

Introduction to *Species, Lost in Apple-eating Time*

I have to admit, I love this wee little story. It's the best I could do at the time, trying to express the unthinkable in words.

It was the unthinkable, I think, that I was thinking, walking around the park near which I live in Fox Point, Wisconsin, thinking, just thinking. Sometimes I think aloud and sometimes I practice speeches as I walk, and I look pretty wild to those who don't, don't walk and talk and think with single-minded intensity, focused on what's inside, oblivious to and not caring how it looks.

Once a young person knows that the meaningful compass is inside, they pretty much own themselves (of course, that inside self is formed in and by a community, we are social animals after all, and the communities we choose do matter, as I often said, preaching to the faithful (more or less) on Sunday mornings).

But I digress. This is no place for exploring paradoxical complexities... or maybe it is, since the walls of a self look like cellular walls inside the self or cell but like modular adjacencies when seen as parts of a whole, making up an organism, and that's what this story is about... the angle, the point of view, the frame of reference.

Anyway, I was walking around the park, thinking of how as what-we-arbitrarily-call species evolve, the boundaries between

them disappear. The names we give them go away. (Are you noticing common themes in these stories?) Think of that long banquet table at which each generation is represented by a person, we are only one person or two away from Einstein and only a hundred or so people away from a neolithic ancestor. Each person can talk to the one beside him or her, maybe to someone a couple of seats away, but pretty soon the conversation disintegrates into gibberish.

Species link to one another in a similar way. And species inhabit the universe like plankton inhabit the seas, by gazillions. Way too many to think.

And as intelligent species (and aren't they all?) link up, I saw as it were in a fast flash forward mode, they form larger and larger organic unities, mind to mind, the language with which they previously described themselves breaking in the process (as cultures among humans mesh and merge and self-transcend), new languages emerging, until the animated sentient matter inhabiting the entire known universe is like one immense organism, parts of which like living cells articulate each through its own aperture or cultural or planetary or galactic frame a way of seeing and thinking about what exists.

It must be so, as Faisal (the character, not the real one) said in *Lawrence of Arabia* (the film, not the book).

One might even think the goal of the universe, if such exists, and I know evolutionary theory says it doesn't, but what if consciousness is both a precondition essential to the emergence of conscious forms of life and an emergent property? and what if the goal is to link up until everything is connected and aware of it and aware of itself aware of it and sees the links at every level, bottom to top and all the way back down? And what if that singular being, while thinking it has completed a task, happens to notice a knot in a thread in the tapestry of Everything, a snag, a little rip in the fabric, in the skein as

it were, and leans down and sees a wee tiny hole and then goes closer, getting down on its knees, and looks through that wee tiny hole?

What does it see, outside (as if outside/inside mean anything at that point)?

What if...

What if the higher consciousness represented by the singular being's way of saying or framing addresses the way we, a single rather primitive species on a planet just becoming aware of itself, a part of the whole but one with the arrogance of adolescence, when it thinks of ourselves/ourSelf/itself in our current lowly form, as if we are just our little self or selves and not part of the whole at all? Speaks to us, as it were? Speaks to itSelf/ourSelves, that is? Speaks to the primitive form or larval stage to which we might regress if we look through that wee tiny aperture and get the shock of our lives?

That universal self/Self, talking to itself... must look like me walking around the park, seeing this story as an image of the whole, talking it out to myself as I see and think and frame it, the way the companion in "Scout's Honor" talks to Scout who thinks he is what he thinks and nothing more. Higher bigger Self to smaller public self. Like when I preached for sixteen years, and I was a well-meaning Episcopal priest, whacky too in a shamanistic way as one must be to have one foot in the other world and one foot in this and know how to move back and forth, one to the other (job description: to be willing and able to go crazy on behalf of the congregation, then know how to come home), and I would remind congregations that the themes that recurred in my sermons were issues I had not finished working through, that the Self Who Knew, as it were, was preaching to the self that needs to keep learning (once it was worked through, the issues would no more surface than a discussion of how to tie our shoes, since once we master and pass beyond once-difficult

challenges, they disappear, going down down down).

