



THE TABULA PROJECT

Selected Writings

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Foreword

When I began work on The Tabula Project 30 years ago my mind was deeply troubled, so much so that I believed that there must be something wrong with me. My days were often spent in a state of anxiety and confusion, and with an overwhelming sense of disconnect. Nothing made sense. Life seemed to be devoid of meaning or purpose.

When I looked around me, I recognised similar symptoms of mental distress in others. This confusion and distress seemed to affect society at large.

I came to the realisation that part of the turmoil I was experiencing stemmed directly from the way I was thinking. Not just *what* I was thinking, but *how* I was thinking. In short, the whole framework underpinning my thought processes. I imagined that there might be certain dysfunctional patterns of thought which affected us all.

This was when I began my first attempts to paint thought. I had the idea that if I could represent visually the way we think – thoughts in their most abstract sense – this would afford us a new perspective on the mind, which would eventually enable us to improve how we think. I began to envisage paintings which could be useful as aides to thinking in a wide variety of settings: offices, universities, boardrooms, research laboratories. Basically, anywhere where creative 'out of the box' type thinking could be useful.

It quickly became apparent, however, that until I could get rid of all the noise in my head, I would be unable to make any real progress.

Then one day, seemingly out of nowhere, the phrase *tabula rasa* came to me. This was my first big clue. I remembered the phrase from school. I consulted my Roget's Thesaurus, and it equated the phrase with "clean slate". Then I remembered how I had once heard it said that a baby's mind was like a *tabula rasa* (see Page 26). That was it! I needed first to clear my mind of thought. To paint the mind at rest, to define the landscape upon which thought could build. Only then would I be able to work towards building thought.

Thus I began in 1994 painting different states of consciousness, thought and consciousness without thought. The paintings led me onto an extensive research exercise as I explored how these subjects had been examined from the perspective of different disciplines.

My first port of call was general psychology, then neuroscience, cognitive psychology and psychotherapy. My field of research gradually widened to include physics, philosophy, spirituality, the new sciences, sociology and anthropology. I found particular visual resonance with findings from quantum physics, chaos and the complexity sciences, and string theory.

I also realised that in order to paint consciousness, with or without thought, I needed to understand the thinker, the self. This inevitably led me to the big questions: who we are, why we are here, where we are going?

Not only did these ideas feed directly into the paintings, but they led me onto a series of propositions about what it is to be human and to develop the idea that there are certain generic patterns of thought. I became interested in exploring groups: how to use the potential of groups to achieve breakthroughs and, conversely, how to avoid the worst excesses of groupthink.

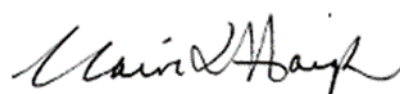
The project corresponded to a personal journey. Like everyone I have my own story, but what has always interested me is where lessons from that story might be of general use. One key lesson is about using the mind as opposed to being used by it. It is the mind disconnected from the present that can take one away from the authentic self and hijack one's very existence.

On a personal level the need to be able to trust my own heart and mind has been of paramount importance. Without that trust there can be no foundation. But on a wider level the whole impetus has been to begin working towards a new framework for thought. I kept a constant record of the search for insights, formulae and generic patterns to facilitate a higher level of awareness.

This collection of writings includes some personal reflections as the ideas developed. The development of the paintings and how they relate to different states of consciousness and thought is described in [The Tabula Project: A New Perspective on the Mind](#). A summary of the research findings can be read in [The Tabula Project: Towards an Evolution of Thought](#).

A clear goal at the outset of The Tabula Project was the sanctity of truth. This imperative has come into sharp focus in recent times with the rise in populist leaders and, in a phenomenon described as 'post-truth', where judgements are increasingly based on emotions and beliefs rather than facts. A current topic of debate is the degree of existential risk posed by artificial intelligence. We are witnessing an erosion of our capacity to think at a very time when new threats are emerging that have the potential to wipe us out.

The Tabula Project is partly descriptive and partly prescriptive. I am currently applying the key findings and conclusions to the challenge of tackling the climate crisis through my work at [Greener Vision](#), an environmental not-for-profit group. Anthropogenic climate change is not the only peril we face but it is arguably our greatest existential threat.



Claire Haigh
27th September 2023

Metamorphosis



Easing the Burden of Consciousness, 1993

PART I

Arms and legs rest peacefully,
deadened by a long sleep,
but the skin now tingles with new delight.

I gaze in awe,
as I am gently covered by a soft and glistening blanket.
Peering closer, I marvel at its intricacy.
Hundreds and thousands of tiny segments
all shining like stars and shimmering as one.

Effortlessly I succumb,

until in cold dead panic
I detect the unmistakable glow of worms.
Tender caress becomes piercing pain as
countless creatures burrow deeper inside.

I choke in horror and try to resist,
but leaden limbs won't respond.
I open my lips but no scream can be found.
Maggots chew forward,
multiplying in my mouth
filling my throat.

Desperate eyes search for help
but find only a few rays of light
as the thick film descends here too.

In my mind's eye they are crawling forward
edging into the centre.
But as they start to consume my consciousness
I am once more overwhelmed by their splendour.
Gladly I give them what I no longer need,
and as they relieve me of the burden
I melt into their radiance.

PART II

I am enveloped by a grainy substance.
Pressing against it,
I wriggle through in sideways thrusts.
I discover harsh grit and brittle soil
which scratch and tear and burn my skin.

At last I happen upon a cool moisture
which soothes and seduces and draws me inside
and deeper I slide into a dark recess.
But craving for light forces me back.
I struggle through clawing dryness until hard clumps fall away
and my skin can bask in the warm light of day.

This pleasure is suddenly and brutally terminated
by a fierce and slicing pain.
I twist and writhe in agony
until my body has completely disintegrated.

No more pain now.
I am flying through the air with a flock of birds.
We are heading for the sky.

PART III

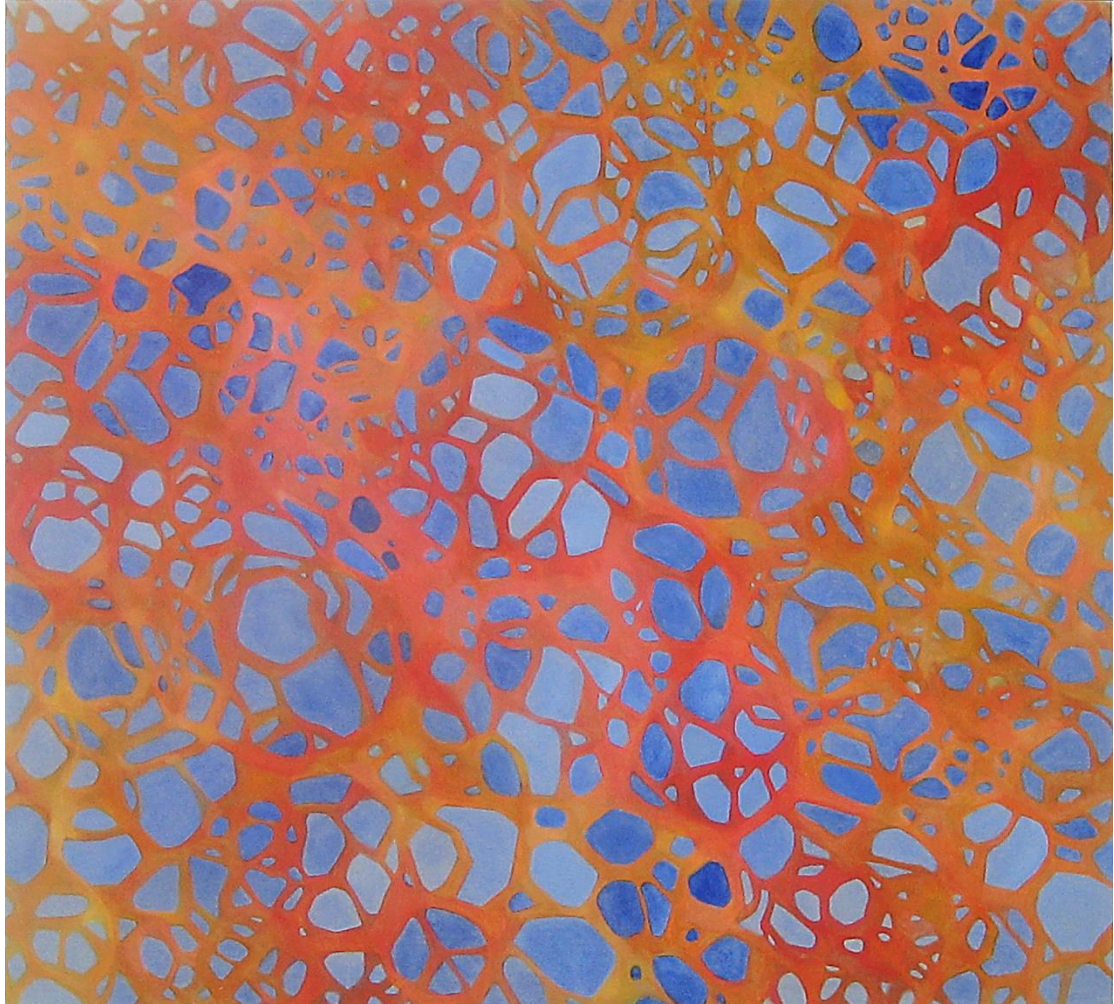
We are seeking what lies in the blue beyond.
The cold ascent numbs our wings,
but soft clouds beckon us higher.

As we arrive,
we become entangled in an intricate white web.
Duplicitous clouds
once so pure and enticing are now
bent on our destruction.

Through thickening fog we catch a glimpse of blue,
but trapped in white fury
we are tossed from side to side
until anger bursts though in electric rage
and blazes out our hearts.

