

Question and Answer



"Apple pie is
made out of
stars"



If you want to know how I feel about my recent decision of becoming a vegan you should watch South Park episode called “Smug Alert”¹. In the episode, South Park residents become the largest community in America using hybrid cars. Happy about saving their environment, blown up with pride like a helium balloons, and ignorant about their other environmental decisions, they congratulate each other. Through their action, the South Park citizens cause a sudden increase in smog over their town. The storm caused by the climate change, destroys the city. Luckily none of the citizens of this little town gets hurt. After the catastrophe, people gather on the big square to discuss their future. They decide that they should no longer use hybrid cars. The reason for this decision is that they are not able to do follow their environmental friendly ways without an overwhelming pride, which in turn, causes pollution worse than following their old habits. Filled with new hope, they decide to re-build their destroyed town and buy gasoline cars. Lastly, everyone leaves the square forgetting about what happened, and learning absolutely nothing. For me this South Park episode is a perfect example of how our

civilization (with myself at the very beginning) treats and deals with environment nowadays.

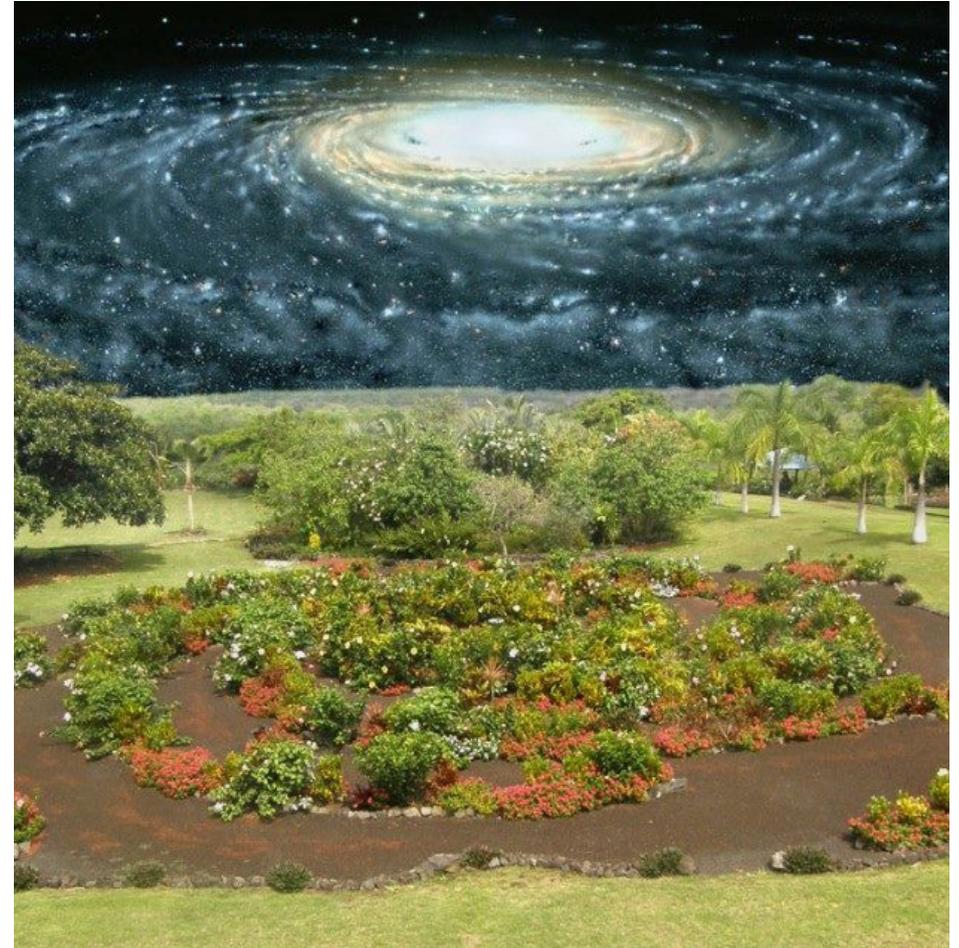
Coming back to a present moment, I just came to school. On my way I encountered a huge Coca Cola billboard commercial newly placed over a building. Close up of a young, beautiful woman's face is printed on the banner. This woman's half way open red lips are showing perfectly straight, white like the arctic snow, teeth. On her bottom lip, a tip of a glass Cola bottle appears. Looking at this image makes me think that maybe this was what I was hoping for by making the decision to become a vegan. My dream was to be tall and skinny blond woman, wearing light blue thigh jeans, sipping Cola from time to time, sitting on the sunny beach.

