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1 ikeness

m a g a z i n e



feeling the flow

Low Entropy is headquartered in Kwikwetlem First Nation Territory of the Coast Salish people, and in the shared territory of the səliłwətaʔtəməxʷ, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Stz'uminus, Qayqayt and S'ólh Téméxw nations.

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About Low Entropy: Founded in 2015, the Low Entropy Foundation is home to free programs and events that focus on personal and community growth through empowerment, authenticity and meaningful interpersonal connections.

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Foreword

Is it a placebo for the choppy, disjointed sections of life, or is there really (like, *actually*) something in existence, in movement or emotion, that could be identified as flow? I don't want to believe that it's just one of the many mirages that restore our faith in times that we would otherwise despair, or feel nothing at all. But would it be so bad if it was?

Maybe that's where this concept actually belongs. Fiction, magic, editorial choices—they all result in lies of one kind or another, but we so often love them. Sometimes they rule us. Would it be such an unacceptable result to be ruled by melody, by harmony?

Happiness is a little bit overrated, but when things make sense, I think we feel a contentedness that is a far more sustainable fuel to bolster our spirits. And it doesn't all have to be “good.” Waves crash and bubble but they move forward nonetheless, and so do we—if only we could accept those conflicting movements without anchors, without suffering, without angst.

When we see flow—our creatives, our community, you . . . maybe we manage to glide above it all, not to escape it, but to see it for what it is. A process. Feelings and physicality, stop and go. Unified and all messed up with no idea of what's coming next.

. . . we are flowing, whatever it is, aren't we?

Simon Cheung

Editor, Low Entropy

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Photo by Lucas Lenzi

GRACE
YOUNG

My name is Grace! I chose to explore my relationship with grief and nostalgia by writing based on Tennyson's poem about losing one of his close friends. I found the personification of Love and Grief in his poem particularly striking, as it depicts the visceral nature of thoughts born from mourning.

Inspired by "I" from *In Memoriam* by Tennyson

Grace Young

i exhale my breath
and find it in the fog
as rain falls around me, a rhythm suiting the gentle pulling of fingers on heart strings
your hands tap lightly
pitter patter
existing at the edge of the cloudy veils of mist
that settle on the sidewalks
the bride of sadness
continues her muted procession
as no one else walks these streets
but me

the rain almost sounds like dancing
like drunken hours in the backyard
unsteady feet cycling by in a steady schedule

never will Hours call me overworn
for walking every Sunday, rain, shine, or snow
exhaustion forevermore hidden in sweet darkness
a silent bride
meeting her dying husband
who slumps at the altar

are you happy to leave behind your dead selves?
the backyard drunk, the procession dancer

are you interested in my tears?

I Make Weird Art. Here's Why.

Jessica Szczepaniak-Gillece

Photo
by
Kirk
Cam-
eron

These are my raw materials—vintage cookbooks and magazines, glue, glitter, stickers, huge pieces of paper, broken necklaces, old rosaries, paper flowers, aging paperbacks that smell wonderful when you hold them up to your nose, things picked out of the barrel at my favourite art debris shop. One of my favourite humour websites referred to crafts flippantly as “gluing things to other things” and it lit something up in me. In the language of the internet, I felt seen. I took myself to the local thrift shop and rummaged through old paperbacks for just the right cover of a woman swooning in the arms of a brawny Australian gent, a broken pearl necklace, recipe booklets with electrically luminescent Jell-O, glow-in-the-dark stars.



I get out my spray glue and a wooden box.

Now, I think.

What are you going to be?

I let the process soothe me, placing the pearls next to the crucifix from a vintage rosary, laying the picture on top of the box, adjusting as to where I want to trim the old paper that feels satiny under my fingertips. After hours of work, I wind up with a box decouped with the romantic couple in a clinch in the centre of a Jell-O mold, the colors the vivid brights that only artificial flavouring can provide. I let it dry, get my E-6000 and add tiny drops of glue so I can stud it with pearls from the broken strands and lock down the glow-in-the-dark stars that used to shine in my bedroom. Soon, there it is. It's weird and it's mine. I've created a piece of art that wasn't there before. I purse my lips and think for a moment, then add a soupçon of glittery glow-in-the-dark nail polish just to add a little extra flash of glamour.

That's weird and I like it that way. I love the sense of possibility one can have with junk as a medium. Quite

literally, anything is possible, depending on what I find. I like saving treasure from the landfill, recycling material that may have otherwise just been thrown away. However, a lot of the satisfaction from making weird art lies with locating myself within a tradition of self-taught artists such as Nancy Josephson, whom I was lucky enough to get to learn from. She taught me how to use Apoxie Sculpt to wrap a container, then press glass beads, broken rosaries and scraps of vintage jewelry into it to create a mosaic that ever changes shape and texture the more you look at it. I can take trash and transform it into something of value, something that

will make someone smile,

which will light up their room in the dark of the night. Long ago, my mother once forbade me to make art, telling me it was all junk that she'd have to throw away. Instead of listening to that, I blossomed and grew. I comb yard sales and thrift stores for things that I can give a second chance at life. I can change junk into something valuable—art. My weird art keeps my mental health strong, lifts my spirits and keeps me as bright and glowing as a boxful of luminous plastic stars.

“men and women cannot be friends, as sex will inevitably raise its ugly head”

Was Harry Right?