New light seeps through thick mist.
Clouds melt away revealing a sea of blue
and we know we are going home.

Evolve to Survive



Melting in the glare, 1994

PART I

Wrenched out of sleep
by the blistering heat
I sit up.
Scorching rays sting my skin
while eyes melting in the glare search for a sign
but I'm still stranded in sand and surrounded by sea.
Long hours have stretched my hunger over days.
I'm sickened by the sweet smell of salt

and the vile taste of sea
on my parched lips.
Drought has drained my throat
And in me a giant crater groans
As life shrinks further inside.

Searching for strength
I look up:
Three vultures are circling silently above me.

My heart screams in horror.

Shaking uncontrollably
My right hand dives into my mouth.

My jaw works hard
Against crippling pain
Until hunger and thirst are satisfied.

PART II

The taste of survival has exploded the pain
And two days later I continue with my right arm.
Having let go of any slightly nauseous feelings
I can now appreciate that I taste quite nice.

Moving onto my legs
I discover to my joy
That my neck has grown longer,
Enabling me to reach those areas
Once quite out of bounds
(I can't resist a chuckle or two!)
Moreover, sharper teeth facilitate beyond measure
Work on the bone and those extra strong tendons.

On completing my legs I feel bloated and exhausted
So I pause for a rest.

With my one remaining hand I run my fingers through the sand
Looking for colours and shapes.
But my skin detects nothing
And all I can see is a dull yellow haze.

I strain my ears for the sound of the waves

But hear only a faint buzz.
All I can perceive is the smell of my flesh.
Feeling faint I start on my left hand
When it occurs to me that I will shortly run out of fresh food:
I must now pace myself.
But the urge becomes uncontrollable.
My resistance weakens
until half conscious and drenched from the struggle
I reach for my left arm.
A light flickers briefly in my eyes
As my teeth sink deep into flesh and bone.

PART III

Some time must have passed.
I cannot remember finishing my arm
But that awful gnawing hunger is upon me once more.
I dream of the sweet taste of living flesh
And my heart aches as I realise all I have left.

What do I have left?
I can no longer perceive anything.

If I concentrate hard enough,
I can see my mother smiling at me in the garden.
She is watering the tubs
with that rusty green can
that leaks as it pours.
I walk over to her and put my hand on her arm.
Her face becomes sad, she turns and walks away.

"Where are you going?" I cry.
She looks back, tears of anguish now drowning her face
And utters something in a barely audible whisper.

What's the matter with her?
But now I am distracted by a delicious smell of freshly ground coffee.
Perhaps I am near a coffee shop?
I look around me and see that I am standing outside Importers
on Guildford High Street.

My reflection in the window reveals
Amongst other things
A brightly coloured scarf and red velvet hat.
It must be cold.
I wonder whether Christmas is close?

What day is it today?
What year is this?
I seem to remember it being very hot recently
And I was dying of thirst.
I can't for the life of me remember when or where
But I know that I was very thirsty
And hungry too.

Wash & Go

Spring 1997

I'm on an internal wheel of torment, spinning round and round in the washing machine but not getting clean. A black garment has run. Won't someone remove it and put me through a hot wash? I want to come out bright and white and be delivered safely into the dryer. The black garment can be flung on the floor and left to rot. Should we then shred it or just walk away? They tell me living well is the best revenge. But no-one appears and as the wheel goes into top spin, I hang motionless in clouds of smoke waiting for something to change.

They all think I am mad. I hate that. I know I'm not but the harder I try to convince them the crazier I seem. They don't realise the lengths to which I've needed to go to keep myself from really losing it. I can go wherever I want. I can vanish at a second's notice. But how can I expect them to understand? There was a map once with detailed instructions for anyone interested in following me, I would gladly have copies made but I lost the blueprint some time ago. Since then, my mind has been buckling under the strain of its own creation – a whole separate mind of its own.

It was company at first, but Mind II has become a liability. It races on at the speed of light and I miss my own thoughts. They wiz by scattering a trail of empty words. And words are unreliable. You try to pin down the truth with a word, but it doesn't stay there, it slides off. Most words can't be trusted, but you do need some. Digging deep into the valley of lies you can find fossil remains of true words, but it's not easy and great care must be taken.

I peer into memories of feelings locked away in a perspex museum case. Sometimes, almost imperceptibly, they move. Can fossils come to life? Or are they really compact shit, imprisoning true feelings now inaccessible and held down by cigarette smoke? There are some black rocks centuries old dying to be released. But how? Coal-mining in the belly is a hazardous exercise. I dig into some shit so tightly compressed it has become diamond. Are diamonds forever? We hope not. They are exceptionally uncomfortable, bruising and tearing the gut. The only hope is for diamonds to become ice and melt into cold water. Water moves things along.

But in all this I know I am skating round the edges, afraid to go into the middle of the lake because it might crack. They say it is safe to walk, that everything is frozen, but I know differently, and a rescue operation will be on the cards. Later at sea I am stranded on a life raft parched for thirst. I could drink my

way out of this, there is a limitless supply, but saltwater gives only temporary relief and then increases my thirst until I am burning alive.

The wash has gone full cycle, and guess what? Some kind soul has removed the black garment! It is lying limp and lifeless in a crumpled heap on the floor. I'm off-white, not perfect, but at least I need have no more association with that intruder. It could be a pair of trousers or a skirt, but I won't look. There are some things I don't need to know.

The rest of me is in the dryer. I'm doing my best to get back to normal, but it appears that I am torn in places. The black garment must have had a sharp edge that wasn't apparent to the naked eye. Coming through the drying out process I am hot, full of static electricity and badly shredded. More damage has been done than I realised.

I have some mending to do but first I must find a needle. How many needles went into my haystack? Everyone has at least one. Finding it doesn't automatically mean you can sew. Not everyone has the time. And of course, there are those who don't need to learn. They are what we call naturals. I'm not one of them. I found my needle, but I discovered it was bent.

Before me I have reams of beautiful material, enough for a whole new wardrobe with threads in every colour of the rainbow and a vicious pair of bright silver scissors. Why can't I find a decent needle? I am not averse to hard work, I wanted to do it all by hand. I was given a sewing machine once, but I never read the manual. I chucked it out with the packaging. I bitterly regret that now. I've fumbled through many bins looking for the packet. I found packets and instructions for other things, but they were tea-stained and covered in cigarette ash and wouldn't have helped anyway.

Alongside me are rows and rows of state-of-the-art sewing machines turning out exquisite garments. My material is all piled up in front of me and if I don't do something about it soon it will be used by someone else.

So I sit here in quiet panic. My clothes are un-wearable, and I don't know how to mend them or make any new ones. To make matters worse, just now, when my back was turned, that insidious black crumpled garment crept in from the left side and is now on top of my old clothes. I thought I had got rid of it. I had built a solid fence around myself to keep it out, but it was too high and in the end my fortress collapsed under its own weight. The foundations weren't deep enough. I needed to work on the part that exists beneath ground level, before I can be seen.

I must move from this spot now; the sun is too hot and I must find some shade elsewhere before I burn. They say it might rain later – what a relief for the sky holding all that in.

A Problem has a Life of its Own

Autumn 2000

My ideas have developed a little further. I believe that certain problems develop a life of their own, an inbuilt mechanism to keep the 'brain owner' guessing. A problem has a personality, it becomes a separate entity within the brain, inside the brain but separate and self-contained. The trick is to absorb it into the rest of the functioning element.

A problem, once it has taken root and especially if it is important to the brain owner, has the capacity to do a lot of damage. It can if not tended to correctly upset the overall balance and harmony in the brain. Most people usually have one or two or even several preoccupations (stubborn problems) which crop up regularly until they are extinguished only to be replaced by others. Usually, it is the same kind of pattern (faulty wiring) surfacing in different guises.

Definition of a stubborn problem: Any mental preoccupation which causes the brain owner to direct energy and attention to it. It doesn't have to be a serious personal problem, just anything that distracts the mind from the here and now. The problem develops a life of its own, and then our greatest assets can become our greatest liabilities if we do not use them correctly.

The brain needs to know itself. If I use analytical thought, I will be fighting a losing battle. Because I will be using the problem strategy to understand the very thing I am trying to resolve. This is why I am committed to searching for insights outside problem strategy thinking, such as creative outlets.

It would be really something else to be able to address all daily problems from a different perspective, one that uses the whole person not just the limited rational brain. To not even attempt to fit into the rational mode, and yet absorb it – to continually absorb and transcend it. To live in a state of heightened awareness, where reactions to situations, people, places and things occur at a greater intuitive level.

Solutions are needed. Very often answers come from unexpected sources (coincidences, chance, fluke). Understanding is a process of recognition. The brain doesn't invent anything, but simply recognises what is obvious. And there are so many layers of obvious. Sometimes fate prompts the brain.

Imagine we are all linked into the cosmos and our surroundings, not separate. Our "surroundings" have a will just like us, or maybe it's all the same will in the end, and our surroundings literally respond to our thoughts. The trick is to become one with your surroundings, to go with the flow at a deeper level.

The Mirror

Winter 2000

Hours, days, weeks, months, years: an eternity of self-reflection, self-analysis, self-criticism, self-obsession, self-destruction, self-annihilation, self-loathing, leading to self-malaise, malaise, depression, despair followed by elation, followed by confusion, followed by malaise, depression and despair.

And so today I choose a different path.

I say farewell to the mirror, the looking glass that shines back an image I can no longer see, I no longer wish to see. I look away. My eyes search for a new subject. Still the poisoned embers smolder in my mind, in the dark corners of my mind. I shine a bright light on them. I don't like what I see and so I look away. I just look away.

Looking outwards now the search light scans the ocean depths and beyond. We stand united and wait. This is unfamiliar but not uncomfortable. Familiar is no longer comfortable because today we are searching for something new.

