

Reflections on death...

While I was writing this essay – in which I was trying to put together the personal notes written during the module so as to try to express some ideas about that ineffable reality that made me end coursing this master in Ecology and Spirituality – my beloved dog Xena died. So I decided to weave this sad event into some reflections that I believe important in relation to what have happened last January during the three weeks of the first module of Ecology and Spirituality at the Elmhirst Centre in Dartington State.

Her name was Xena – like the Warrior Princess, yes – but we often called her using a variety of sweet substantives and adjectives in Catalan, our mother tongue at home. Bonica, preciosa, botifarra, coseta dolça, cara guapa, xicotiniua, la meua perla del Túria... I personally have my own vast repertory, which include also Italian, Hindi, Tibetan, Spanish, Portuguese and English over sweet corny words, though it's never enough sweetness for her. She was meek, sweet and obedient. She never made an aggressive gesture. She was not effusive, but always accepted caresses with pleasure.

When she stretched out to lie at my feet, she liked to be in physical contact, even if only connecting a small part of her (big) paw with my fat toe. She never complained, even if someone accidentally stepped on her. During her fast illness she was patient, never lamenting. When it hurt, it was soft and short.

She did hate something: being alone. When she recovered the company was perhaps the only time she was effusive, but even then only moderately. She was careful and polite. When I gave her something to eat from my hand, she took it with her lips with extreme care so as not to hurt my fingers. She was good, very good. A good friend, a good companion. What a great being. She has been a model of behaviour for both dogs and humans. I am devastated by her loss!

When I said goodbye to her, I told her assuredly: we'll see each other again Xena! Is that an empty desire? No. I want to investigate its foundation.

Both Xena and I are only pure forms of the absolute dimension of the real. That absolute dimension is both timeless and spaceless, though also with time and space. Xena and I are with time-space and without time-space. From time-space we were born and she has died. Xena left to not return. Oh, how much it hurts! From no time-space neither she has died, nor I will die. In that dimension of reality, between her and me, there is no duality.

If our mortal dimension is pure form of the absolute dimension without any addition, there there is already her as a form of the absolute, there I am already in that other dimension of the real.

Can we meet in that dimension?

In the “timeless” there is no “diversity of times”, nor there is there a “now”. In the “without space” there is no “dispersion” or “concentration”. In the “without space, nor time”, there is neither a “place” nor a “now”.

How will we find each other?

The “without space or time” is inconceivable for us. I cannot think our meeting, but my dimension without space-time and hers are real. That is a fact for me, although it was not for her. Both she and I, pure forms of the absolute dimension. There we meet and we will meet, although I do not understand how.

Ancient traditions have said that we would find ourselves in God. It is the same idea with religious concepts and without them. The meeting will be between her absolute dimension and mine, which are not two. Will it only be at the subtle level, without our corporeality? Will I meet Xena without her beautiful and kind figure? Will I meet the ghost of Xena? Certainly no.

What will I find?

My body, alive, and hers, dead, are pure forms of the absolute dimension with nothing added. They are purely the absolute. Though they are also not the absolute, but merely mortal corporeality.

We cannot conceive of a pure absolute dimension, we only know of it from within the dimension of the real that is today, and tomorrow does not appear. In that dimension, relative to living beings, the absolute dimension is presented as the only source.

We cannot think of reality as a sum of something subtle without space-time and something rude, material and perishable. That perishable, corporeal, is nothing other than a form of the subtle. What seems crass and deadly, in its real being is subtle and without time-space.

All the forms that surround us,
also the one of Xena and me,
are, in their own reality,
without space-time.
Everything in her being is
the immensity of the worlds,
not the immensity that we conceive,
but the inconceivable;
not the immensity
of what we call cosmos
but the one that is beyond
of the possibilities

of a brain and its sensors
of a terrestrial animal.

We have news of that inconceivable immensity for a terrestrial brain, and that news is what allows us to develop our sciences of the cosmos and of life. All that we perceive are the pure ways of the absolute of presenting itself, not another thing, not a material and perishable creature. That was and is Xena, that is what I am.

I saw the absolute dimension of the real in Xena, I saw in it my own reality. That that has ever been and is in time-space; there it is, in the no-time and no-space. Nothing has been lost. Nothing snatches the death.

I will meet Xena and all my beloved ones, not as ghosts. How can it be an encounter without space-time? I cannot think about it, nor I can imagine it.