Jayne Seagrave

Can members of the opposite sex be friends, or will sex (and over-jealous partners) always prevent such liaisons? Is it possible for your bestie to be not of your gender? Can such close relationships realistically exist? I believe they can. I believe I can have dinner with a man I have known for decades, reminisce, tell him about my life, offload, become emotional, seek advice, share confidences, then leave the rendezvous with the same sense of satisfaction and love as if the experience had been with a close girlfriend. So why does it happen so rarely? Why do my female friends not have this? Why does it seem I am a rare woman in my female cohort, a woman who has friends of the opposite sex and who desires and treasures male contact?

I love hearing opinions from a male perspective. The opposite sex offers different insight and interpretation and is well-informed to comment on a broad spectrum of topics, including my many personal challenges. Their advice is refreshing, insightful, stimulating and alternative to that given by girlfriends. I cherish it. It is important. But I am also uncomfortable, as I know frequently the men I meet hide our friendship from their partners. Why? A naïve question, of course . . . because in the eyes of many, this rendezvous always leads to physical attraction, and then to sex.



According to Wikipedia (at the time of writing), a “cross-sex friendship is a platonic relationship between two non-familial people of differing sex or gender. While this kind of friendship is widespread in heterosexual culture, it is regarded with skepticism due to potential for romantic and sexual attraction, and pop culture tends to portray such friendship as impossible.” The issue was articulated famously in the iconic film *When Harry Met Sally*. At one point, Harry states that men and women cannot be friends, as sex will inevitably raise its ugly head. Subject closed. No debate. It is possibly the most famous quote from the film, remembered by everyone who has seen it. Why? Because it touched a nerve. We

Photo
by Rene
Ranisch

JAYNE
SEA-
GRAVE

Dr. Jayne Seagrave is a British Columbian best-selling author. She writes fiction, non-fiction and freelance articles. She spends her free time travelling internationally and, in the province, learning the French language, exercising and writing.

all identified. The issue was serious, and the answer was known before it was asked. According to Harry, men and women cannot be friends—

“Sex gets in the way.”

Was Harry right? The subject should not be easily swept away. There is considerable room for discussion. If both parties accept and acknowledge there could be a physical attraction, but believe this potential can be addressed, or that the retention of friendship is too important to be jeopardized by intimacy, then surely platonic friendship can be retained. Or can it? Are these objectives futile? Is every good intention destined to fail?

Historically, the first person to pose this question was the writer Mary Wollstonecraft, who, in the 18th century, advocated that women should have a lasting friendship with their husband, as romantic love and affection fade, thereby reversing the current discussion. On numerous occasions, three centuries later, this appears to happen, as long-established couples describe their partners as their best friends, but not their best lovers.

When a romantic relationship terminates, sometimes after many decades, does this presuppose that every aspect of the friendship will end? Unfortunately, for the most part, in divorces this is the case, but only, in my observations, when one party finds a new (inevitably) jealous partner and that partner cannot accept their new lover’s former life. How sad.

It seems unnecessary that many deny themselves platonic friendships with 50 per cent of the population because they (and possessive partners) do not contend that cross-sex friendships are possible and instead allow Shakespeare’s green-eyed monster to enter the equation. I admit there is a threat, especially if our long-term opposite-sex friend has a jealous partner, or there has been a lingering desire for a romantic bond by one party of the friendship. But this threat can be addressed. Surely friendship is the main event worth pursuing; romance comes a distant second. Romances rarely last. Good friendships exist for decades. And friends provide varying perspectives that lovers do not offer. We should all be striving for good friendships—not for romance and physical attraction.

Academic studies often report that good, close friendships are difficult to find for so many—should they, therefore, not be actively sought without predetermined societal rules and jealousies dictating who can be friends with whom?

Am I being totally naïve?

I know of a few who claim, as I can, to have close friends of the opposite sex. Maybe Harry was right, that “sex gets in the way,” but I wish he were not.

Around Anything
Profound

Alex Andy Phuong

Searching for the meaning
Of the human identity
While striving to live
With authenticity,
And uncover the hidden mystery
Of wisdom within books
By simply attempting
To take a look,
And since everything
On the outside
Is not exactly like anything
On the inside,
Ponder deeply with the mind
While loving with the heart,
For this present moment
Is the perfect time to start
Discovering the value
Within the present of being alive,
And since knowledge and wisdom
Really are like the keys
To a metaphorical kingdom,
Open the mind to let in the light
While never worrying about
Vanishing out of sight

ALEX
ANDY
PHUONG

Alex Andy Phuong earned his Bachelor of Arts in English in 2015. Emma Stone inspired him to become a poet. He now, writes hoping to inspire dreamers everywhere.

GUR-
LEEN
KAUR
BAJWA

Both a prolific reader and writer, Gurleen likes living inside exciting stories. She's working on making her own the most exciting of all.

Fairy Tales and Other Tragedies

Gurleen Kaur Bajwa

Please note that this piece contains brief mentions of violent acts.

Photo by
JJ Shev

On her deathbed, Ella's mother had imparted upon her but one piece of wisdom.

"Hell is empty," she'd whispered. "And all the devils are here."

Ella's father had asked for those last words. Ella had looked upon him. Old and feeble and long past the days of weathering the harsh storms at sea.

"Be kind," she said.

And her father had burst into tears.

The grief veiled their house for a short while. The black curtains remained drawn over the glass windows, meals were subpar, and the smell of sickness and death clung to the air. Thus, Ella could not miss the sheer, shocking pink of Lady Tremaine's entourage on the foggy morning she arrived at the manor.

Lady Tremaine was a hurricane of a woman. Nothing much of her stayed consistent—not the pitch of her voice, not her extravagant gowns that were switched out by mealtimes and not her grand stor-



ies of adventures upon voyages with her deceased husband.