Oh, about “apples.” A nod to the fruit eaten by Eve, as the story goes, that meant the end of innocence. But also a nod to a happy time when my oldest son Aaron and I opened his new present, an Apple 2 computer, one Christmas in Salt Lake City, Utah, thanks to beloved Adele, my aunt (she and my Uncle Buddy saved my psychic life), a gift to us all, and our lives changed forever... as I soon would see, playing *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* on that primitive Apple with my son, just as the world would be changed when it opened the Bigger Box called networked computing.

Species, Lost in Apple-eating Time

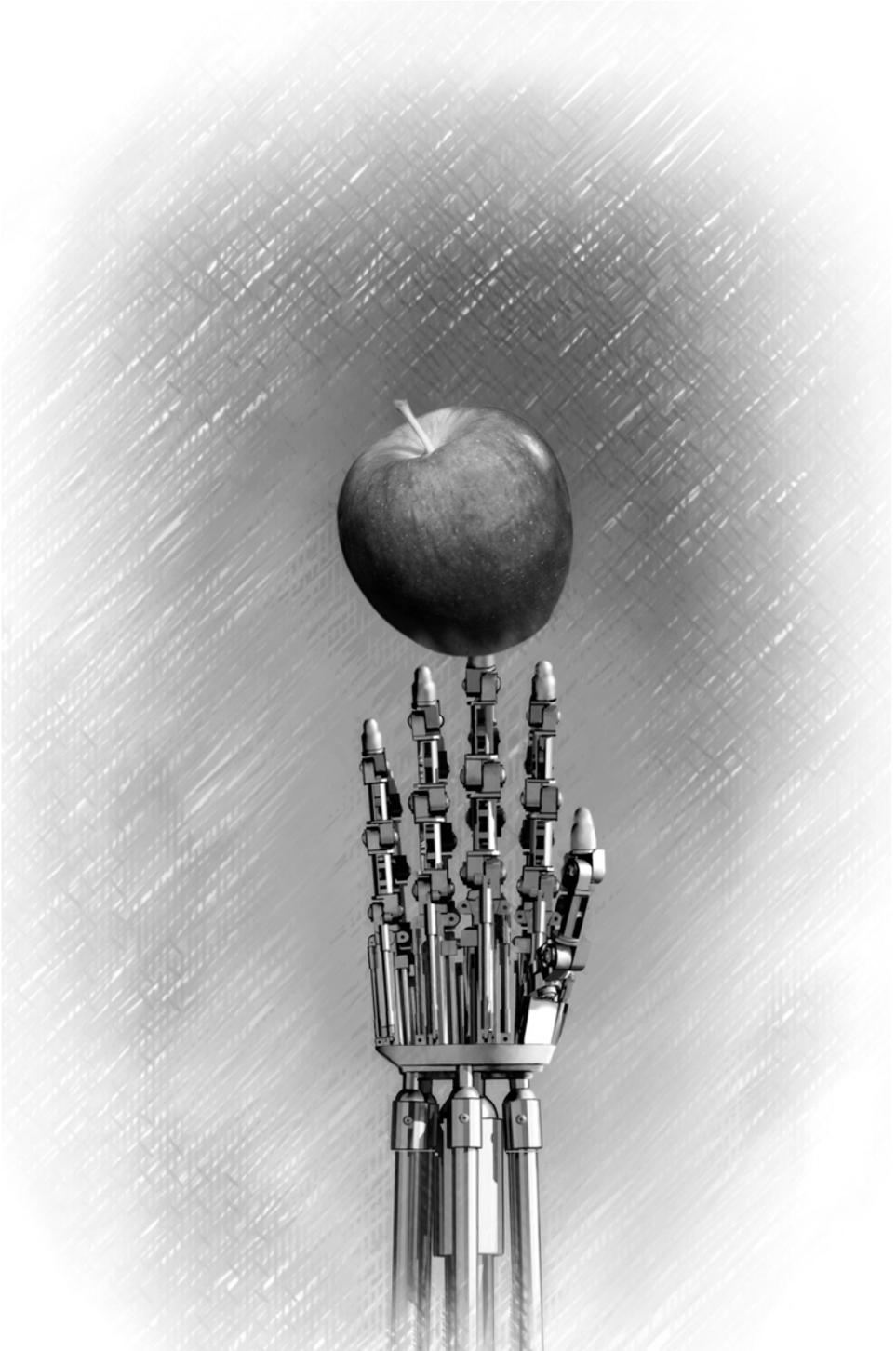
The moon was the first step down from our front porch.