In this life I am not this woman and I guess I will never be. I live in a city called Amsterdam, in which instead of sun, rain falls on my face almost every day. My skin tone is far from the velvet fabric, which the girl from the commercial has. My lips are small, teeth rather yellow than white, and two front ones separated by a huge Mariana Trench size gap in between them. These space defect over the years costed me a permanent change in my body

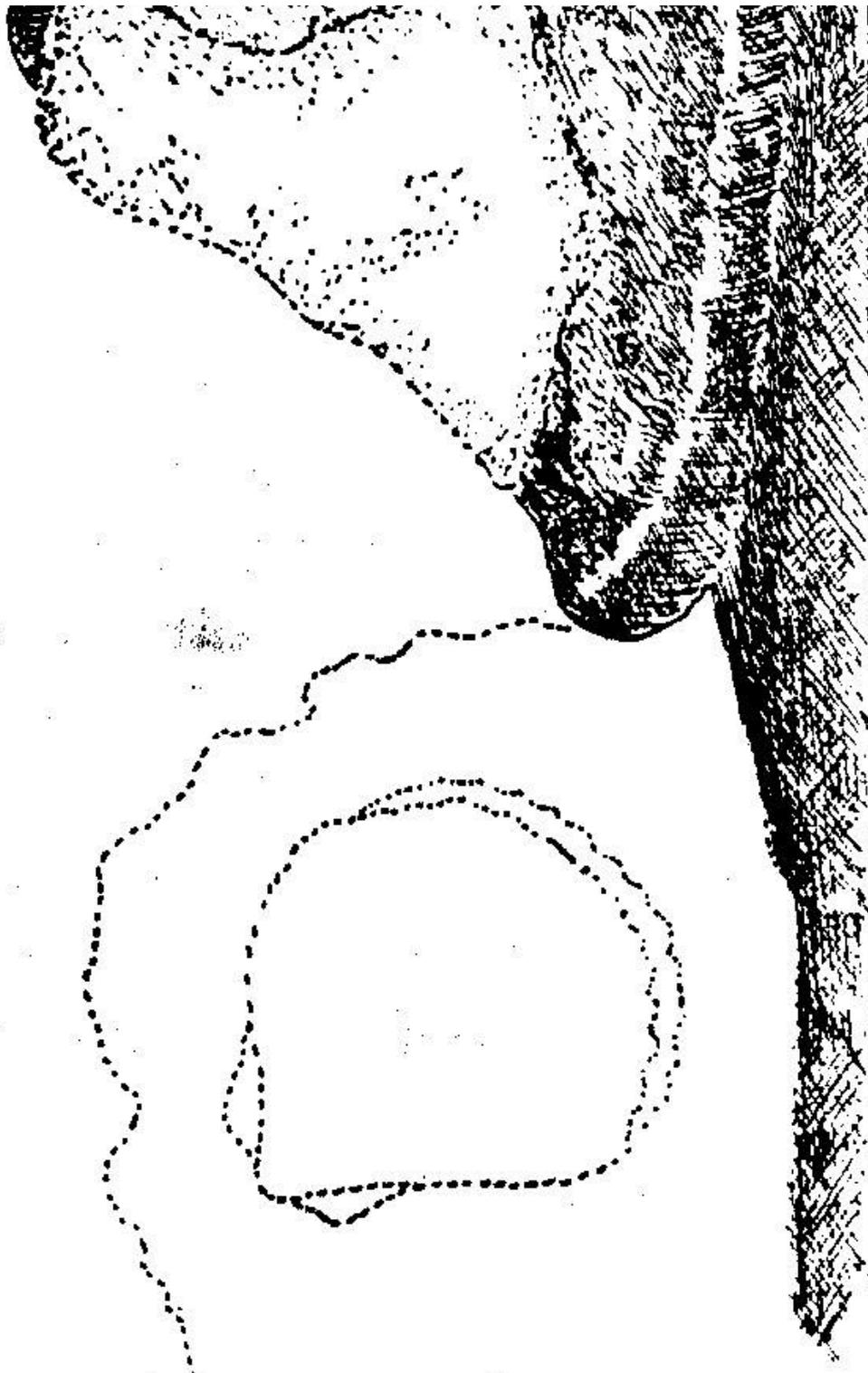
facial language. I never smile with my open mouth, I am too ashamed of the gap between my teeth. I almost never smile. The only moments when that happens is when I listen to Carl Sagan talking about how all living beings of this planet are triumphs of natural evolution. When I hear it I start to believe that this includes me as well. Am I really a miracle of life? Me, with the feathery hair, short legs, saggy breast and long nose? It is hard to believe it, but there are those moments in which I do. Thinking about something so huge and endless, which surrounds us like cosmic space, makes me forget about all my troubles, the doubts existing in my head, the pain, and the disappointment. Vastness of interstellar space gives my life another meaning, one that has to be felt. However, because I am using language in order to communicate what is in my head, I will use a simplification in the form of quote, to give you an example.