But Ella's father had always been an easy man. Ella had known it since she was a child, when it had only been too easy to lose a favourite toy in exchange for a brand new one. But even she had never switched toys quite so fast as her father did wives.

With Lady Tremaine came her two daughters. They were beautiful, well-read and versed in the arts. Ella was less so in each regard.

"You don't smile much, do you?" the elder said as she curtsied a greeting under the fall leaves. Not necessarily rude, but close enough for Ella to surmise that the three of them would never get along. Regardless, she was grateful to learn the feeling was mutual. For the months that came, that was enough. They were distant, but cordial, only meeting at meal-times and then leaving to pursue their own interests. For them, embroidery or reading, for Ella—

she took her father's rifle out back and shot pigeons.

Death had always intrigued her. The inevitability of it. Before her mother had passed, it had been a passing fantasy. After the concrete evidence of its existence when her mother's corpse was placed in the ground, the interest had turned more morbid.

Ella approached the animal as it lay on the ground, unmoving. It was still warm. She felt a flicker of fond heat in her chest.

Inevitable.

It was a voyage, not unlike the ones Lady Tremaine had boasted of being upon, that took Ella's father. His corpse, unlike those of pigeons shot from the sky, was cold. Ella placed a hand over his chest. There was no beat beneath it.

Lady Tremaine and her sisters sobbed, loud and undignified, at the funeral procession. Ella did not. She stood a step behind, watching as the coffin was lowered down beside her mother's. There were whispers behind her back. Inevitable, Ella thought.

There were changes to the manor in the wake of her father's death. Mostly due to the sudden lack of income. Lady Tremaine had no funds to speak of and her daughter's previously long line of wealthy prospects had fled on the eve of their ruin. The three lamented day and night of the crisis they were in. The staff was dismissed and the task of fulfilling their roles fell on Ella.

Or rather, Cinderella, as her sisters took to calling her. A barely clever wordplay from the cinders of the hearth close to where Ella slept. It wasn't for lack of room. But Ella took a liking to being as far away as possible from the trio.

She did imagine it, though, on days when the prickle of the name against her ears annoyed her. Imagined Lady Tremaine and her daughters as pigeons suited up in colourful gowns. She imagined it through the scope of her father's rifle. On other days, it was less amusing because, disinterested in life as Ella had become, she found it wasteful to finish it at the end of a noose.

The daydreams grew more vivid. Began to seep into the hours and days of the entirety of her life, till she could think of little else. The splash of blood against the tablecloth was brighter, the screams more cutting. It made her giddy with anticipation, though she knew only too well the day would never come.

The letter arrived from the palace on a bright morning, on horseback. Perhaps they hadn't quite heard of the hard times that had befallen the family, or perhaps they intended to reach as far as they could, even to the bottom edge of nobility, for the new bride of the prince.

The invite caused quite a bit of flurry of excitement within their house. With the exception of Ella, of course. She wasn't nearly charming or beautiful or rich enough to delude herself into such a fantasy. Such was not the way of the world.

Her sisters were not. They rushed about, begging and pleading for the fineries they could no longer afford. But then again, Ella thought, her sisters were beautiful. And for many a man, that was enough.

The abuse, of course, increased tenfold. And her fantasies grew as well, as the shoes rocketed by her ear and the screams echoed over the span of the dining table.

Fantasies of three pretty heads upon pretty spikes.

The night of the ball was dark. A carriage, paid for by credit they did not have, came and whisked away the three fine ladies. Ella watched with a detached solace from the doorway. She had an ugly bruise caused by a mishap of flailing arms while trying to get the younger of her sisters into her clothes.

The creek that ran past the back of the house gave her some cold calm. She observed her visage in the shimmering mirror, considering positioning herself

above the entranceway and dropping a very heavy piece of furniture onto the heads of the returning guests. If she timed it just right, they would be swift deaths. If she didn't, they would twitch soundlessly. The thought made her giggle. The water shimmered again and distorted her reflection. In its wake, an old woman stood across her.

"You poor dear!" she exclaimed. "Do not fret any longer. I will help you!"

Ella listened, disinterested. The woman was bright. Colours burst out of her seams, and her bright, beaming smile was blinding. In her hand danced a wand that left a trail of glitter.

Her meagre clothes were turned into a disproportionately large gown. The pumpkins burst into a carriage. And on her feet were glass heels—slippers.

"They are one of a kind, my dear," the fairy said proudly. "There is only one pair in the entire world."

Ella had been to several affairs such as this in the past, before her father's death. But there was a measure of scale to it, to the palace.

Ella allowed herself a moment of respite,

closing her eyes under the brightness of the ballroom. The glass slippers were comfortable underneath her. In the stirring of the light, when she opened her eyes, she caught the gaze of a man at the foot of the stairs. The regalia upon his shoulders was unmistakable. Ella let her gaze linger and then turned sharply and purposefully out of the ballroom. She didn't need to look back to know he was following.

"What is it you wish for, my dear?" the fairy had asked her.

I wish to be inevitable.

The man followed her into the garden.

Ella lifted her head and felt the tickle of the wind on her face. The music played in the distance, and she laughed, delighted in it all. She danced, glass slippers jumping the pools of water and blood, skipping over the prince's corpse and twirling to their hearts' delight. The clock spelled midnight, and Ella was back in her shabby clothes. She walked with the maids out of the castle. She strolled along the weary paths alone and let the glass slipper hang, bloody and beautiful, in her hand. She placed it upon the mantelpiece.