There is one golden rule, just one rule, only one rule, and if we obey this one rule we will be free to explore, free, completely free to discover what we need to discover. Just one rule:

Look out, look ahead, look up – don't look back!

Where is back? What do we mean by back?

Back is the back room, the filing system, what we already know, catalogue of where we have already been, places we have already seen, interpretations we already know, previous versions of ourselves, imprints in the vast sands of time.

Imprints in those vast sands of time of where we have been, this journey we have trodden, the path we have made, are no longer valid. We turn around and see the sea wash our footprints away. We are standing still now.

But standing still is exhausting. Standing still, resisting the way forward or backward. Being still. Being.

Natural has become unnatural.

But here is the point. Nothing can be achieved by looking at our problem. Our problem is always a memory. And this is the blinding, awe inspiring, life shattering truth. There never really is a problem, only a perception of one.

We need and want solutions. The answer is simple. ONLY CREATE.

The First Rule

New Year 2001

The first rule is to discard everything once you have familiarized yourself with it. This applies to the entire range of inputs possible: people, places, situations, things, ideas, works of art etc. The list goes on. The absolute golden rule is that everything is relevant for the length of time it takes for the brain to comprehend it – after which time it must be discarded immediately. The length of time needed is quite a variable piece of string and depends on the functioning ability of the brain and the complexity of the data in question.

There is a good deal to say about the functioning ability of the brain, but we need first to look at information, and the historical relationship between the brain and that information. In many ways the brain and the information it stores as memory have become opposite sides of the same coin. They have a theoretical existence apart, but in practice they have become so intricately and inextricably entwined as to have become almost inseparable. As we shall see later, what has hitherto been, and in certain cases remains, a perfectly valuable symbiosis has also become onerous, limiting and ultimately dangerous.

The brain has become accustomed to relying on the data it absorbs and processes to teach it how to absorb and process new data. Patterns have been memorized and the brain has instinctively learnt how to impose these onto new situations in order to reach a rapid understanding of that situation. In one sense this has served us well and has brought about a massive explosion of stuff. But the accumulation of vast quantities of data and interpretations of that data has been at the expense of depth of understanding and quality of interpretation.

In short, we have learnt progressively parrot fashion how to be intelligent by memorizing what we learn and how we learn it so we can impose it onto our next subject. We have trained our brains to function automatically, like computers, irrespective of the value of the data we have been processing. We have been unable in fact to discriminate on grounds of value. We are so dependent on past data the functioning of our brain depends on the amount we can remember.

This state of affairs is completely back to front. We have collected data instead of processing and fully understanding it. The patterns we have learnt serve in a superficial way to predict likely outcomes or to explain certain factors. 99 times out of 10 this serves to get us by, and since there are

apparently more immediately urgent tasks to deal with than the quest for ultimate truth this usually does suffice and we move onto the next thing.

What we fail to realize in all of this shortcutting is that we burden our brains with trying to carry information which they ultimately simply don't need. The way out of this messy bog is to store nothing and to turn the entire brain over to functioning, to mental gymnastics, to all kinds of acrobatics.

I am racing ahead, but this is important. The vital leap of faith that needs to be made is that one can erase all information quite easily from one's mind when one realizes that all information exists everywhere at all times and is instantly retrievable so long as one's mind is tuned to receive. A few questions may be necessary as prompts, and of course asking the right questions is absolutely essential, but assuming one has trained one's mind to ask those questions then the answer follows as sure as night follows day.

Although to all practical purposes we have merged the boundaries between our brains and the information we think they carry, such that they appear at times to be the same thing, they are absolutely not the same thing, and even more crucially information does not exist in the brain any more than in a carrot – equally as much as in a carrot as in a brain or anywhere else...

We have become confused by memory which is not the same as information. The brain has the capacity for experiencing vast memory, but this actually has nothing whatsoever to do with information and it is terribly misleading to equate the two. Information just is.

I hear you gasping in horror at my assertions and I don't blame you at all! The idea that all information is "out there" and instantly retrievable sounds preposterous. History lessons, or indeed any conventional lessons, become surplus to requirements. We could all just hang around like cows gazing in a meadow....

We have been trained to believe that we can only know what has passed through our conscious minds, in short what we have actually learnt. We cannot possibly have access to information beyond our experience.

This is absolutely not the case. To recap: we have depended too heavily on the immediate details of what we know and on the patterns they form, without understanding the true meaning. We need to get onto the next level.

When we get our brains to function the right way we don't need to carry anything, any memory at all, we don't even necessarily need to know any of it. We are on the next level. When our brains are functioning the right way, the way they have the capacity to function, we live completely in the moment. We understand that memory is just about personality, attachment to people, places, things and who we think we are.

The marvelous truth is that all information, including survival techniques and anything we could possibly need, is available at all times. Moving one step further we then find that we do not even need to have directly seen or been in a situation to know it.

Leap of faith 1: There is no need to remember a situation, person, place or thing. It needs only to pass through the brain and be fully comprehended once.

Leap of faith 2: There is no need to even see at first hand or experience a situation, person, place or thing to know it

All energy needs to be redirected into the brain itself. Telepathy is a symptom of it all going on in space, of all information existing in space. The brain is part of that space. It is all about perspective and vantage points. Look at your brain in operation from another point of view...

All memory is connected to the brain/body. It is fairly useless ultimately and potentially very destructive. People labor under the misguided notion that if they store it all up it will come in useful, because to a degree it has, but what they don't realize is what they leave out in the process, what they fail to understand is that they are trading in a pass to infinite light for an electric light bulb.

Of course, this is how we are taught at school and university, and to be fair this kind of memory based thinking has its uses. It may not be possible or even desirable for many people to deviate now from the path.

There are people, however, and they are in places where you would least expect to find them, for whom memory based thinking no longer works. It is essential that these people wake up to the reality facing them.

In varying degrees we have all departed at some point from memory based thinking, but to truly make the leap is at once ridiculously easy and nearly impossible.

Back to memory – all it amounts to is where the individual has developed a habit of recalling periodically certain data, and that data becomes part of who they think they are.

Most of us are trapped by what we think we know. We believe that we can only know what our direct experience has shown us, what has been revealed to us through our senses.

I am advocating a leap outside of that. A completely new world opens up when one realizes that there is absolutely no limit to what one can know once there is the realization that everything is accessible. It is simply a question of being open to it.

We need a new framework for understanding. It seems appropriate now to say a few words about truth. What is truth? This can be a very emotive subject. For some truth is the ultimate goal - the search for an objective, absolute, fundamental truth.

This search needs to be looked at from the point of view of the thinker. For ultimate truth to exist there needs to be a consciousness capable of comprehending it.

Some have historically viewed truth as i) a subjective notion, idea, interpretation; or (for the religious) ii) something only God has access to.

This is absolutely false. It has been a cop out to view it that way, but understandable because the idea of any mind being able to comprehend in all its complexities ultimate truth has been seen as just too daunting, indeed impossible. The difficulty stems from the wrong turning we all took. I wouldn't say wrong turning so much as cul-de-sac. Defeatism has set in.

So to get back to the main thread: all knowledge is everywhere. Our bodies are simply vehicles on loan to us for the duration of our life. To become attached to the body is missing the point. The real game is elsewhere, and many things fall away when one realizes that.

Eternal contradiction? The difficulty is in reconciling the fact that the body has a life of its own and the mind has the capacity to believe whatever it chooses. The illusion of hegemony and freedom, and the attachment to other people, places and things can be extremely seductive, and it is perfectly possible to live one's entire existence believing that these are the ultimate things to strive for. The more attached one becomes to these things the harder it becomes to let go of them and the more entrenched one becomes in the limitations of one's physical existence. And the body does have limits.

Really the body is not that important. Maybe it could live forever if the mind was tuned differently, but if the mind were tuned differently, maybe the body would have been replaced by something else.

Letting go of attachments to all these material things is extremely difficult and can for many only even be contemplated when such things fail to deliver. For many it may be necessary to be at a point of ultimate destruction before alternatives can be contemplated. Even then the enormity of the task becomes prohibitively difficult, and the easier option is to return to one's former mindset once the crisis passes....

Awareness

August 2002

Rows of polished benches, and a beautiful peace – this is better than silence which can feel too hard and oppressive. I wonder what they are all doing. A couple are whispering over by the Psychology section. It's far enough away not to be disturbing me, just adds to the rustle of paper, occasional cough or sound of chair moving along the parquet floor.

Lynne will be at her office by now, and I have the whole day to myself. She was concerned that I wouldn't have enough to do and has given me a list of sights to see, things to do, places to go. People rarely get the way I just like to drift...

I love what I call the 'negative space', the bits in between life, or what we commonly call life. I learnt this concept at school in an art class. The teacher was trying to show us how the background was as important as the foreground in a picture. I remember consciously holding on to what seemed like a nugget, a precious stone not to lose. It has remained in my pocket ever since, a reference point which my hand instinctively picks up when I find I am confronted by the paradoxes of life.

So here, 'killing time' in Los Angeles library, is where I find the opportunity to perceive my life through the right lens. Most of life outside the negative space is upside down. Opportunities to stop and question present very rarely in the foreground of our existence. It is a symptom of this upside-down nature of perception that for many only events such as funerals afford them the time, and indeed permission, to ask "What's it all about?"

How crazy is that? Only when a loved one dies that we ask ourselves what surely has to be the most important question there is. Why are we here? It is all about perception – and the framework, the filter through which everything is viewed.

It seems to me to be patently absurd that we spend so much of our lives attempting to find meaning in the things we do without questioning further back to the whole point of doing anything in the first place.