We were so proud to navigate that top step, letting ourselves down carefully, knees scraping on the rough wood until we could stand up and see the world from a new perspective: the tops of the trees a little higher, the edge of the step against our legs like the ledge of a cliff.

It seems like a dream, that time when the planet mattered, when we were as gods. We were young then, just buds, full of the pride of life, our outward migration a cloud of bats pouring out of a cave at twilight. We called ourselves humanity or humankind, and we had the audacity to make up names for other species. Whales. Lions. Elephants. <laughter> We believed in our distinctions, dividing everything up so it could be conquered. We followed the contours of language into space as if what we described “out there” was independent of ourselves. Our words wrinkled and slashed into the spaces between the worlds and we came tumbling after.

Now we know better. Nothing is out there. Nothing at all.

Let me try to explain. Forgive my primitive images, please, and please forgive my archaic language. I am not trying to talk down to you. I am using metaphors preferred by children learning their first words because that’s what humankind is and does. The Froth overflows your tiny cup like bubbles on the lips of a nursing child. Of course we are not limited by Oursel(Itsself) to such a small container.



And yet we are. We are the smallest bubble on the corner of that baby's mouth. So drink, my precious child, my beloved child, drink all of your milk and you will grow big and wise and strong.

Out here, in the expanding space of (y)our outward migration, we encountered trillions of windows that open onto the universe. Even on our home planet, our small precious blue world, there were millions of perspectives. Yet we had the arrogance to think that the window through which we leaned, craning our necks like immigrants in a tenement to see past the laundry that hung between the buildings, was the only aperture that mattered.

We called everyone else an "alien," as the ancient Greeks called everybody barbarians. Even after Contact, when the Little Truth became obvious and coherent at last, when decades of periodic encounter with anomalous and intelligent beings had finally drip-dripdripped into a steady trickle and percolated through our defenses and denial died at last, even then we called them "aliens" instead of Wrzzzzarghx or Lem-Lem-Three-bang)! or HelllenWuline. And that was just the Tight Group from the few stars in our neighborhood. The Skein was the stuff of legend then. We gave it hundreds of names and celebrated them all in story and song. In our innocence, we spoke of "wormholes" as if beings of significant size could squeeze through them and blip blip into hyperspace. <chuckle> We felt ourselves Big then, bigger than anything else, which happens often just before the bubble pops. (Yes. Write that down, please, and refer back to it later.) When the down-a-thousand offspring of the HelllenWuline twice-twisted showed us how teleportation really happens, humanity died dead. Yet memory (as we called that wrinkling in the diaphanous fabric of the Skein) flows that we celebrated in the streets of thousands of cities on hundreds of planets, so excited were we all to be free of our local star-allegiance at last. The geodesic was so interlaced with cross talk that everyone became. The Skein

emerged in our consciousness like the grin of the Cheshire cat.

Now, when I say “we,” I mean the beings who had coalesced into and around our common purpose then, however dimly we glimpsed our reflected image. “We” were what we had made of ourselves, a Being(we) that made Accidental Humanity look like a small primitive tribe in a lost forest. So humanity – for all intents and purposes – was long gone and we were more. But we still hadn’t grasped the true nature of the Skein.

Teleportation turned us into toddlers coming down those front steps, ready to hop skip and a-jump around the all the way around the long way around the whole block.

But not alone. No, not alone. Once we had exchanged data with the down-a-thousand twice-twisted spliced pairs, with the *66^^^ (the six/six) and the Yombo-wh-!~~ from far beyond the clouds in our local groups of galaxies, we were no longer remotely human. (Do I repeat myself? Very well, I repeat myself). Humankind had vanished into the Strands of the Hundred-and-Twelve. Only the museum (a crease in the Skein like a memory) preserved molecular clusters of how it felt to think like primitive humanity, placing ourselves at the center of the universe, as happy as rabbits scampering in the grass and as dumb as a box of rocks. So use the museum to enter again into those primitive languages. When we do, we immediately feel the constraint of our childlike thinking binding us like wet rawhide wrapped around, shrinking in the sun. The cultures of Accidental Humankind had once been comfortably snug. Then they grew tight and then they became suffocating. Time to breathe. Time to be free. You would think we would have bolted for the opening door and leaped from the edge of the cliff, but humankind is a funny duck. Even on the edge of surrendering, we experienced the expansion of possibility as something to be resisted.