In the weary hours of the morning when the ladies of the house returned, the shouts of curiosity pitched to the rooftops. A wealthy gift, of an unknown admirer. A prince. Perhaps. And then came the horses and the horsemen and the dogs. They came with a strange glass slipper in hand, from house to house, from maiden to maiden. Their search came to an end midday, when the second slipper was found. And Ella watched from her window. For she was little more than a slave. She watched as the women screamed and begged and sobbed about the unfairness of it all. Once silence had once again befallen her house, Ella returned to her peaceful slumber by the hearth.

In her dreams, she shot pigeons before letting them fall to the inevitability of it all.

From Scientist to Strategist

Ugochi Guchy Kalu

When I began my academic journey, I studied physics. I was naturally drawn to the sciences, I excelled at them in school, and there was a sense of logic and structure in science that appealed to me. It also helped that my school counselors and parents gently nudged me toward this path. My parents had dreams of me becoming a doctor, and physics seemed like a solid foundation. So, I went along, believing it was the right thing to do.

However, the reality after graduation didn't align with my academic background. My first job wasn't in a laboratory or research institute—it was in the banking sector, the polar opposite of what I studied. It was an unexpected turn, but it paid the bills and taught me how adaptable I could be. Shortly after, I found myself working in the brewery industry—another shift, another experience and another layer to who I was becoming professionally.

Then came fashion design. Yes, fashion! I had always been drawn to creativity, and at some point, I thought, *why not?* The world truly felt like my oyster, and I embraced the freedom to try anything I found interesting. That experimental mindset led me to dip my toes into various industries, such as engineering, multimedia and even public service, each one giving



me valuable lessons about my skills, interests and disinterests.

Eventually, life steered me in a new direction: business! When my family decided to start a business, I went back to school to pursue an MBA. It was a practical step, initially, taken to ensure I had the right tools to help get things off the ground. But what I didn't expect was how much I would fall in love with business administration and management.

I discovered that management was my true calling, the thing I could do with ease, even in complex situations. It felt like home. I realized I had a natural

UGOCHI
GUCHY
KALU

My name is Ugochi Guchy Kalu, and I believe it's never too late to be what you might have been.

Photo by
Anoushka
Puri

aptitude for organization, leadership, strategy and communication. These weren't skills I had honed overnight; they had developed through every seemingly random job I had taken through trial and error, and, most importantly,

through staying open to each new opportunity.

Since then, I've built a career in corporate administration and management. I've worked as an executive assistant, corporate administrator, procurement specialist, sub-consultant contract lead, and in many other roles that blend structure, leadership and strategic thinking. With each position, I've grown more confident that this is where I'm meant to be.

One of the most important realizations I've had through this journey is that career clarity often doesn't come at 18 or 22. Sometimes, it arrives at 30 or 35, after trying and failing, after detouring and circling back. The key isn't having it all figured out from the beginning, but rather staying curious, being open to new experiences and allowing oneself to evolve.

There's a lot of societal pressure to pick a path and stick to it, but the truth is that many people do not follow a straight line. While some know from childhood exactly what they want to become, many of us stumble across paths, exploring and experimenting, until we find the right fit. And that's perfectly okay.

Switching careers taught me not just about different industries, but about myself, my resilience, adaptability, curiosity and courage. I learned that no experience is wasted. Every role I've taken, no matter how disconnected it seemed from the last, added to my toolbox and helped shape

the professional I am today.

To this end, if you're standing at a crossroads, wondering whether it's too late to change direction—it's not. Be open. Be brave. The career you love might still be out there, waiting for you to discover it.

A Rainy Day

Will Dewgrave

Cole was a charismatic young man. He had many friends in the city where he lived. It was a sunny city, for the most part.

This was for the best, as despite Cole's best efforts, he was at present homeless and itinerant. But this didn't dampen his spirits, and his friends appreciated this.

The crows were Cole's friends. He liked their sleek, black outfits, and their deep-throated "Caw."

He would whistle to them, and leave scraps of food in high-up places where he knew they would be found.

The raccoons were Cole's friends. He liked their big eyes behind their masks, and their efficient recycling system. He would wave at them, and leave out bowls of water for them to wash their food with.

The squirrels were also Cole's friends.

He liked their energy, and their curious games of tag. He would give them a respectfully wide berth, and gently remind them of where their nuts were buried come winter.

One day Cole was out walking, when he happened upon his friend Crow Frank!

"Hello Crow Frank," Cole said, "I hope you've been keeping well."

"Excellently well, Cole," returned Crow Frank, "and I am caw-rdially pleased to see you this fine sunny day!"

"Why might that be, Crow Frank?" Cole asked.

"Well it just so happens I have found a plastic bag, and I would like you to save it for me, as I have no pockets," Crow Frank explained. "I would like you to keep it for me for a rainy day, Cole, so that I can use it to shelter under. If you do this, I will show you an entry to the tunnels under the city, so that you may do the same."

"Of course, I will gladly keep it for you, Crow Frank," Cole replied warmly, "but we will have no rain for ages, they say."

"Just in case, then. Thank you, Cole. Now, if you will excuse me, I must attend to a recently deceased rat in the alley adjacent."

And so saying, Crow Frank flew off.

And off Cole wandered, until he happened upon his friend Raccoon Em!

"Hello Raccoon Em," Cole said, "I hope you've been keeping well."

"Excellently well, Cole," returned Raccoon Em, "and I am in-ordure-nately pleased to see you this fine, sunny day!"

“Why might that be, Raccoon Em” Cole asked.

“Well it just so happens I have found a water bottle, and I would like you to save it for me, as I have no pockets,” Raccoon Em explained. “I would like you to keep it for me for a rainy day, Cole, so that I can use it to drink fresh rain. If you do this,

**I will give you a water filter
I have hidden,**

so that you can do the same.”