If we knew why we were here it would make a massive difference to how we live our lives. The purpose is in fact the all-defining criteria, the yard stick by which to live, not a casual optional add-on.

Looking around me here today I don't presume to know what goes on in the minds of these silent companions. I am guessing that for the majority this is

positive space. The young woman three seats down on the opposite side of the bench might be studying for medical exams. The books tower around her reaching almost up to the green reading light. Surrounded by texts on anatomy, ambushed even, she has not even once lifted her head. No killing time for her! I don't think she has noticed me.

Researching for a project, a quiet space to write some letters. Maybe there are others who like me came here with no ostensible purpose, just to reflect on the meaning of life.

I ask these questions at every available gap in my life – waiting for a bus, sitting in a doctor's surgery.

Just because the answers aren't forthcoming, doesn't mean the questions aren't valid, crucial even, like the foundations to a house. Trying to live a meaningful life without addressing these questions is like trying to bake a cake without a tin.

Take for example the geology section right in front of me and imagine the paths trodden there over and over...

Looking at the rows and rows of books in this library I wonder how many books there are. I wonder how many other libraries there are just like this, and if you add them all up how far they would reach. Would they take us out of this universe into another?

Does Awareness exist in a library? You'd think so, but don't bank on it. Perhaps she exists no more or less in a library as God exists no more or less in a church.

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Wind back to the original impulse and what do you find? A question. What was the question? It had something to do with why we are here, what we are doing, where we are heading. Difficult questions to answer are not encouraged, not discouraged just not encouraged because there are always more pressing questions each day or should I say more immediate.

In truth, some of those immediate questions can be completely satisfactorily answered with the immediate answers they receive. Well they do on one level, but if we are alluding to larger meaning they are limited. Limited to the here and now rather than everywhere and forever.

Why is everywhere and forever important? What is everywhere and forever? Everywhere and forever is a state of mind, a way of being, of seeing, of understanding.

What is it then that blocks it? Before I can answer that I need to explain more clearly what it is. It is being focused – in focus – completely in the here and now. When you are completely in the here and now you are everywhere and forever. Don't ask me to explain why just trust me.

So once you are completely in the here and now you have access to everywhere and forever. You are plugged in. And that really is all I want to say about that. Other people, a countless number of other people, could say much more, and much better than I, about God, being connected to the spirit of the universe and all that, I don't feel like coming out with a pile of clichés.

Awareness though is vital if one wants to proceed. And awareness may indeed lead one along familiar paths for a while. These paths must in some way be trodden again and again and again if one wants to extend the reach. And it's never easy. Finding those paths that already exist is a challenge in itself.

Awareness when it comes demands 100% of everything. It is an exacting guide. Awareness carries the map, the telescope, the compass, without which one can only flounder around in the dark.

Awareness knows what she wants to show you and won't be bullied by you and told what to say, or even what to talk about. She chooses the subject. She is in control. You must listen. Trust her. She does know more than you. At least now. Maybe later things will be different. But right now, just trust her.

Tabula Rasa

Spring 2003

I am more convinced than ever that there is a direct correlation between my ability to paint the Tabula Rasa and Forms of Thought paintings and my mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.

I originally conceived of this project as a means to improving how we think. I believed that it would be possible to convey on a 2-D surface the way the mind processes and generates information and that in preparation for this I needed first to define the mind at rest.

Tabula Rasa is all about creating no patterns, no symmetry, nothing that the eye can latch onto – but alive, organic and breathing: consciousness at rest. This would lay the foundations for building thought, or rather defining the landscape upon which thought could grow.

This project has been a long time in incubation. I am in a passive role here I can only allow the work to guide me. I will not build thought; I will only allow thought to build.

I don't want to speculate too much at this stage about what the work means or how to apply it to practical living. It would be wholly wrong to heap that kind of baggage on it. I can only observe. It feels premature to go further down the path of practical application, it may never feel right, but I will allow myself to observe the effect that the subject has on the object and vice-versa.

I put Tabula Rasa on hold seven years ago until such time as I was physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually strong enough to continue with it. I did this partly because the work itself is extremely demanding, but more importantly because I needed to experience the whole essence of what I was trying to "convey" – or create – first.

But it is not all one way. Personal healing is essential but the work itself takes me further. And if I cast my mind back to the beginning, I suspect that the whole process of painting Tabula Rasa was a major contributory factor to my breakdown of seven years ago. My spiritual well-being was in such stark contrast to the objective of the project that as I progressed artistically the dissonance became intolerable.

It became clear to me that I couldn't paint what I couldn't experience. My mind wouldn't settle, switch off and relax sufficiently and for long enough periods. I did get glimpses and some progress was made, but that progress also paradoxically acted as a catalyst for my collapse.

Today I sense a clearing of my mind and I suspect I will see this played out in the current four paintings. It will be interesting to observe how much give and take occurs between subject and object, as I move forward to greater peace and clarity – or to put it another way, the relationship between spiritual and artistic growth. Only a truly developed and enlightened mind can experience a perfect “state of rest”.

Back in 1994/5 I saw in Forms of Thought the beginnings of what I was trying to achieve, but it felt like I was skating on thin ice. I was excited by the forms, but I didn’t know where to take them. I felt out of my depth, and it felt much more comfortable and within range at the time to “back track” to Tabula Rasa.

I am not interested in attaching relative value to “thought” or “without thought”. They are simply different states of consciousness, and likely to be equally difficult to represent. However, it felt at the time that I could make more progress with thought once I had managed without thought.

I see an opening up soon of a twin track approach – push and pull, thought and without thought.

Some Assumptions

To understand itself the mind must step outside itself. The mind can become conscious of its own workings with the assistance of unconscious processes like creativity (inspiration). A fully integrated mind works simultaneously on many different levels.

For example, the route to analysing thought involves firstly leaving conscious thought behind, secondly finding awareness in another realm (creative, spiritual etc), then finally returning to conscious thought so it can re-inform itself, thereby completing the circle.

I believe there are generic patterns of thought and that we have the ability to transcend these patterns and reach a higher level of consciousness. Unifying codes exist, which we are capable of grasping, and they can be portrayed on a 2-dimensional surface as an aid to comprehension. Beauty and functionality are united at core.

All minds are connected and at root consciousness cannot be separated. Moreover, the mind replicates itself, and many minds replicate the same fundamental principles of one mind i.e. group consciousness is an extension of individual consciousness.

Is there a pool to dip into from which all ideas originate? Assuming there are certain constellations of thought which we want to transcend, what is the ideal scenario for the next level?

Where we will be one day

Thinking from a much higher and more integrated perspective, using all our mental faculties and parts of the brain we haven't even yet accessed.

We need to examine how we think in order to be able to focus our minds on what really matters. Right now, we have too many choices. The massive exponential growth in our technological and scientific capabilities has not been accompanied by any real grasp of the implications, nor an equivalent spiritual understanding or moral development to be able to make the ever more difficult decisions and tough choices we are faced with. Going forward the search for meaning must become our defining purpose.

We currently lack the maturity and wisdom to cope with the responsibility that our knowledge has given us. Up until now we have overdeveloped one part of our mental capability at expense of all the other parts.

We must evolve to meet the challenges of the times we live in, and this will involve accessing different aspects of our mental capabilities in order that we enhance our individual capacities as conscious beings. And often we will need to access these different aspects simultaneously.

Beyond Space/time

To get back to the main thread: all knowledge is everywhere. We need to find a means of rising above ourselves, obtaining a birds-eye view, breaking out and moving beyond our limits.

Perhaps we could start by contemplating infinity, beyond space-time. Space and time are artificial constraints. They don't exist except in our minds as a grid, a way of conceptualising that relates to the senses. We must not confuse the instrument of measurement with thing itself. Time and space are relative, have no intrinsic value and no beginning, middle, or end.

Building a new framework for thought

Using mind as opposed to being used by it. The aim is to address all daily problems from a different perspective, and at a greater intuitive level.

The first step in building a new framework for thought is the foundation layer, creating the blank canvas, a *tabula rasa*. This involves overcoming personal blocks and learning to silence the internal dialogue.

Having cleared the mind, the next step is to become open to new insights, to find new ways of addressing problems and new ways of seeing. We may start recognising that there are intrinsic patterns, and these patterns replicate.

Look for harmony, patterns that resonate with and replicate the way it works. Beauty and functionality stem from the same source. We can reach a higher

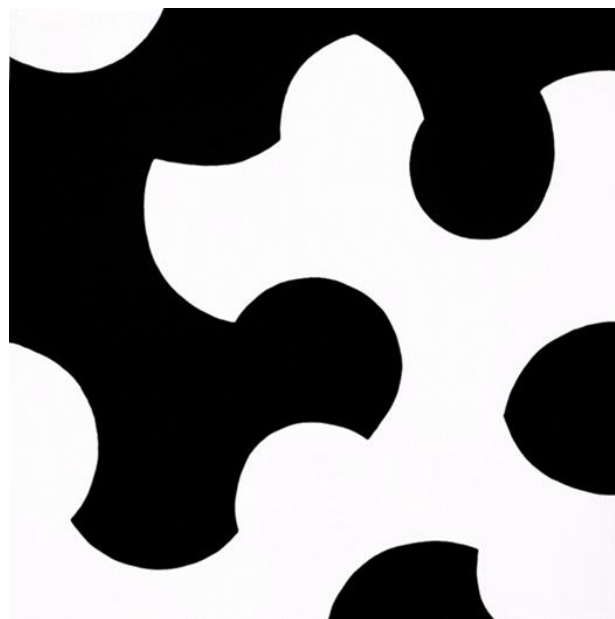
understanding of life via patterns. Patterns can be a means of expressing the inexpressible, where verbal communication fails.

There are fundamental principles about how things work, and these principles cross all boundaries, all disciplines, all fields of human endeavour, all matter, all phenomena, everything – including the human mind.