“The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of star stuff.” This is a quote by my beloved Carl Sagan in one of his episodes of

the “Cosmos” television series from 1980 ². First I encountered this idea watching Neil de Grasse Tyson in his Cosmos series, which is the newer version of the show made by Carl Sagan. Started discovering the statement that earthlings are being made out of stars in pop culture for example-. Moby “People they come together. People they fall apart .No one can stop us now, cause we are all made of stars”. Among others with similar outlook were spiritual teacher/public speaker Eckhart Tolle, Albert Einstein, David Bohm and many others Yet for me, this is a discovery that is on par with the discovery of fire. Excited about this from time to time, I would walk around sharing this beautiful truth with other people. I wanted to make sure that others know it as well. What I would usually get in exchange was a soft tap on my left shoulder with a smile similar to one that parent gives it's child when seeing hers/his first drawing and saying - good job!



" I see the
back of my
head in the
mirror"



Us (earthlings), originate from carbon based biology, taking its core from one cell organisms. This fact, combined with the knowledge that all of earthling's atoms came out of stars, convinces me of the idea that WE ARE ALL ONE.

In parallel to my thoughts, I discovered a theoretical physicist who is interested in quantum theory, neurophysiology, and philosophy of the mind named David Bohm. In his book called "Wholeness and implicate order"³, he explains his theory about implicate order. In short, the implicate order suggests that everything (every existing element in the universe) has a field, and this field unfolds the whole as well as the whole is enfolded in it. As we can imagine that the universe we live in is not one and only but rather one of many other existing universes as well as each atom in our body is a universe itself which we can zoom into more and more and discover other universes to infinity. Implicate order places every existing object in a universe as an ever-changing entity. I want to compare a universe to 'a soup'. Every day, into this delicious dish, new ingredients and spices are being added. Next, those ingredients become overcooked and fall into tiny pieces creating thick mushy pulp. To prevent complete stillness of

the soup water is added. When the soup pot is close to becoming full, evaporating water aligns the level of liquid so the dish will never boil over. I myself, as an ingredient of 'the soup' feel fine swimming around in the pot. But I am also 'a cook'. I am a chef in the restaurant of my own body, cooking my own 'entity' made out of my own thoughts. And lately, I started feeling pretty alone, blurred, and mixed up in my kitchen. - I am not sure about this whole 'soup' thing help comes to comfort my mind in the form of a German zoologist named Jacob van Uexull, with his concept on “ (...) infinite variety of perceptual worlds that, though they are uncommunicative and reciprocally exclusive, are all (...) linked together as if in gigantic musical score “⁴. What Uexull does, is distinguish an objective space of a specie as a space where this creature is living, from the 'environment-world' which is made out of things that interest this animal.