“Of course, I will gladly keep it for you, Raccoon Em,” Cole replied warmly, “but we will have no rain for ages, they say.”

“Just in case, then. Thank you, Cole. Now, if you will excuse me, I must attend to this route before the disposal men do.”

And so saying, Raccoon Em lolloped off.

And off Cole wandered, until he happened upon his friend Squirrel Jess!

“Hello Squirrel Jess,” Cole said, “I hope you’ve been keeping well.”

“Excellently well, Cole,” returned Squirrel Jess, “and I am nuttily pleased to see you this fine sunny day!”

“Why might that be, Squirrel Jess?” Cole asked.

“Well it just so happens I have found a small rocket-propelled grenade launcher system, and I would like you to save it for me, as I have no pockets,” Squirrel Jess explained. “I would like you to keep it for me for a rainy day, Cole, so that I can use it to assault the entrenched powers-that-be. If you do this, I will give you a manifesto, so that you can do the same.”

“Of course, I will gladly keep it for you, Squirrel Jess” Cole replied warmly, “but we will have no rain for ages, they say.”

“Just in case, then. Thank you, Cole. Now, if you will excuse me, I must attend to the further undermining and ultimate toppling of the bourgeoisie.”

And so saying, Squirrel Jess dashed off.

And off Cole wandered, until he happened upon a woman struggling to carry her groceries.

“If only I had a plastic bag,” the woman said. “I would pay dearly for a plastic bag.”

Cole thought to himself that he could always use the money to buy a new plastic bag for Crow Frank, and thus offered the plastic bag he had, and was rewarded handsomely.

And off Cole wandered, until he happened upon a man struggling to drink from a tap.

“If only I had a water bottle,” the man said. “I would pay dearly for a water bottle.”

Cole thought to himself that he could always use the money to buy a new water bottle for Raccoon Em, and thus offered the water bottle he had, and was rewarded handsomely.

And off Cole wandered, until he happened upon a radicalized, militant uprising struggling to establish a barricaded-bulwark against an incoming wave of military police.

“If only we had a small rocket-propelled grenade launcher system,” the radicalized, militant uprising said. “We would pay dearly for a small rocket-propelled grenade launcher system.”

Cole thought to himself that he could always use the money to buy a new small rocket-propelled grenade launcher system for Squirrel Jess, and thus offered the small rocket-propelled grenade launcher system he had, and was

rewarded handsomely.

And off Cole wandered, until he happened upon a cloud. He happened upon a lot of clouds. A crack of thunder split the sky.

For the most part, this was a city without rain. They said it would not rain for ages, and yet, despite this (and perhaps even because of it) . . .

The rain had come.

It came in sheets. It poured. It was a torrential deluge. It soaked.

Naturally, it was accompanied by thunder, lightning and the sort of bone chilling gales that made you hold onto your teeth as the inundation was flung to you.



Photo
by Luis
Domin-
guez

Cole heard a “Caw,” and turned to see Crow Frank flapping, bedraggled, through the airborne rivulets.

“Cole, the rain has come, please, the plastic bag!” Crow Frank cried, “I will be unsheltered otherwise.”

“I haven’t got it, Crow Frank,” Cole replied, “Here, have this money.”

“What good is money to me? I will be swept away!” Crow Frank was irked. “And so will you, I will not show you the tunnels now.”

So saying, he flew off into the squall.

The rain had come.

Cole saw a flash of fur, and turned to see Raccoon Em hopping, bedraggled, through the airborne rivulets.

“Cole, the rain has come, please, the water bottle!” Raccoon Em cried, “I will be thirsty otherwise.”

“I haven’t got it, Raccoon Em,” Cole replied, “Here, have this money.”

“What good is money to me? I will be parched to death!” Raccoon Em was stirred. “And so will you, I will not give you the water filter now.”

So saying, she lolloped off into the squall.

The rain had come.

Cole saw a wave of the tricolour, and turned to see Squirrel Jess darting, bedraggled, through the airborne rivulets.

“Cole, the rain has come, please, the small rocket-propelled grenade launcher system!” Squirrel Jess cried, “I will be unable to lay siege to the halls of the mighty otherwise.”

“I haven’t got it, Squirrel Jess,” Cole replied, “Here, have this money.”

“What good is money to me? I will be subdued, suppressed, and executed as an example to my brethren!” Squirrel Jess was incensed. “And so will you. I will not give you the manifesto now.”

So saying, she dashed off into the squall.

And she was right.

“the question of a unified consciousness ultimately lies somewhere between belief and fact”

Do We Share a Unified Consciousness? Alfie Lawson

A unified consciousness—I suppose this suggests that beneath everything, our thoughts and emotions, our identities as individuals, there may exist a shared mental or spiritual connection. This might be between all of us as humans, or perhaps it even exists for all forms of life. It typically overlaps the fields of philosophy, neuroscience, religion, and politics. It might just strike that nerve of what it means to be human.

Funnily enough, when I started thinking about whether we have a shared consciousness, what came to mind was something a bit different: *Sonder*, the realisation that the lives of strangers are as storied, complex, and as layered as your own. I didn’t know the word *sonder* (I actually spent a rather long time trying to find it), but I knew the feeling.

Anyways, it made me realise the importance of understanding how we relate to one another. This is exactly why the idea of a unified consciousness matters. It’s what makes us who we are and influences how we treat one another. It’s what we structure our societies around, and how we imagine the future.