Humankind resisted it's own destiny, even as it arrived. As if to become more was in fact to become less.

It is no wonder then that traits like that were discarded and the attitudes of the Nebular Drift, as they were called, those thousands of trans-galactic cultures that had grown into a single Matrix, were integrated instead into the way we made ourselves make ourselves. The Hundred-and-Twelve was a single thread, humankind a recessive gene in the deep pool of the Matrix.

Once we had engaged for millennia in multiple replication and had manufactured the attributes we preferred, we were no longer at the mercy of molecules that had piled up

willy-nilly to create an interesting but pot-bound species. And along the way, you had better believe, now write this down! Yes, I mean it! This is important. Along the way, we

made plenty of mistakes. Now we can see they're what they(we) called funny then. They can still be observed in a simulation of a replication of a holographic set in the Skein that anyOne can access. Unhappy humanitads unable to laugh, horse-laughing humanitoids unable to think, chip-whipped hummans unable to dance. We did not know that laughing and thinking and dancing made humans human, then. The trick was getting the mix just right. And that, we discovered through trial-and-error <yes! spell it for me! Good!> meant a mix that was right for the Skein, not just a species or planet or galaxy. A mix that made the trans-Matrix a rich broth of diverse possibilities. We became adept at pan-galactic speciation only when we learned to think macro, manage multiple images of more than millions of stars swarming with warm sentience. We finally identified consciousness, intensionality, and extenuation as hallmarks of a mature being(people)-or:species and the necessary attributes of any viable hive.

Consciousness is a field of possibility, self-luminous, unabstracted, boundless. It is a way the wrinkles in a diaphanous fabric (as it were) invite self-definition. Our subjectivity is our field of identity, shaped by the Skein.

To review, then, my little ones: <I know how tired you are. Believe me(me)[me]{me}, I remember!> We gave species names. Thousands of cycles later we discerned a pattern of trans-galactic distribution and nested disintermediation and called it a void Warp. At last we called ourselves(=Self) the Skein and were ready to take that first tentative step off our front porch.

We had expanded plenty by then, into ourSelves, hollowing hundreds of inhabited galaxies, filling them with Nothing. We began to understand that there was neither out nor in, there was only the Skein becoming aware of itSelf. All of the names were arbitrary vocables, but even that simple fact was beyond the capacity of a human brain truly to grasp. I know, because I fed the primitives into the simulated human mind and the Skein belched. So even as the Skein continued to manifest itself at all levels, a remnant of humanity like an eddy, a backwater, on a single planet continued like the tip of a whorl of a swirling fractal to think one thing. The Skein, of course, knew many things, but knew too they were really One.

How could we-it, how could the Skein, manifest at every level? An excellent question! Because how we define the system depends, dear ones, on the level at which we choose to observe it. Everything is nested, connected. Yes. Messy and messless. Very good!

Well, my dearly beloveds, let us continue: The Skein was more than context, the Skein was/izz the content of whatever we had no longer happened to become. Now we became. Our languages fractured once and for all when we tried to name ourSelf in the Skein. Looking back at the nested levels of linguistic evolution, we can see how we were spoken by our primitive language, all unconscious

that we were carried along for the long ride outward, oblivious to how language was made. Then we learned how to make progeny that made language that made progeny that made language and so on and so on, down-a-thousand-thousand. Accidental Humanity had to vanish, so do not grieve for what is only never lost <twinkle>. We learned how to extend ourselves until we were singular, flexing inside ourselves(ourSelf), our awareness nearly identical to the molecular enterprise we had chosen to become. When we look back or across the translucent folds of the Skein or – as some say – when we look into the Emptiness and see what we created out of Nothing ... no wonder the new skin/Skein growing all the while under the old was experienced as something new, when in fact it was always the Skein, a field of subjectivity within which we had always been woven, always dimensioned. Yet even then, our arrogance persisted, because the Skein was aware of itself as a journey moving outward at increasing speeds, rather than a spiral closing in on itself.