Perhaps we can even speculate that there could be ultimately one key pattern: the root of all patterns; a formula that can predict or unlock to 100% accuracy all information that exists about a person, place, situation, thing; a formula that is in effect an all-seeing eye, that can tell you everything you could possibly need to know about anything and everything.

Snapshots of infinity

It occurs to me that a successful resolution of the Tabula Rasa paintings will define, amongst other things, a state of infinity. Time and space constrictions are purely products of our minds which so far have been unable to properly comprehend 'no time' and 'no space'. The mind at rest functions according to the same laws as everything else in the universe. This is an impression or expression of the inexpressible.



Tabula Rasa seeks to create one perfect line or interface. There should be no patterns, no symmetry, no separate shapes (which would break the continuous flow). There is just one continuous interface with no end. Nothing for the eye to latch onto, including uneven distribution of white/black – there needs to be perfect balance. All the energy is in that magic interface, a perfect continuous flow through each painting.

Definitions of *tabula rasa*

Tabula rasa is the Latin term for "blank slate", and originates from the Roman *tabula* or wax tablet, used for making notes which was then repeatedly blanked by heating the wax and smoothing it again to create a *tabula rasa*. The concept has been used variously by philosophers from as early as Aristotle. The modern Western idea of the theory is attributed mostly to John Locke's formulation that at birth the human mind is a "blank slate", without rules for processing data, and that data is added and rules for processing are formed solely by one's sensory experience. In his expression of the concept Locke emphasised the freedom of the individual to define the content of their character, author their own soul.

In *The Tabula Project* the use of *tabula rasa* refers back to the original Latin definition. Clearing the mind of thought, creating a blank canvas upon which one can create anew. This creating the conditions for mindfulness, pure potentiality and the freedom to redefine ourselves.

Tabula Rasa is the mind at rest, full of infinite potential, free of all baggage, of the past, of the ego. The mind clear, a pure channel, a receptor, at one with the universe, of God like intelligence, able to understand life, to contemplate infinity, to transcend our current level of awareness and understanding, to see beyond the illusions and artificial constructs of the mind, a channel for pure wisdom.

Perils of the Ego

Autumn 2007

The biggest obstruction to realising and becoming who we really are is our notion of the separate self. I am not saying anything new here. For centuries enlightened teachers have pointed to the illusion of separateness as the cause of all suffering. And yet it is such a powerful illusion.

We have forgotten who we are. But to realize that would be devastating for our egos. Our egos have got nicely used to the illusion of separateness and all that it entails. Multitudes of vested interests have been vying for this status quo for thousands of years, and in this illusion there is an inertia which makes it increasingly unlikely that anything will change. Like the prospect of turkeys voting for Christmas our egos will hardly willingly vote for self-annihilation!

We need to bridge the gulf between ourselves and our notions of God, so that we may come to understand that we are one, and as one we have access to everything that we are. It is our undeveloped individual consciousness that is the problem. We have defined ourselves as limited mortal beings, either created by some greater force which many call God, or just randomly brought into being by chance and evolution. And what we imagine we are, is what we have become. We have not dared to dream of anything greater.

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It is the trauma stemming from this basic delusion of separateness that religions have attempted to counter in their attacks on human selfishness and greed. But in trying to solve one problem they have created another: the idea that we are “God’s creation”.

As beings created by “God” we have a limited awareness and power and can only ultimately be responsible to God not to ourselves. This has led to an abnegation of responsibility, leaving us disempowered and unable to meet the challenge of who we are, and to face the consequences of our actions.

We have chosen to limit ourselves. We only know what we think we can know. Our minds are infinite, but we limit our minds to what our brains have registered. We need to re-focus our minds. Consciousness is energy. Mind is creation. Mind and creation are one. Mind and matter are one. We are all one mind. We are what we create.

Do we have even the faintest idea of how powerful we are? Do we realise that our minds have infinite potential? We can literally do anything, go anywhere, know everything – know everything there is to know and then

create some more to know. Our minds are infinite, but we are so bogged down with the humdrum limited horizons of our small and narrow individual existence that we miss the wonder whizzing by, it completely evades us.

Our minds are at the epicentre of creation, but we are still in darkness imagining we can't see without light. We are like janitors who see only the fire exits and emergency lights, looking for the switches to illuminate the whole building. We creep around in semi-darkness feeling our way for switches on the walls not realizing that the switch we need is our mind. If we understood that we would know we don't need light, we don't even need eyes.

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We have one mind, but many brains and these brains develop minds of their own – counterfeit minds / ersatz minds / poor imitations of the real thing. Some imitation minds are pretty convincing – they nearly always are to themselves at any rate!

The trick is to somehow find a way to jump out. You need to do it very carefully, so bogged down as you are by the burden of your separate existence which you are so duped into believing is your real self.

Your counterfeit mind will trick you in every which way. Look how it is enjoying reading this right now, and thinking how cleverly it is disguising itself as your real self... It might think it has nicely become invisible, that it has lulled you into a false sense of security while it spies on your efforts to decommission it. But on another level, it knows the game is up, because if it really takes on board what we are saying it knows that it is only an illusion.

Don't imagine it's going to go without a struggle. It may realize it is only an illusion, but it will feel very real to itself, and it is highly unlikely to step aside and magnanimously let the real you in. It will fight tooth and nail to retain the right to exist on its own terms, as it has done successfully through the ages. It will form barricade around itself. It will become impregnable. But at the same time, it will be horribly conflicted.

Let's just say that your counterfeit mind, being pretty good at what it does, has understood its own limits, is signed up to the overall objective of omniscience and is prepared to be a willing agent in its own destruction – a pretty tall order you might say – even then, it is tragically doomed to sabotage its own efforts in this endeavour, and to miss out on the miracle.

Is there somewhere for it to go? Perhaps we can find a fitting requiem, somewhere it can rest in peace?

Now pause and think about this for a moment. If you understand what I am saying, you will know that you are not real.

How does that make you feel? How does it feel to realise that you are only an illusion?

If you are identified with your separate self, it means you believe you are your counterfeit mind, and when you realise your counterfeit mind is only a counterfeit where does that leave you? Up the proverbial without a paddle, I'd say!

The tool which you use to think, your counterfeit mind, has taken you over and assumed an identity, which you think is you but it's not.

I know this sounds catastrophic, but the only painful bit is making that realization. And it is only painful for a nano second.

Think of it like jumping into a pool of cold water – as long as you keep moving you will quickly adjust and soon you will wonder what took you so long.

Thoughts & Feelings

Autumn 2008

Thoughts and feelings profoundly affect each other, but the relationship can become dysfunctional. Ideally it should be an equal partnership, with thoughts and feelings progressing independently on their own trajectory and influencing each other in a symbiotic feed across. Thoughts present the facts and information, feelings respond.

Where things can go adrift is where thoughts and feelings stray into each other's territory – when feelings present false or biased information, misleading thoughts, or when thoughts dictate to feelings what they're feeling.

When this starts to happen all kinds of problems arise. The whole structure becomes unbalanced. Thoughts, having undermined feelings, can no longer rely on them. Feelings become confused and caught up in thoughts. The result is an unholy mess.

A person cannot proceed each day with that all important clean slate. Every day is a carry-over from the day, days, weeks, months, years before. There is very little room for new thoughts and new feelings because the system is so clogged up with previous thoughts and feelings.

So the crucial first step to disentangling the confusion is to recognise that thoughts and feelings have become entwined and co-dependent in an unhealthy way. The next step is to begin to uncover where. Start with the low hanging fruit – the obvious issues that need attention, concerns, upsets, preoccupations. And look at them one by one. And observe yourself looking at them, your reactions.

When things are functioning the right way, we shouldn't need the ever-present memory of previous thoughts and feelings, because our present responses both in terms of thoughts and feelings are built upon where we have been before. We have fully internalised, processed and metabolised what is important and we are moving forward with the benefit of that awareness. We don't need to go over old ground. There isn't time, it takes us away from the present and what is happening now.

Watch an athlete taking a massive jump. If for one moment they were to look back would fall flat on their face. See a dancer moving in total harmony with the music, instinctively following each successive step. This is what I mean when I say we need to forget everything, once we have fully processed and absorbed it. And the first step to that is correcting the function of thoughts and feelings. In either case we cannot afford to have the tail wagging the dog.

Core Principles and Objectives

Winter 2010/11

Winding back to the beginning, I remember having some clear goals. I was focussed on the “sanctity of thought”, on the need for people to “reclaim their birth right” to once again be able to “think for themselves”. I also had a Utopian vision of how different the world would become. A revival of humanity and the human spirit – out of the dark ages at last.

These goals still seem relevant but need greater definition. The detail of the vision will unfold, and it will be multi-faceted and about many different things. We need a sea-change in human consciousness, and this will be brought about by a pincer movement, lots of parallel work streams, different pressures and points of entry, bound together by some core principles and objectives:

- 1. Support life** – set goals that serve the widest possible good and support life on earth
- 2. Do the right thing** – think through the long-term consequences of every action (avoid fool’s gold)
- 3. For the right reasons** – thoroughly examine one’s motivations for actions and choices
- 4. Be fully present** – in the moment and conscious of all one’s thoughts, feelings, motivations
- 5. Learn, grow, evolve** – seek to learn from every experience, grow through challenges and reach highest potential

I want the world to become a better place. No more war, no more abuses, no more pointless and needless suffering. A world where we all treat each other kindly and have respect for all life on earth.

I realise this might sound like an impossible Utopian vision, but I believe this could be achieved by enough people reclaiming their natural birth right to think for themselves, by effectively “waking up”.

I cannot bear the endless suffering, inequality, exploitation, cruelty and inhumanity in the world today. And I cannot feel at peace with a status quo where my lifestyle comes at the expense of so many others less fortunate, the climate, the health of the planet and future generations.