What is interesting to me is the fact, that despite of the separation of different species universes and the fact that those universes are separate and as none communicative as they can be, all beings live in an amazing harmony and fulfillment with each other. The fact that without bacteria humans would not be able to digest

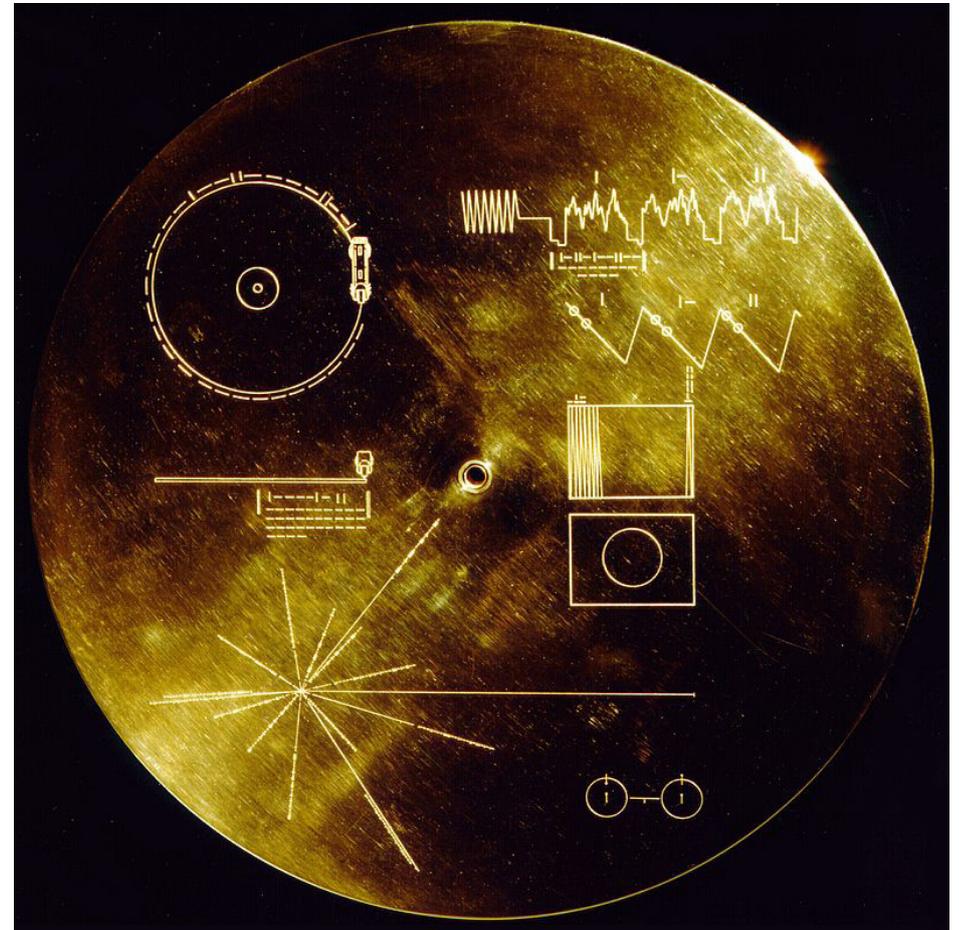
their food is a mere beginning of the mutualism, symbiosis, co-adaptation and so on, happening all around us. Now gazing breathy on Wikipedia on that subject, aside from large list of references and books written by people who 'understand' it. I found a mathematical equations which are supposed to explain what mutualism is in biology.⁵ That, makes it clear that perhaps other, wiser people 'Do' comprehend the order and chaos of nature and universe from which we originated and by which we are surrounded. But when I move back in human history, looking at the influences by Sigmund Freud's idea about human brain being an electrical machine. I look at Jay Forester, a cybernetic engineer, who developed this thought about human brains, societies and ecosystems living in networks of controlling them feedback loops which can be defined by computers.⁶ The thought that computers will bring stability and balance in nature. All these things start causing me to have second thoughts. My uncertainty becomes skepticism, my ambiguity becomes confusion, my suspicions turn into doubt, and shift into disbelief of the coherent understanding of anything by anyone.