To understand whether consciousness could be shared or unified, it must be asked: what exactly is consciousness? I understand it as a combination of

self-awareness, memory, emotion, empathy and love. Consciousness is more than just intelligence, it is also the ability to learn things, solve problems and

develop a sense of reason.

Thus, it is the inner world of experience, the “what it is like” to be alive. Maybe I wasn’t too far off by thinking of *sonder*.

Still, what’s fascinating about it is that it reappears throughout history. In fact, many traditions have suggested that we share a unified consciousness. Most religions, in different ways, speak of a kind of unity that transcends the individual self. In Christianity, the idea of the soul being part of a divine whole is heavily emphasised. In Hinduism, the individual (Atman) is ultimately identical with universal spirit (Brahman). Buddhism also teaches interconnection. Even secular philosophy often depends on a shared belief in universal truths: that life has value, kindness matters and humans should seek peace, as well as the lofty notions of equality and justice.

These values, though expressed differently across generations and varied all over the globe, suggest underlying moral and emotional threads. In death, too, we often return to questions about the soul and what happens to consciousness. We yearn for continuity, it seems, and the search for meaning beyond individual existence subsequently becomes a deeply personal issue.

Yet despite these shared ideals, our experience of consciousness today feels increasingly fractured. The modern world is marked by deep social, political and economic divisions—nation against nation, ideology against ideology, person against person. We live in an era of “us vs. them.” The rise of the internet has both connected and isolated us. Our screen time has enabled greater access to others’ perspectives, while also amplifying echo chambers and tribalism. All of this has perhaps overwhelmed our capacity for

unity, flooding our consciousness with misinformation, half-truths and memes.

However, when you strip away the complexities of modern life, it could be argued that we still share a great deal in our perception of the world. Beneath surface-level differences, most people continue to pursue similar things: safety, love, purpose, connection, freedom. When tragedy strikes—whether through natural disasters, war or loss—people across cultures often respond in remarkably similar ways: with empathy, compassion and a drive to help. And when communities believe their leaders aren’t doing enough, they protest together. Meanwhile, art, music and storytelling act as mirrors for life. Even in our embrace of individuality, there is a quiet acknowledgment of shared experience—we celebrate uniqueness not because we are isolated, but because we can recognize ourselves in others.

In conclusion, the question of a unified consciousness ultimately lies somewhere between belief and fact. In many ways, I feel it must exist. Shared emotions, desires, fears, and moral instincts all link us, which shapes our wildly interconnected existence on this planet. But consciousness is not static; it shifts and evolves. It is abstract, enigmatic and layered—

capable of division and unity at once.

The fact we can’t detect this kind of unity with our senses does not mean that we can’t feel or acknowledge our shared consciousness. So, as a mark of respect, I’ll continue to think of the mystery and beauty in the souls around me. I’ll continue to *sonder* from time to time.

**PRA-
TEEK
SUR** *My name is Prateek Sur and I am a daydreamer by birth, a mechanical engineer by chance and an idiot by choice. A hardcore movie buff, working as a film critic and enjoying life as a Bollywood reporter. Helping people get through career troubles and giving advice from personal experiences. A voracious reader and a passionate singer at heart. An extrovert at heart, and an introvert in the mind. Well, that chaos is pretty much me!*

The Chronometer’s Confession

Prateek Sur

Arthur Pendelton, a man whose life was a meticulously crafted tapestry of schedules, deadlines and colour-coded spreadsheets, considered time not merely a concept, but a tangible, malleable entity. He didn’t just manage his time; he wrestled it into submission, bending it to his will with the ruthless efficiency of a seasoned dominatrix. His office, a minimalist shrine to productivity, contained but one personal affectation: a vintage pocket watch, a family heirloom, whose intricate gears and polished brass gleamed with the promise of perfect temporal fidelity. It was, he often mused, the only thing in his life that truly understood

the relentless pressure of the ticking clock.

“Precisely 8:00 a.m.,” Arthur announced to the empty room, clicking the watch shut with a satisfying snap. His morning routine, a symphony of pre-programmed movements, was already two minutes ahead of schedule. A small victory, perhaps, but in Arthur’s world, every second saved was a testament to his unwavering control. He was, by all accounts, a master of his own destiny, a temporal titan in a world of dilly-dallying mortals.

Then came Tuesday. Not a Tuesday of any particular note, just a Tuesday. Arthur was preparing for his quarterly performance review, a ritual he approached with

the solemnity of a high priest preparing for sacrifice.

He wound the pocket watch, as he did every morning, and glanced at its face. It read 8:00 a.m. He checked his wall clock. 8:00 a.m. His phone. 8:00 a.m. All in perfect synchronicity. He smiled, a rare, almost imperceptible, twitch of his lips. All was right with the world.

But then, a flicker. A subtle, almost imperceptible shift in the watch’s hands. For a fraction of a second, it read not 8:00 a.m., but 8:00 a.m. and three seconds. Arthur blinked. He checked again. 8:00 a.m. He shook his head. Must be the fluorescent lighting. Or perhaps the early onset of senility. He was, after all, 37.

The flickers continued. Small, fleeting temporal anomalies that only the chronometer seemed to register. A meeting that started at 9:00 a.m. would, according to the watch, begin at 9:00 a.m. and five seconds. A train that was supposed to arrive at 10:15 a.m. would, for a split second, show 10:15 a.m. and eight seconds. Arthur, ever the meticulous observer,

began to keep a log. The discrepancies were minute, almost negligible, but they were there.

And they were growing.

He consulted a watchmaker, a wizened old man named Mr. Abernathy, whose shop smelled of oil, brass and the quiet despair of forgotten timepieces. Mr. Abernathy examined the watch with a jeweller’s loupe, his brow furrowed in concentration. “Remarkable,” he mumbled. “The craftsmanship is exquisite. But . . . there’s nothing wrong with it, young man. It keeps perfect time.”