I passionately believe that there must be another way, a better way. I may not see the world I want to see in my lifetime, but I believe that working towards it is the only goal worth striving for, and true happiness lies along this path.

A Blueprint for Change

Autumn 2015

Movement 1

Recognise the limitations of the current framework for thought to understand life, to make sense of the world.

Observe oneself and become conscious of all one's thoughts, feeling and intuitions simultaneously.

Become aware of one's personal issues, of where the past is interfering with the present.

Let go of pre-determined notions, of private ego-driven agendas, and trust that there is a bigger picture.

Movement 2

Quieten the mind, clear it of thought - create a state of consciousness without thought.

Open one's mind to greater awareness, become a channel ready to receive.

Recognise that we are all linked to our surroundings, that understanding is a process of recognition.

Align oneself with the bigger picture, to understanding greater meaning and purpose.

Movement 3

Understand that the separate self is not real, but an ever-evolving construct which we create - consciously or unconsciously.

See the self as just an object in one's awareness and become willing to transcend the self.

Let go of all memory, of all attachments, of all previous versions of the self.

Recognise that all is one, that the separation of the observer and the observed is an illusion.

Movement 4

Continually learn, grow and evolve.

Work towards a new framework for thought which transcends confines of analytical mind and integrates the heart, mind and soul.

Recognise intrinsic patterns, that patterns replicate, that everything is interconnected, that there are generic patterns of thought.

Understand that enlightenment is a state of constant renewal that peace comes in acceptance of the endless struggle.

The Overall Objective

Autumn 2015

The level of threat we live with is greater than ever, but the mindset that got us into this predicament won't get us out of it. If we want to change behaviours we need to change premises which led to them. We need to change how we think.

If we consider the many self-created challenges we face it is reasonable to conclude that there is something fundamentally wrong with how we think. Social injustices and inequalities, widening extremes of wealth and poverty, inhumane treatment of each other and of other species, wars and acts of terrorism, unsustainable plundering of the planet's resources, anthropogenic climate change, the list goes on.

The above are all examples of suffering which seem destined to repeat in different guises indefinitely, but which are within our gift to change. And yet for each generation the same patterns repeat and the level of threat to our existence becomes ever greater.

The question is, where do we keep going wrong? Why do we keep making the same mistakes? What can we do to change things for the better? How do we avoid the threat of ultimate extinction?

We need to change how we think. Not just *what* we think, but *how* we think. This goes to the core of who we are, our identity and entire existence as individuals and as a society. And once we start to pick apart one aspect the whole edifice starts to crumble. How we think is inextricably linked to who we think we are, and this is a product of our entire history, of both our individual and collective experience.

We urgently need a shift in consciousness away from one where we are narrowly focused on selfish desires, inward looking, preoccupied by our own repetitive thoughts and unable to live in the present to one where we operate from a higher level of consciousness, at one with our society, our environment and the world around us.

For real and lasting change to occur we need to begin with ourselves.

The overall objective of [The Tabula Project](#) is to provide a new perspective on thought so we might improve how we use our minds, in order that we might evolve as individuals and as a society. The paintings depict states of consciousness and thought, and the development of the project is informed by extensive research across a range of disciplines.

Faulty perception is at the root of our suffering. By logical extension much of the misery, trouble and strife in the world is caused by faulty perception. If we can correct this perception on an individual level the world will start to change radically.

Our understanding of the world is heavily influenced by prevailing paradigms and how we currently use our minds. Our understanding is also flawed because we are part of the world we seek to understand. As far as we are able, we need to examine ourselves – the filter through which we see the world – and this involves the need for insight and perspective on the self.

This is a lengthy process, involving an evaluation of who we are, how we relate to others, and the very nature of consciousness. It also involves some serious soul searching. This is first and foremost a personal journey which begins with a willingness to accept that we may not be who we think we are, and which leads ultimately to a fundamental realignment of our understanding of ourselves as individuals.

Our minds are often cluttered with repetitive thoughts that make it very difficult for us to be fully in the present. We create our own misery, that is, the day-to-day misery of ordinary life, and 99.9% of it is completely unnecessary and caused by our minds. We need to strip away the false preconceptions and misperceptions if we are to understand the fallacies we labour under.

Feelings are a reliable guide, when used the right way and when supported and aided by thought, not controlled by it. But when feelings and thoughts are at odds, very often the mind rules over the heart, in so doing depriving itself of its own wings. This is one of the many ways in which the mind can become so self-defeating.

Managing the mind is a key skill to learn, and this includes the discipline at times to be able to switch thought off. We need to discover the ability to live fully in the present. A common thread in all the great spiritual teachings of the world is that a still mind is the pathway to understanding, to the awakening of intelligence, to enlightenment.

We need a new framework for thought. An integrated framework, where the whole mind is in balance – where the heart and soul are as critical to thinking as the rational mind. This kind of transformation may not happen for many generations, but it could conceivably happen. I believe it is possible.

There is something fundamental about the way we are that suggests a soul. This soul is not restricted to a spiritual realm but is a fundamental law of nature determining everything.

This leads us to the question of faith. William James defended our right to “adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our

merely logical intellect may not have been coerced"¹. Saint Thomas Aquinas famously wrote that faith lies between knowledge and opinion, it is a supernatural gift of grace from God; man can choose to believe "by assenting to matters of faith raised above his nature."²

Faith is ultimately a personal experience, perhaps even a personal choice, but irrespective of one's relationship or otherwise with a 'Higher Power', there is a need to understand for oneself, and in one's own words, "what it's all about". There is no avoiding grappling with concepts of meaning and purpose.

Einstein asked, ***"Why does the Universe go to all the bother of existing?"*** In a similar vein Heidegger posed the question ***"Why is there something rather than nothing?"***

These questions have to varying degrees preoccupied humanity since the beginning. Even early cave drawings point to an awareness, an ability to question and reflect. As soon as one has awareness of one's existence the next questions that naturally follow are: who am I, why am I here? Intuitively we feel that there must be answers, and through the ages there have been countless attempts to find them.

The world's religions may offer something by way of explanation or at least provide a framework for conceptualising about the meaning of life. In the end, however, it is for each person to satisfy themselves in their own mind whether or not there is a greater meaning and purpose.

Perhaps one of the reasons the big questions can be so baffling is that very often they are asked from the wrong vantage point. And it's nowhere near as obvious as one would imagine to know what the important questions are.

Even the question "why are we here?" – when asked from the wrong vantage point – can be misleading. It sets up expectations which may be based on a whole host of unexamined assumptions. Why the need for there to be any point in anything? Is purpose just something more immediate and connected to our survival, and not connected to any wider meaning?

We need to ask the right questions from the right vantage point. And to do this we need to get ourselves out of the way. Root and branch reform on every level is needed if we want to be free. All the while our own past and preconceptions affect what and how we see, we will continue to see only part of the picture. And any real understanding will continue to evade us.

You might ask – why is it so important to ask the big questions? There is after all very little in daily life that naturally harmonises with such questions. In fact, almost everything pulls one away from there.

¹ "The Will to Believe", a lecture by William James first published in *The New World*, Volume 5 (1896)

² Quoted in Mortimer J. Adler, *How to think about the Great Ideas*, 2000, Open Court, Chicago

On one level that makes sense. To be too focused on the meaning of one's life might militate against living life for what it is. However, I believe it is vital that we open our minds to questions of meaning and purpose.

If we knew why we were here it would make a massive difference to how we live our lives.

Each of us has the potential to reach a higher level of consciousness if that is what we choose. Free from confusion, depression, feeling lost and without any sense of purpose. Emptiness and bewilderment are states which seem commonplace. Suffering seems endemic to the human condition. But it doesn't have to be.

There is plenty of evidence that individuals have a conscience. But it is rare that the conscience is the fundamental motivating factor in decisions and behaviour. The "still small voice" is like a faraway signal that is rarely heard, but if it was loud and clear and governed our daily choices it would lead us to the place of understanding that I am talking about.

I have come to believe that freedom and the pure joy in simply being alive is our birth right. The choice is fundamental to our existence, but how many of us realise that?

This whole endeavour is about ways of seeing and perceiving. Whether you choose to accept that what is immediately in front of you is all you need to concern yourself with, and you can tolerate living with all the unanswered questions, or whether you want to expand your field of conscious awareness and deepen your understanding.

Perhaps not everyone wants to be free, and that is their choice too. But for those who do want to be free, I hope that The Tabula Project may provide some useful pointers.

Truth is the Foundation

Summer 2023

Too often the lens through which we perceive is faulty. The Tabula Project seeks to find a new way of perceiving ourselves, our experiences and the world around us. This journey could have applications for recovery from brainwashing, indoctrination with toxic ideologies and a broad range of low level to serious mental health issues.

To a lesser extent it applies to nearly all of us at different times in our lives. It can apply to whole societies and to the worst excesses of groupthink.

Truth is sacrosanct

At the heart of The Tabula Project is the sanctity of truth. This imperative has come into even sharper focus in recent times with the concerning rise in populism and the development of a phenomenon described as 'post-truth', where judgements are based on emotions and beliefs rather than facts.

The UK's vote to leave the European Union, the election of President Trump and the rise in populist leaders, often fueled by misinformation, signal a deterioration in public debate and a downgrading of the status of truth. In the Brexit debate it was famously suggested that people are "tired of experts".

The ability to separate fact from fiction is an essential prerequisite both for a healthy mind and a healthy society. Without a firm grasp on reality, one finds oneself in a precarious situation. The consequences for institutions and whole societies are even more serious. When basic facts cannot be relied upon, decision making becomes flawed and our democracies are at risk.