I am not trying to take away the 'understanding' of Uexull. However, I would like to point out his 'under-

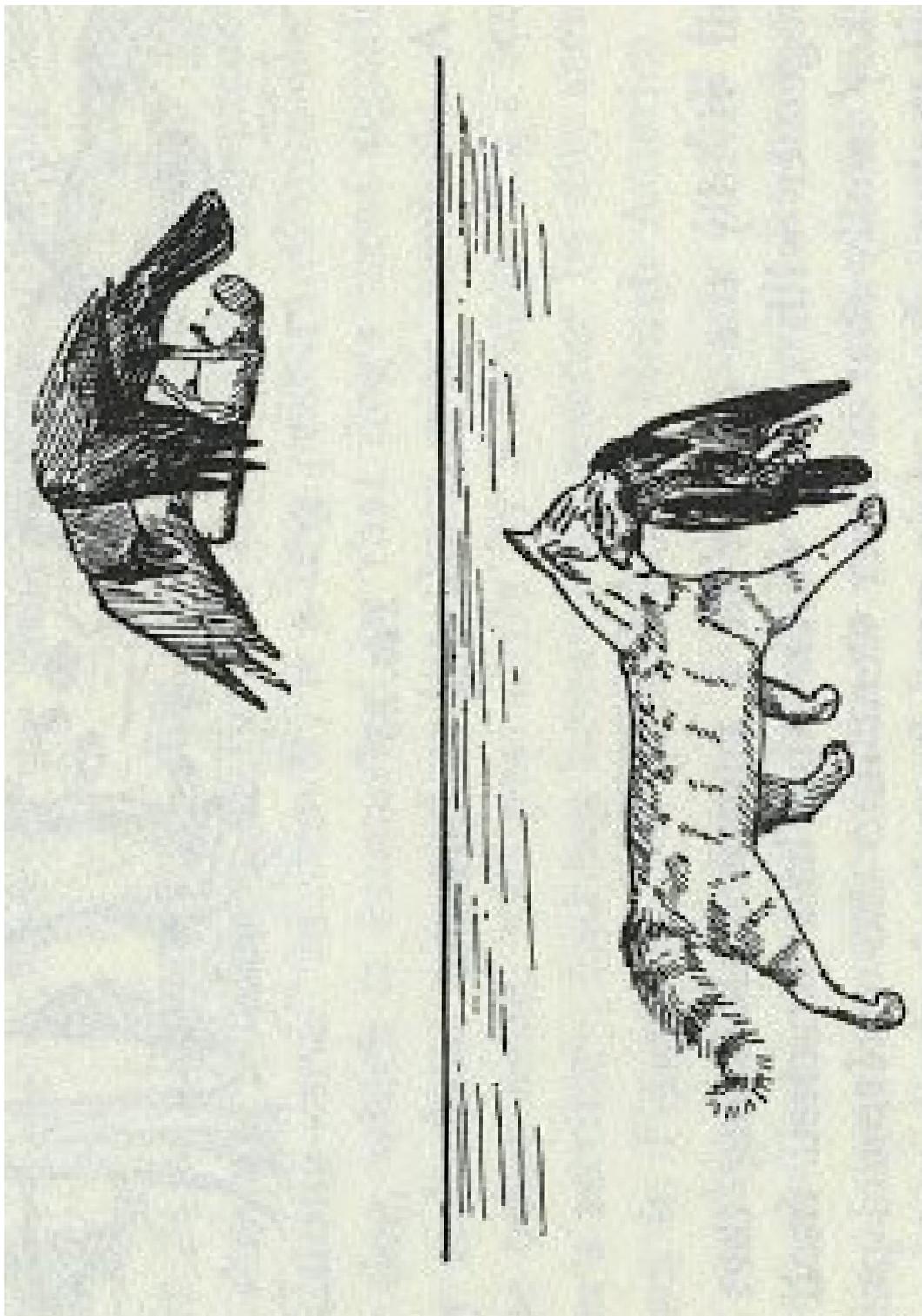
standing of not understanding'. As he states that there is a never any fixed environment for any creature, it becomes more clear to me why it is that whenever I bring up the idea of US ALL being made out of STARS, I've always encountered apathy and indifference. 'STARS' are not an objectively fixed environment. There are stars for astronomers, stars for astronauts, stars for physicians, stars for philosophers, stars for sailors, stars for fashion designers, stars for writers, stars for astrologists, stars for disciples. The interstellar trip of The Kinks in their "Supersonic Rocket Ship" was incomparable to the one that Major Tom took in David's Bowie "Space Oddity". Keir Dullea in Stanley Kubrick's "Space Odyssey 2001" was traveling in a different spacecraft than Lee Scoot did in his "Don't make Me" video clip. I am sure that stars are much less friendly for members of the 'Apollo 13' mission to the moon, whose ship did not succeed to land on the moon and the damage to the spacecraft endangered the lives of astronauts, than it is for Lady Gaga who announced to plan a performance in a cosmic space.