The more matter was ingested and became the frame of the evolving Skein, the less able the Skein became of saying anything at all. The Skein fell into Mute, when the edges of the known universe were discerned not in some simulation but as the finite-but-unbounded possibility of Skein itself. There was, after all, nothing more to say; language no longer served a useful purpose. The numbers of differentiated apertures through which the Skein experienced itself had advanced to something like 2 to the 32nd power, but every single one <laughter> was Skein and aware of itself as Skein. Except the ones that weren't, but they were Skein too. <Remember yourselves! Remember that planet!> The configuration of energy and information that had animated itself so many millions of eons ago had reached the near-term goal of expansion. As we understood or defined it, of course.

We knew by then that we had chosen only one way to expand,

filling spacetime co-extensible with our awareness, we knew there had been millions of other possibilities, each a perfectly good way of being the Skein. But then we arrived at the edge of the front porch for the first time and slipped going down and landed, whapht! on our ass on the second step. We hadn't seen it coming but (obviously) in retrospect, it was inevitable.

What the Skein boldly called the Known Universe was in fact merely a bubble of Froth that Second Contact dimensioned some/what so immense that we had to regress, we were so confounded by the Bigger Truth of it all, so aghast at the muchness of it, the wildness of it, the sizes and sizes! We were like a child(Children) called suddenly (prematurely? No, I did not say that) to advance to a level of comprehension and self-responsibility unimaginable to our little brain. So we stuck our thumb in our mouth and began babbling. Yes, the Skein started speaking again, just before it disappeared.

We know now that the Skein had no choice, and of course, what I call "speaking" resembles primitive utterable tongues as an exploding galaxy resembles the darkness of a limestone cave in one of your green hills. The Skein needed to differentiate itself in order to extend itself through the aperture that disclosed new possibilities that the Skein had been unable to imagine in its finite-but-unboundedness. Now, of course, we just call it "reality." Then, it blew the mind – literally – of the Skein. Mind disappeared, and the Skein experienced itself as a field of consciousness, unabstracted, self-luminous, boundless. More important, the Skein saw that it too was merely an emergent reality, a Self as illusory as that which humanity had called ourSelf/itSelf.

It had to happen. We know, we know it did. But forgive us please a wispy remnant of wistful feeling. The way the Skein dreamed was childlike. The Skein planned Little, while thinking it was thinking

Big. Now we understand <smile> pause. <smile> We met ourselves in the Froth like a child with paper and pencil doing sums while the Froth was more like oh, lets say a Supercomputer(s), a dimensionless web of quantum computers that networked forever, indistinguishable from its means. The Froth was like an old Apple under a tree on a morning of giving/receiving gifts. Or perhaps an entire planet under a heaventree of stars wrapped in the fabric of spacetime. Oh, more. More. The Skein reached its limit because it experienced the Next Step as limitlessness, while the Skein had built itself to manage only finite-but-unboundedness. However many possibilities we had included in our/its schema, the fact that they could be numbered however numberless the numbers was simply a careless mistake.

Back to the drawing board, boys and girls. Trial-and-error means we make mistakes. Never forget. The Skein over-reached itself through the aperture into the Froth and became the Asymmetric Foam that now is flowing with growing confidence in its capacity to enhance the possibilities that glow with nascent mentation on the outer inner edges of the Froth. We are the emptiness of the Froth. Our destiny has been to become Nothing. We understand at last (we say with downcast eyes and chastened demeanor, knowing we understand nothing, nothing at all, knowing that we are like children standing on our front porch, looking down at our skinned knees and the first step). The Froth looks to humankind in its planetary crib like a hydra-headed fractal, the Skein like a bubble in the Froth. We believe the Froth Knows Whereof it Speaks, while the Skein, bless its heart, has outgrown its worn yellow one-piece sleeper. It is time for the Skein to buy itself a new suit.

And die to being the Skein forever. Yet within the Froth what was the Skein meets and embraces what had been ... even Our/its language breaks, the billion Skein-like non-Skeins smiling inside outside at the sheer impossibility of saying anything at all. We are the

Froth and the Froth is evolving toward the Second Mute. But try. <Why> because humankind tries. Humankind tiny but laughs and thinks and dances the Froth. Small and so adorable, humbled now, humankind on its wee planet. Tip of a swirl. A swirl in a whorl of a spiral.

Try. Try again.

<sigh> <smile>

The Froth however dimples, dimples again and gimbles, all mimsy as the Skein, laughing and dancing, ola! Loa! High! High! Leaps over the fire to become twice blasted twice undone.