards the adult form is determined by the final state as much as, or even more than, by the previous state." This seems to suggests that things seem to proceed as if motivated not so much by an evolutionary **momentum**, but **towards** something. Organisms have the nature of proceeding `towards'. Oliver Sacks wrote of Thom Gunn's verse, "One is always nearer by not being still.", that it "deals with the basic **urge to move** - a movement which is always, mysteriously, **towards**." (Sacks: `Awakenings', 288).

This motion `towards' is called forth in an asymmetrical rhythm of responses to `perturbations'. If there was not this `calling towards', if there was not this `desire' in organisms to respond and follow this call, there would be no reason for any organism to overcome and proceed **through** perturbations. Any perturbation is experienced by an organism as distress, disorder and risk. To proceed beyond and through this perturbation must be seen as requiring some degree of effort and struggle. To simply give up, to succumb to the perturbation, or to refuse to respond, would seem to be the easier and more likely prospect. But this is not the case. Organisms have this mysterious desire to survive. And not only to survive, but to proceed, change and complexify into a new way of being. There is this mysterious urge to proceed towards through perturbations. And pertur-bations, it would seem, are necessary for the journey, like steps on a ladder.

Early on in this section I used the metaphor of an acrobat. The acrobat is anyone who is willing to dare the cross, but proceeding across requires more than just putting one foot in front of the other. For the acrobat to proceed across the acrobat must transform her very nature. In order to maintain her identity as an acrobat, a being proceeding towards, she must **ontologically** adapt. She must metamorphose to the bones.

When I was first working on the problem of `homeostasis' as the paradigm for evolutionary theory, I wanted an alternative word, and after fiddling around with various combinations I came up with the invention `translibrium'. Trans means `across, beyond, on the other side of'. Its earlier Sanskrit roots derive from tarati; `he crosses, traverses' and it may be further related to the Old English thurh, meaning `through'. Librium comes from the Latin `libra'; `balance' `a pair of scales' and `librate'; `to vibrate like a balance', `to be poised'.

This `translibrium' has a direction, and because I can really say nothing about the content of that direction, I'll call it, like Atlan and Sacks did, `towards'. To means to `break away'. Wards comes from the Indo European wert; `to turn', and is related to the Lithuanian vesti; `to return', the German werden; `to become', the Old English wyrd meaning `fate, destiny, fortune', the English `weird, and the Old Frisian werd; death.

`Translibrium Towards'. Its a great way to open conversations with total strangers. Its a horrendous combination, I know, but I couldn't resist. There's a lot to chew on, and I think its all true. Even the Old Frisian, death. Serious challenges, that require the deepest and most profound responses, always feel like death.

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`Apocalypse', what does it really mean? We all know the images it conjures up: turmoil, violence, the end times, the book of `Revelations'. Originally, though, its from the Greek apo; `away from', and kaluptein; to uncover, to reveal. That's all; taking the cover away. So what's all the fuss about?

I think that the fuss is probably about what's under the cover. Addiction is all about making and living in patterns and circles of evasion and denial and so, the fact is, the last thing that addicts want is revelation. They, we, don't want our evasive patterns to be shown up. We've built our identities with them. We cling to them and we don't want to leave them.

Revelation, then, is a challenge to our identity. Love always comes in the nature of revelation. And so resistance to revelation is synonymous with resistance to love. Apocalypse is the character of love when it eventually breaks through resistance and denial. That is, we experience love as apocalyptic, as violent and cataclysmic, because it is overthrowing an order that we value and cling to. That is why we experience it as death.

In the Old Testament we have the stories of Adam and Eve and of Job to draw from as metaphors for this revelation experienced as death. Adam and Eve experience the departure from Paradise as death, and Yahweh describes it as such when he warned them that if they were to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die.

In Job Satan `tries' Job after making a wager with Yahweh. `Satan' is actually Hebrew for `adversary' and, in terms of Job's development, this adversary is critical. His trial leads to Job's departure from his state of comfort into a period of extreme suffering, but through this Job is profoundly enriched. Both narratives, of Adam and Eve and of Job, can be seen as apocalyptic in character.