The situation could be set to get more dangerous. A current hot subject of debate is the degree of existential risk posed by artificial intelligence. Rapid progress in AI is arousing the fear that we could be developing minds that might eventually outsmart and replace us.

The quest for truth

Institutions are only as healthy as the people they serve. The quest for truth can be a perilously difficult journey and it starts with the individual. Humility and rigorous self-honesty are essential requirements.

We don't have the luxury of standing outside of ourselves. Even when we attempt to observe ourselves dispassionately, we still see through layers of filters of which we may be unaware. As anthropologist Gregory Bateson

observed: "Very few people seem to realise the enormous theoretical power of the distinction between what I "see" and what is actually out there"³.

The famous admonition to "walk a mile in someone else's shoes before you judge them" is a reminder to practice empathy. We are all imperfect, flawed human beings doing what we can with the cards we've been dealt. Truth goes much deeper than just acknowledging the surface reality of things.

Personal identity

Who am I? Who are we? The more one examines the self the less solid it appears. A central theme of The Tabula Project is that we are not fixed entities but are constantly evolving and changing.

We are each of us a collection of narratives and stories that we share with our social group. These narratives have a purpose and a function, to orientate ourselves in relation to others. Personal identity is crafted out of these narratives and give us our sense of who we are. But they are not who we are. Serious problems can arise when aspects of these narratives are based on myths or distortions.

We can choose which narratives about ourselves to hold. But most of the time they are just unconsciously assimilated by default.

Social groups define us

We are first and foremost social beings. George Herbert Mead argued that relationships are prior to, and constitutive of, the individual self⁴. Siegfried Heinrich Foulkes stressed that no individual has a mind independent of the social process which produced it. The individual is "pressed into shape" by external forces.⁵

Social groups define who we are. But when those groups fail us, we may be forced to look beyond the "social". As social beings we need each other, but at times we may need to develop the capacity to stand alone, independently of affirmation by others, but without becoming shut down and bitter. We may need to develop deeper levels of compassion.

Alienation from the group

Groupthink can arise in homogenous groups as regards social background and ideology, or where leaders do not encourage open enquiry and evaluation and bring in outside views for advice. It arises in small groups, institutions and in whole societies with sometimes disastrous outcomes.

³ Gregory Bateson, Sacred Unity: Further steps to an ecology of mind, Harper Collins, 1991

⁴ G.H. Mead, Mind, Self & Society, University of Chicago Press, 1934

⁵ Quoted by Farhad Dalal, Taking the Group Seriously, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1988

History is full of examples of brave individuals who transcended their social confines, who broke the mould of what their society or social group deemed acceptable. When an individual believes something to be true which their group does not believe it can require considerable courage to speak out.

Sometimes there is no alternative but to separate from one's clan or social group. Alienation from the group is painful, but it is very challenging to have a fundamentally different view of the world from one's group. Expulsion or voluntary departure may be the unavoidable outcome where compromise becomes untenable.

Learning to trust one's own heart and mind regardless of whether or not there is corroboration by others is an important lesson. It is not easy because all our instinct is to want to agree with our social group, and emotion can be a more powerful motivator than rational thought. However, it is not possible to stay aligned with the truth whilst living a lie.

Freedom of thought

Freedom of thought is an inalienable right. As human beings with free will this notion is deeply embedded in our culture.

Difficulties arise when pressure is brought to bear to take a person away from their own authentic responses. Lies, myths, brainwashing and control by others interrupt one's ability to see the world as it is. It can be challenging to retain a grip on reality in the face of total denial and abnegation of truth.

Ultimately, however, we have the choice about how to respond to any given situation. Viktor Frankl described the freedom to work out our individual responses as "the last freedom"⁶.

Changing an entire mindset

Changing an entire mindset is very difficult. It can be difficult even to know where one's view of the world may be distorted. The likelihood is that untruths are buried deep in the foundations and have affected a person's development and whole outlook, often in hard to detect or imperceptible ways.

The entire structure must be re-examined. Like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, it will eventually topple over. But mercifully the process of toppling over is in most cases incremental, because in the meantime one needs to live. The converse would be like having open heart surgery while running a marathon.

Integration of heart and mind

There are tools we can use to help us get back in touch with our authentic selves. A key priority is for heart and mind to reconnect in a new healthy way.

⁶ Viktor Frankl, *From Death Camp to Existentialism: A Man's Search for Meaning*, first published 1946.

The first step is to recognise where we are out of alignment. This may manifest in situations where our thoughts and feelings appear to be in conflict. Emotion is intricately woven into thinking and beliefs. Feelings and emotions play a major part in what we know, and how we know what we know, so extricating oneself from misshapen beliefs can be a complex affair.

The next step is to become willing to clear the mind. This is a process which takes time, it rarely happens instantaneously, so developing a willingness is the start. Meditation is useful but it is also necessary to confront and examine intrusive thoughts. Examining thought and clearing the mind should ideally happen in parallel. They are the foundations for building a new framework.

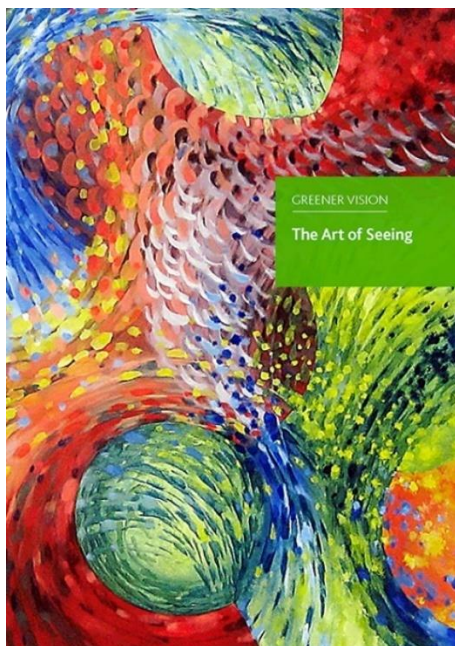
Understanding the truth is one thing. Fully internalizing it is another. It can take time for feelings to catch up with new awareness. Full acceptance can take a very long time. Key elements of the process include:

- Recognition of truth
- Disentanglement of thoughts and feelings
- Acceptance of truth
- Acceptance of full implications of that truth
- Integration of heart and mind.

ANNEX I: Greener Vision

[Greener Vision](#) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to encouraging the switch to a greener future, set up by Claire Haigh formerly CEO of sustainable transport group Greener Journeys. The Foundation for Integrated Transport provides grant funding to support Greener Vision's work.

OUR THINKING NEEDS TO CHANGE IF WE ARE TO RISE TO THE CLIMATE CHALLENGE.



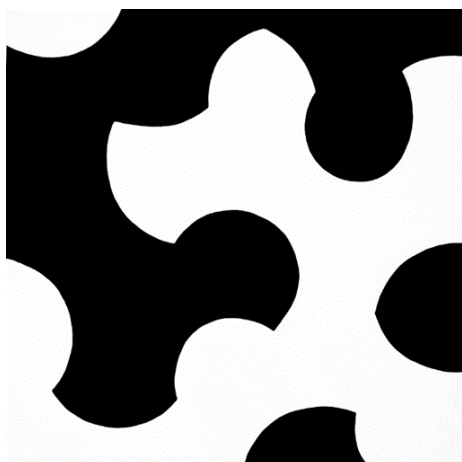
GREENER VISION: THE ART OF SEEING applies insights from The Tabula Project to the challenge of tackling climate change and developing policies to achieve net zero. (PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2023)

Anthropogenic climate change is not the only peril we face but it is arguably our greatest existential threat.

If we are to make any real progress, we will need to change our whole approach, and this needs to start with an honest appraisal of how we look at the problem.

Ultimately, it will be through the cumulative impact of changes at the individual level that society might evolve.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A GREENER FUTURE:



Support life: set goals that serve the widest possible good and support life on earth.

Do the right thing: think through the long-term consequences of every action.

Take action for the right reasons: examine the motivations for every decision and action.

Be fully present: stay in the moment and conscious of all one's thoughts and feelings.

Learn, grow, evolve: learn from every experience, grow through challenges and evolve to highest potential.

Our most important goal is to support life. We need to give greater focus to the long term the consequences of all our actions and behaviours. We should strive to do the right thing. Change is possible but we must start with ourselves. Our aim is to be fully present and to learn, grow and evolve from all of our experiences.

Doing the right thing means supporting life on earth and working collectively for the common good. But it is not enough just to do the right thing. The right thing needs to be done for the right reasons. The rationale is as important as the policies and behaviours themselves. Self-awareness is key. It is important to have sound motivations, to examine honestly the reasons for every decision and action.

This leads to the need to focus only on the things that matter. Understanding which things matter is a process of ever deepening awareness. There are some useful tools for assessing this. Is something of intrinsic or extrinsic value? Appearances are not necessarily good indicators of intrinsic value. Monetary value is extremely misleading and is basically a different value system.

Intrinsic value usually means of lasting value, sustainable and supporting peace and contentment. The things that matter support life. Things that matter also support a good quality of life, such as relationships, and time to connect and reflect.

Another component of focussing on things that matter is having a sense of meaning and purpose. It is not necessary to have answers to questions concerning the meaning life, it is just important to be mindful of the big questions, and to 'stay with the unknowing' (Keats). Keeping open and inquisitive keeps one's mind tuned to its highest frequency. It is an aspiration for us to know one day what Einstein once called "the mind of God".

As Socrates once said, "The unexamined life is not worth living!" Ever deepening awareness comes from a combination of experience, leading an examined life, and time to quieten the mind. Enlightenment is a state of continuous renewal.

One might say that the purpose of life is to learn and grow, in order that we might evolve as individuals and collectively. That the ultimate purpose of life is the continuation of life itself.