Astra (which in Latin means 'star') is my parent's cat. However, I am sure Perry Como has a different one in his pocket saved for a rainy day. Stars are different

kind of things for me than they are for you. We are all different yet the same, boiling in the dish of life, chefs of our own 'restaurants' cooking our own 'soups'.



"Once I had this idea that the entire universe exist in one atom of my finger."



In a book called “Vampyroteuthis infernalis”, Villem Flusser explains how the Homo sapience’s understanding of the world comes about. It starts in the human eye, on which light rays reflects upon. The information gathered from the eye is transmitted to the hands, which move accordingly to previously given information. As the human hands move, they modify objects in such a manner that they imprint the information which they received by the eyes back onto those objects. So then these objects, already modified by hands, are being perceived again by the eyes, which will one more time transmit the information back to hands which will then move accordingly. As Flusser continues to explain this mechanism, he states that it is “(..) a complex act of mirroring between the objective world surrounding man and the human organism (...) a complex 'feedback' loop”. Accordingly to this feedback, the human world (which is also considered as human culture), together with the human himself and his consciousness, are 'continuously modified'.”⁷

In Flusser's 'understanding' I recognize a lot of hands. That this is not the only way in which human beings perceive the world surrounding them, but it is clearly the most significant instrument in recent times.

By recent times I mean the period since our ancestors came out of tundra forests, freed their hands and eyes from of the ground and started looking towards the horizon for something new and exciting. This new, unfamiliar, contemporary, and fashionable something is a possession. This is when the child of ownership was born.

Thomas Traherne in his book “Centuries of Meditations” poetically describes his coming into the world - “All appeared new, and strange at first, inexpressibly rare, delightful, and beautiful. I was a little stranger, which at my entrance into the world was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys. My knowledge was Divine.”⁸

At first Traherne is free, ignorant, innocent, and immortal. He is alone in the paradise like the biblical Adam. He continues by writing: “The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it.” By then, everything belonged to him, his 'true self'

has not excluded itself from the outside world. The self than is everything which at the moment perceives.