#### [SIR GAWAIN AND THE THE GREEN KNIGHT]

#### Love and Apostasy

"At the boundary, life blossoms."

James Gleick; Chaos Physicist

Arnold Toynbee, in `A Study of History', described an alternative view of the Fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise.

"The Fall, in response to the temptation to eat of the knowledge of Good and Evil, symbolizes the acceptance of a challenge to abandon this achieved integration and to venture upon a fresh differentiation out of which a fresh integration may - or may not - arise.."

In some circles I realise that this alternative view is apostasy. But, what is `apostasy'. You'll remember that `ecstasy' comes from ex, `outside of', and stasis, `static'; and that `homeostasis' comes from homeo, `same', and stasis, `static'. And you'll remember that I've suggested that these two represent two extremes of a dialectic. With this in mind it gives me great pleasure to give the

etymological origins of apostasy. Apo, like in 'apocalypse', means 'away from', and stasis is, as always, 'static'. The differences between ecstasy and apostasy are somewhat subtle, but to me they are absolutely critical. 'Ecstasy' is 'outside of' patterns, paradigms, boundaries and limitations. 'Apostasy' is 'away from' patterns, paradigms, boundaries and limitations. The first is disengaged from the patterns, has no part in them, ex-cludes them and is ex-clusive. The second 'stands out' from the perimeters. Apostasy, like Rilke's wonderful, courageous acrobats, sets up tent at the edge of town. It needs the pattern, but does not belong to it.

Apostasis is nomadic and prepared. Like the 'librium' from 'translibrium', the apostate is 'poised', ready to respond. The apostate is prepared and poised to respond to challenges. It is prepared to transform, to ontologically adapt, to metamorphose, to convert itself, but this conversion does not take place without a context, in nothingness or towards nothingness. Like the 'trans' from 'translibrium', the apostate travels 'through' and 'across' paradigms and patterns. The apostate's feet are on the ground, firmly, steadily, walking towards.

While apostasy travels through paradigms and patterns, its movement is in response to challenges or perturbations. But love is not just mere change. Change can be for the good or the bad. Nor is love solely in the hands of the apostate. Love is the communion of a challenge and a response. The loving challenge is a disturbance that, to borrow from Toynbee, "intrudes with a stimulus of the kind best calculated to evoke the most potently creative variations." (Toynbee, 63). But, as we've seen, such an intrusion can be experienced or perceived as terrible, cata-strophic, apocalyptic. The apostate, however, because she is free from addiction and clinging, because she does not need to 'cover' her deceit, comes to meet the challenge. The apostate does not 'react', but 'responds'.

The apostate is like Henri Atlan's 'transcendent' organism which saw a 'random perturbation' as an opportunity, like Sir Gawain who responded to the challenge of the Green Knight, and like Job who suffered through the trials of Satan. In Hebrew, as we know, Satan does not mean 'the evil one', it means 'adversary'. The 'adversary' provokes a crisis; it puts the tree at risk and in jeopardy. But it is also an opportunity, As Toynbee writes, "In the language of mythology, when one of God's creatures is tempted by the Devil, God himself is thereby given the opportunity to recreate the world." (Toynbee, 65). Crisis is from the Greek krisis, 'to sift': its a challenge to undergo an ordeal that will changes your shape. Its the possibility and opportunity for purification.

## Conversion

The stance of love is apo-static, apostasy.

.... "The creative process culminates in a system, but the system is only a system on the move. It never reaches a static system that comes into existence and remains forever after." (Lonergan, 61)

There is nothing easy about being an apostate. I want to stress again that the apostate is

involved in the patterns and paradigms of the world. The apostate is involved in relationships. The apostate is attached. The apostate is in love. The apostate is very much alive. And so challenges and `perturbations' are disturbing, confusing, painful, dis-illusioning, disorienting...

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Out of the taut ground of the tension between consciousness and Being, homeostasis and ecstasy, attachment and detachment, there is a challenge and a response which inspirates a circle forth into a gyre, a settler forth into a pilgrim, death forth into life. This tension, this cross, is the dwelling and pathway of the apostate, and this inspiration encourages the dare into the cross, the death, necessary for growth, renewal and resurrection.