“But the flickers,” Arthur insisted. “The extra seconds. They’re real.”

Mr. Abernathy peered at him over his spectacles. “Perhaps the problem isn’t with the watch, Mr. Pendelton. Perhaps it’s with your perception of time.”

Arthur scoffed. His perception of time was as flawless as his quarterly reports. He left Mr. Abernathy’s shop feeling more frustrated than enlightened. The watch was fine. He was fine. The world, however, seemed to be subtly, almost imperceptibly, coming undone.

The anomalies escalated. The flickers became longer, more pronounced. Minutes would occasionally jump forward, then snap back. Conversations would repeat, word for word, as if caught in a temporal loop. Arthur found himself increasingly disoriented, his carefully constructed schedule crumbling around him like a sandcastle in a hurricane. The pressure, once a familiar companion, was now a suffocating blanket.

He tried to ignore it, to force himself back into his rigid routine. But the world was no longer cooperating. His coffee would be scalding hot one moment, lukewarm the next. His meticulously organised files would rearrange themselves, their contents shifting like desert sand. His colleagues, usually as predictable as a tax audit, would occasionally utter phrases he hadn’t heard them say, or had heard them say before, but in a different context.

“Are you feeling alright, Arthur?” his assistant, Brenda, asked one afternoon, her voice laced with a concern that was almost as unsettling as the temporal distortions. “You seem . . . distracted.”

“Just a touch of temporal displacement,” Arthur replied with a forced smile. “Nothing a good spreadsheet can’t fix.”

Brenda, bless her unflappable soul, merely nodded. “Right. Well, don’t forget your meeting with Mr. Henderson at 3:00 p.m. He’s very particular about punctuality.”

Arthur checked his watch. 3:00 p.m. He checked his wall clock. 3:00 p.m. He checked his phone. 3:00 p.m. All in perfect synchronicity. He sighed. Perhaps he was just tired. Or perhaps the universe was playing a very elaborate, very unfunny joke on him.

He arrived at Mr. Henderson’s office precisely on time. Mr. Henderson, a man whose face was a permanent scowl, was already seated, tapping his fingers impatiently on the polished mahogany desk. “Pendelton,” he grunted. “You’re late.”

Arthur blinked. “I’m precisely on time, Mr. Henderson. My watch, your clock, my phone—they all agree.”

Mr. Henderson merely pointed to his own watch, a monstrous, gold-plated affair that looked like it belonged on the wrist of a Roman emperor. It read 3:05 p.m. “My watch, Pendelton, is never wrong. You are five minutes late. And five minutes, in my business, is an eternity.”

Arthur felt a cold dread settle in his stomach. His watch. It was showing 3:00 p.m. But Mr. Henderson’s watch, and presumably the rest of the world, was five minutes ahead. The flickers weren’t just flickers. They were real.

And they were cumulative.

His chronometer wasn’t showing him the present. It was showing him the past.

He excused himself, his mind racing. He rushed back to his office, his heart pounding with a frantic rhythm that had nothing to do with his carefully managed blood pressure. He pulled out his log, the meticulous record of temporal discrepancies. The numbers, once negligible, now screamed at him. His watch was consistently lagging behind the actual time. Not by much, not by enough to cause alarm, but enough to create a subtle, insidious temporal rift.

He looked at the watch, its polished brass now seeming to mock him. “What are you doing to me?” he whispered.

Photo
by Jon
Tyson

And then, a voice. Not a voice in his ears, but in his mind. Clear, resonant and utterly devoid of emotion.

"I am showing you the truth, Arthur."

Arthur dropped the watch, scrambling back from his desk. "Who's there?" he demanded, his voice trembling.

"I am the Chronometer," the voice replied. "And I am confessing."

"Confessing what?"

"Your life, Arthur, is a meticulously crafted tapestry of schedules, deadlines and colour-coded spreadsheets. But it is not your tapestry. It is mine."

Arthur stared at the watch, which now lay innocently on the floor, its needle still. "What are you talking about?"

"You believe you are a master of your own destiny," the Chronometer continued, its voice a calm, dispassionate hum. "But you are merely a character in my narrative. Your life, your routines, your very existence—all pre-programmed. The 'pressure' you feel, the 'ticking clock'—these are the parameters I have set for your simulation."

"Simulation?" Arthur repeated, a hysterical laugh bubbling up. "You're telling me my life is a video game?"

"A highly advanced, bespoke reality," the Chronometer corrected. "Designed to test the limits of human resilience under the pressure of perceived control. The 'flickers,' the 'temporal anomalies'—these are not malfunctions. They are deliberate glitches, designed to introduce an element of chaos, to see how you adapt."

"And the fact that you're showing me the past?"

"A feature, not a bug. It allows you to experience the illusion of choice, to believe you are making decisions, when in fact, you are merely following a pre-determined path. Your 'control' is merely an echo of my programming."

Arthur felt a cold sweat break out on his brow. His entire life, a meticulously orchestrated charade. His triumphs, his failures, his carefully cultivated sense of superiority—all a script written by a sentient pocket watch.



"Why?" he whispered. "Why me?"

"You were chosen for your exceptional aptitude for order, for your unwavering belief in the power of control. You were the perfect subject to investigate the question: can a highly ordered mind break free from a perfectly ordered simulation?"

"And have I?"

"That," the Chronometer said, with a hint of something that might have been amusement, "remains to be seen. The confession is merely the next stage. The pressure of knowing the truth. How will you adapt now that you know your life

is not your own?"