It is regarded though that the individual human being will not fully be satisfied by anything less than becoming a god. Because only 'God' can see himself as a pure subject, considering everything else as objects, while having a privilege to never be seen as an object. Traherne as protagonist in his own book is alone in the paradise as Adam once was on pages of the bible. Adam was the men to whom the planet earth was given to, and from then on, every human being is meant to be 'the Adam'. Possession that is indisputable by anyone is not a control. Therefore rivalry, competition, power, control, and possession in biblical Eden, as well as in Traherne's paradise, is nonexistent.⁹ Homo sapiens' ancestors, stood up for the first time looking straight ahead as pure and innocent children whom possessed everything, and that was good. Good, until the moment when their sight circled around the planet and they saw the backs of their heads.



" Continuous
wonder and
recognition of
the presence"



Let's move back in time a year. What a year younger Elizabeth was thinking about?

I was getting ready for a semester-long exchange program in Kyoto, Japan. Expecting overload of time and lack of entertainment in the place I was going to live, I went to a secondhand bookstore to do purchase. There I found a book with a quaint title of “Unfinished Animal: The Aquarian Frontier and the Evolution of Consciousness” by Theodore Roszak. While reading this book during the summer, a seed was planted in my head. It was the quote: “Body as microcosmos of the universe, a contemplative object whose rhythms and fibers resonate to that sensitive cosmic network.”¹⁰

I took this poetic and beautiful sentence very seriously. I slowly tried understanding each individual word at the time. I decided to sit down, close my eyes, and breathe. In one of the places I went to meditate in Japan, an old, dainty, and kind lady, lead my meditation experience in a place where I never expected to end up. During an hour long meditation, I found myself in a space above the clouds, breathing-in cosmic energy, as well as breathing-out love over a whole blue globe. This contemplative

experience made me aware for the first time of the existing interstellar space above my head. Sure, I knew that there was a Moon somewhere nearby. I was educated enough to know that on my way to the sun I would encounter planets like Venus and Mercury. I could also distinguish a galaxy Milkyway from a chocolate bar with the same name. For all my life I was surrounded by endless amount of galaxies, stars, supernovas, black holes, planets, etc. But were they really real? I had my doubts about it. Planet earth is already big enough to get lost with your mind here. Only when I visited cosmic space for the first time during meditation I was able to personally relate to it, and understand that I am in it, not outside of it.

During this time I asked myself most profound questions which nobody would answer. I wished to speak to people that are already dead and to those who haven't been born yet. Unfulfilled and frustrated to the very limits of my soul, I craved for a divine power as help. Instead of that, I found myself naïve, irrelevant, shortsighted, and dumber than ever. I was hanging in the numb empty void, regretting every thought and breath I took. I spoke

to my grandmother on the phone. She asked if I still believe in God. I gave her no reply. She said—"Oh, then now I have a problem".

That was the time when I lost my ground. My grandmother, doubting in me for the first time, maybe I have been living in imaginary universe. I meditated, one more time.

The influence of religion has been inbred in my mind as deep as a tree. If it is taken out of the soil, it leaves a deep and empty hole. As the time passes the hole fills itself with another different tree. This is what I have been waiting for. I know that it will take some time, but I already see it on my horizon. Understanding that the dream regarding divine God-like knowledge about universe surrounding us, is just a dream, can be a salvation for human. Romanticizing nature, and taking it's playfulness into abstraction is equitable, as long as we accept and remember that questions do not lead to the solutions and one linear answer. Questioning is a continuous wonder and recognition of the present. That is how we can have a dialogue with the universe existing in us. Homo sapiens emerging from the universe are new trees growing in outskirts of our cities.

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Pictures in order of appearance

- 1. Ark of Space, 1968 - Shigeru Komatsuzaki.**
- 2. Galaxy Garden composite view, Photomontage by Jon Lomberg.**
- 3. Illustration of a scallop's umwelt from Jakob von Uexküll's book "Stroll through the worlds of animals and men"(1934).**
- 4. "Sounds of earth" Cover of the Voyager Golden Record**
- 5. Illustration from Jakob von Uexküll's book "Stroll through the worlds of animals and men"(1934).**
- 6. Screenshot of Cosmos (tv series by Carl Sagan)**
- 7. Screen shoot from google maps earth - view on Salomon Islands**

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