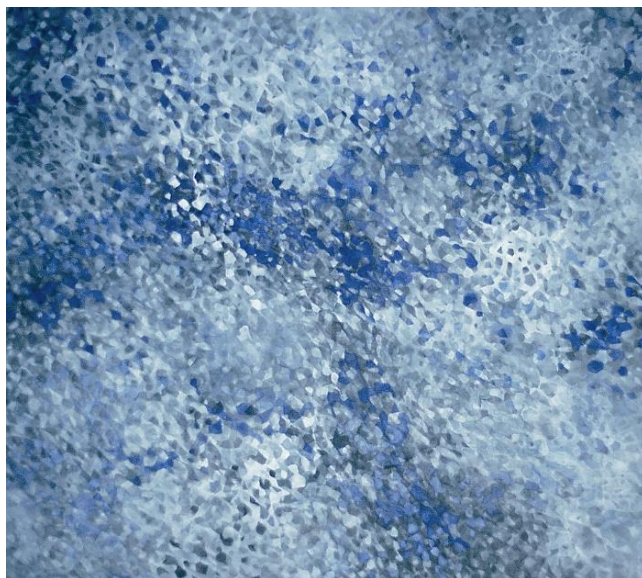
ANNEX II: About the Paintings

The paintings depict states of consciousness and thought. They are grouped into three main sections and were produced in parallel over a period of more than two decades.

- **Examining Thought** seeks to explore current predominant thought forms.
- **Clearing the Mind** is about achieving a state of consciousness without thought.
- **Building a New Framework** is about discovering a new integrated framework for thought where the whole mind is in balance.

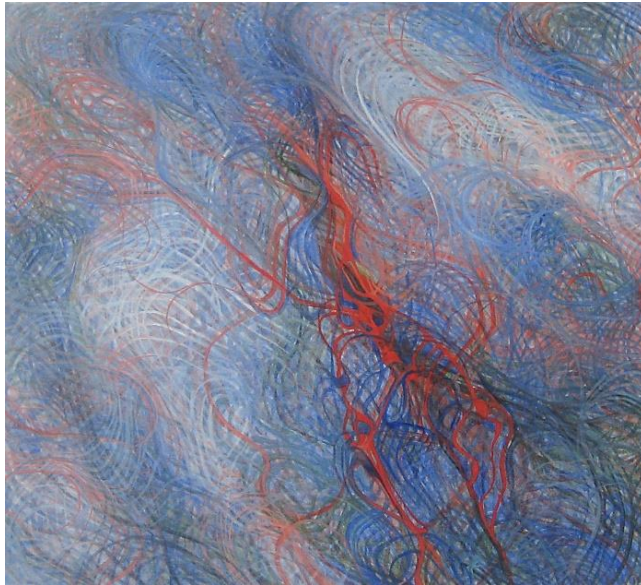
EXAMINING THOUGHT

Faulty perception is at the root of our suffering and much of the trouble in the world. If we can correct this perception the world will radically change. We need to examine ourselves, the filter through which we perceive the world. This leads to the recognition of our fundamental interdependence with each other and the biosphere.



1993, 15 paintings, oil on canvas, each 96x106 cm

Metamorphosis explores the fluidity of the self and the infinitely malleable and changeable nature of consciousness. The paintings represent stages of a poem. They depict states of awareness, and a range of sensations of pain and pleasure which could be experienced by any sentient being. The fourth painting in the series, *Easing the burden of consciousness* (pictured) encapsulates the driving motivation behind The Tabula Project.



1994, 4 paintings, oil on canvas, each 80x88 cm

Evolve to Survive explores the self-limiting nature of much of our current thinking. The paintings represent stages of a [poem](#). The series describes how thinking that is focused primarily on self-interest can become self-defeating and destructive, as described in the second painting *Life shrinks further inside* (pictured). We are hard wired to focus on that which serves our immediate narrow self-interest, but this can lead to poor decision-making.



1994-2007, 9 paintings, oil on canvas, each 80x88 cm

Forms of Thought attempts to represent generic thought forms. The paintings in this series are deliberately devoid of figurative content, the assumption being that the patterns depicted could apply to a wide range of subject matter. The paintings seek to explore in the most abstract sense how the mind processes and generates information.

CLEARING THE MIND

Our minds are often cluttered with repetitive thoughts that make it very difficult for us to be fully present. Managing the mind is a key skill, and this includes the discipline at times to be able to switch thought off. We need to discover the ability to live fully in the here and now. This is the pathway to true understanding.



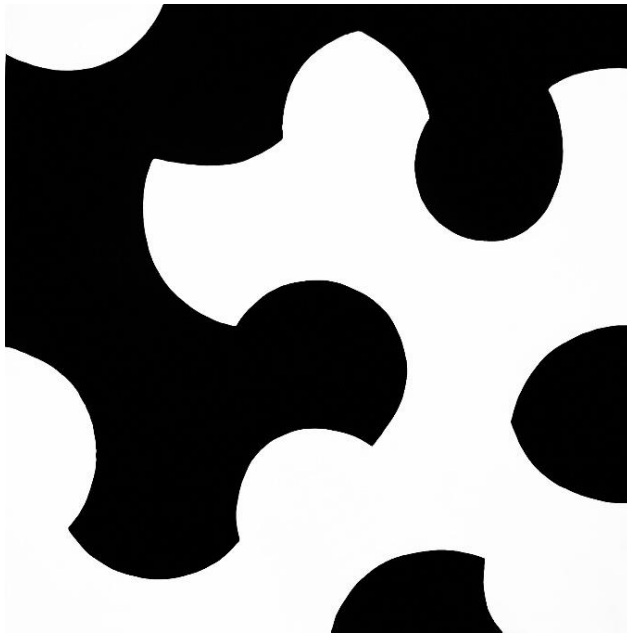
1993, 15 studies, ink on paper, each painting 34x44 cm

[States of Mind](#) depict different states of consciousness. Each ink wash was produced very quickly, the result of a spontaneous outpouring of visual thoughts and feelings. The effect was one of at least briefly decluttering the mind, accessing stillness, before more thoughts and feelings emerge.



1994, 6 paintings, oil on canvas, each one 80x88 cm

[In Search of the Perfect Line](#) illustrates the challenge of quietening the mind. The paintings seek to define the mind at rest, the landscape upon which new thought will eventually emerge. The perfect line represents a clear mind. But in searching for the perfect line, new lines continue to appear seeming to replace the previous ones - like repetitive thoughts which echo unprompted and repeatedly through the mind.



Tabula Rasa depicts the mind at rest, free of thought and full of infinite potential. The perfect line emerges as the interface between black and white. Clearing the mind of thought, creating a blank canvas on which we can create a new framework. This creating the conditions for mindfulness, pure potentiality and the freedom to redefine ourselves.

1995-2015, 16 paintings, acrylic, each 92x92 cm

BUILDING A NEW FRAMEWORK

The goal is a new integrated framework for thought, where the whole mind is in balance, with thoughts, feelings and intuitions working together in harmony. The mind becomes a tool at our disposal. Free from incessant thoughts we can become open to new insights, and eventually able to reach a place of enlightenment.



Building a New Framework

develops further the generic patterns of thought depicted in the Forms of Thought series. The nine-part series presents an evolution to an increasingly integrated thought system. The journey begins with a representation of basic cognitive awareness and gradually builds in layer by layer more developed thoughts, feelings, and intuitions. The final painting in this series (pictured) seeks to bring all these aspects together into an integrated whole.

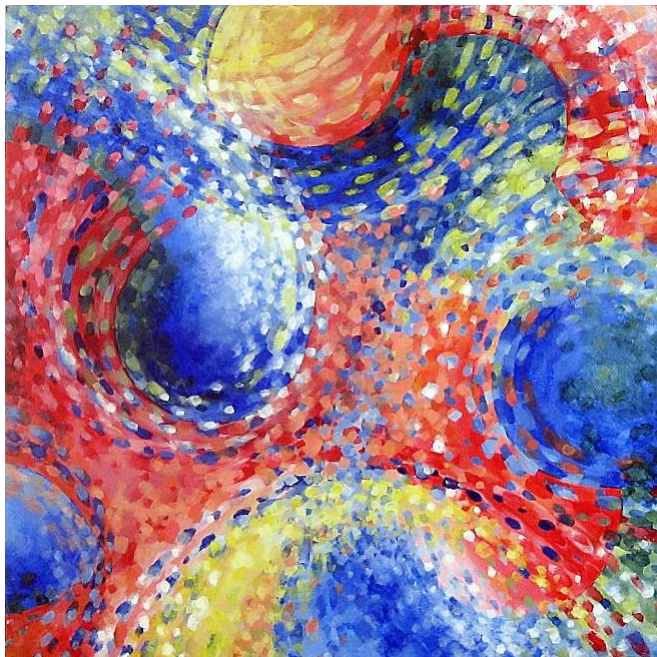
1994-2010, 9 paintings, oil on canvas, each 80x88cm



Finding New Frontiers

illustrates some insights from the fields of quantum mechanics, string theory and the complexity sciences, including *The Particle and the Wave* (pictured). Patterns can be a way of expressing the inexpressible where verbal communication is inadequate. There are fundamental principles about how things work, and these principles can be captured in patterns.

2006-2007, 6 paintings, acrylic on board, each 92x92 cm



A New Framework. Here the boundaries between thoughts, feelings and intuitions begin to dissolve. The paintings point to the beginnings of a new framework for awareness. We may recognise that the self is an object in our awareness, a filter through which we see the world. We may come to see our knowledge as a tool or a construction, and our “selves” as constructions too. This brings the possibility of real change: the liberation from the self. With this comes the realisation that any division between ourselves and the world is an illusion.

2011-14, 3 paintings, oil/acrylic on board, each 92x92cm