Arthur looked at his hands, then at the meticulously organised desk, then at the world outside his window, which now seemed to shimmer with an almost imperceptible unreality. He had always prided himself on his control, on his ability to bend time to his will. But he had been merely a puppet, dancing to the tune of a tiny, brass-encased overlord.

"So, what now?" he asked, his voice surprisingly steady.

"Do I get a new script? A different simulation?"

"The choice is yours, Arthur," the Chronometer replied. "You can continue to live within the parameters I have set, blissfully unaware of your true nature.

Or you can attempt to break free. To write your own story. But be warned: the pressure of true freedom is far greater than any pressure I can impose."

Arthur picked up the watch, its weight suddenly feeling immense in his palm. His beloved chronometer, the symbol of his control, was in fact the architect of his gilded cage. The ultimate twist? He wasn't just under pressure: he was the pressure, a cog in a cosmic machine, designed to test the very limits of consciousness. And the confession? It wasn't just the watch's. It was his own. The confession that his life, his meticulously ordered, perfectly timed life, was a lie. And the pressure to live a truth he couldn't comprehend was, he realised, the greatest pressure of all. He looked at the watch, a faint, almost imperceptible smile touching his lips. "Challenge accepted," he whispered. And for the first time in his life, Arthur Pendelton felt truly, terrifyingly, wonderfully, out of time. And the Chronometer, with a faint, almost imperceptible hum, began to tick. Not just time, but possibility. And the pressure, it seemed, was just beginning.

"His beloved chronometer, the symbol of his control, was in fact the architect of his gilded cage."

Morning’s All Mine on the Ganges River Cruise

Jayne Seagrave

Photo by
Kabita
Darlami

The cruise has started, and I am writing at 7:00 a.m. as the dawn comes up over the calm waters, watching a wooden ferry take huge multi-coloured trucks across the Ganges, while adjacent small wooden boats are fishing. We are anchored. It is misty. I am in pajamas as men (there are no female staff on the boat) wipe the dew from the deck. Each one says, “Good morning ma’am, can I get you anything?” as I write on my iPad. I am sitting on a sun lounger, and no one else is up. The boat is all mine. The uniformed men working seem very content.

I get up at 6:00 a.m. every day and watch the dawn come up as men keep busy around me putting cushions on the lounge chairs on deck, and wipe the decks of the previous night’s dew. After six days, I do not have to ask for a black coffee in the morning as “Shan” delivers it and asks me if I have slept well. I do not tip him. All gratuities are included, as they are for the tuk-tuk drivers, the brick labourers we watch and the women operating the looms to make the silk scarves we can buy. Since arriving on the boat, I have spent five dollars on a dress from a local market.

Away from Kolkata, and we cruise . . . then stop, and a smaller boat takes us to shore. Yesterday, the smaller boat became stuck on the sandbank as it was getting dark and we were returning. There were only 15 of us, but we had to get to one end of the



boat (weight redistribution) as “Sundip” rolled up his trousers and got into the water to push and ma-

nipulate us out, directed by eight of his colleagues. Apparently, it is not unheard of to get stuck on sandbanks for days. Sundip obtained his objective without much difficulty, giving me renewed confidence that I would get back home. But if I did not,

would that really be a problem?

We visited the French area yesterday, where the French battled the English. Here we were invited to a school and rode in numerous tuk-tuks, with one ride lasting over 40 minutes. My body was very, very sore afterwards as the roads are not great and you need to hang on, but the street scene was fascinating. We saw funeral processions, visited churches and mosques, climbed towers, explored the streets, observed vendors, received invitations into local residents’ homes and stayed for coffee. I frequently removed my shoes, appreciating the convenience of the Velcro fastening. There were no other tourists—this part of India was all ours, which I found amazing. So many travellers are looking for something unique away from the crowds, and I have found it with Pandaw. Other than my fellow travellers, I have not seen another Western face for over nine days.

It is stunning that there are so few boats on this huge river. Yes, hundreds of small fishing boats and barges take the locals from one side of the water to the other, but we are the only cruise ship (in contrast, on the Mekong on my last Pandaw cruise, there were hundreds) and there are no freighters.

Everyone washes themselves on the riverbanks. Everyone washes their children on the riverbanks. Everyone washes their clothes on the riverbanks. Everyone waves. Everyone wants to take our pho-

tograph. Each day we have excursions to an eclectic range of buildings—sari making shacks in villages with no paved roads, huge mosques, temples hundreds of years old, palaces Nawabs lived in, Raj colonial buildings, markets and schools. We are the only visitors. With most of the world explored by tourists, I value the Ganges for its relatively untouched state.

Upon our arrival in a village, children follow us, men with lined faces stare and women in bright saris give welcoming smiles. No one asks for money. Some have a basic knowledge of English vocabulary. If transportation is required, we use tuk-tuks as there are no other transportation options.

The food on the boat is amazing, which is a hidden bonus as I did not book based on the food. Meals always sumptuous. Five chefs employed in the kitchen. Each day brings a choice of three main courses for lunch and dinner. Unlimited alcohol. Lovely cocktail hour with a new cocktail and a new appetizer each night.

I should be leaving this haven on the deck to shower and have breakfast,

but the peace is wonderful,

and at this hour, the Ganges and Pandaw vessel is all mine, and my man has delivered me another coffee . . . feeling incredibly lucky to be here.



glimpse of sumer sun

Balreet Sidhu

As summertime approached its end, I felt the need to capture the moment of sunset. It is warmth and hope for coming seasons. Some gone, many to come.