What I have written is not pure speculation, nor is it a dream of longing, it is to draw consequences from the double dimension of reality and from the fact that the source of the perishable is the absolute dimension. There is no other water than that. There is no duality between the two dimensions of the real.

See you soon Xena! You as you were and I as I am. But how will we see each other in the no-time and no-space without a place, nor a now? I do not know, but we'll see each other and we'll be together again. See you later, Xena!

During the module we discovered and experienced different methods, theories and ways of knowing applied to diverse ecological, spiritual and human fields. In particular, in the last week, we dived deeper into experiential ways of knowing, both individually and as a group, approaching views from Phenomenology.

Far of attempting to explain what phenomenology is, here I would just like to put together my experience and reflection about the death of Xena with what we studied in the lectures given at class.

It was this double access to reality reflected around my conviction of meeting Xena again that made me think about phenomenological approaches that frame realities with meanings.

It is common to interpret the fact of creativity in a way of seeing it only as a possibility of our mental capacities, of our intelligence. This view disregards the fact that if we are creative it is because reality as we see it is ductile. Our creativity is a result of our seeing reality as ductile. This is because we have a double access to it. This makes me think that our own reality is modifiable, because it is made up of only what is meaningful to us – this is by what stimulates us and therefore what builds our reality – and it is not a description of the world as it is.

On a permanent basis we always face a bifurcation of reality: our reality and the Reality from which ours starts. The Reality then is the background on which we have built our world. Our construction will always be to our measure, and its background will never be trapped in it. But, I wonder, can we also renew our reality, can we distance ourselves from it, detach ourselves from that construction and have small tastes of the absolute and ultimate reality that supports ours? Haven't religious and spiritualities always tried – with more or less success – to put these “small tastes” into words? Isn't this awareness of this wonder that lead many of us into this master's program?

During the discussions we had in class I often wondered if our bifurcated reality is a specific condition of humans, fruit of the speech as our condition to relate with the world and other beings and make a sense of it.

But I also believe and experienced during class that we can practice this detachment from our own construct of reality, normally through experiences that don't understand easily of the language expression, as they are subjective and unique in each individual.

Some of the practices that can help in this detachment from our constructs of reality are the exercises Laura Sewall presents in 'The Skill of Ecological Perception' (1995). From the perspective of a perceptual psychologist, Sewall talks about five perceptual practices that can connect the self and the world in ways that re-awaken our 'deadening senses'. Furthermore, she believes this numbing of our diverse senses 'is at the heart of the environmental crisis' (1995: 201). She defends the honour of subjective experience as 'our sensory systems are exquisitely evolved channels for translating between “in-here” and “out-there”' (1995: 203). Establishing that this honouring of sensory experiences may be fundamental to rebalance the ecological crisis.

Perceptual practices have the potential, and therefore are the key, to alter consciousness, which in turn alters behaviours. The five perceptual practices she presents – 'learning to attend', 'learning to perceive relationships', 'developing perceptual flexibility across spatial and temporal scales', 'learning to re-perceive depth', and 'the intentional use of imagination' – can, if developed skilfully, help us to extend our narrow experience of self, making our identity boundaries permeable and flexible to experience a vaster identification with the external world (Sewall 1995: 204).

I wonder, furthermore, if developing an ecological perception in tune with the exterior world is like the first step or a doorway towards another realm altogether, closer to the other dimension or Reality as it is. This is, can these perceptual practices help us to access that ultimate dimension or Reality with capital “r” mentioned earlier?

David Abram in 'Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth' (1988) talks about depth as the primordial dimension, i.e. viewing one's self as within the vaster body of the Earth. This produces a new sense of vulnerability due to lack of control, but also the recognition of our psychological permeability and the liberating feeling of needing not to control that accompanies it (Sewall 1995).

I see the possibility on this being also our capacity of the double access to the reality that not only places human and other beings within the Gaian organism as Abram and Sewall suggest, but the wholeness of Gaian organism within the ultimate dimension or Reality.

In a similar way Thomas Lowe Fleischner presents his experiences observing wild birds around the globe as a moments in which 'portals [open] into new worlds' (2001: 3). Fleischner writes about 'the mindfulness of Natural History' as a practice of paying attention to bigger worlds outside of us. In these experiences, framed in a space-time moment, he shares them also with no-space and no-time, where for example half a minute of being in presence with a couple of tanagers becomes a weeks-long moment in his memory; where nonetheless, connects him with the unknown wholeness out-there 'going about their business, each an every moment of each and every day' without us being aware of it or having to take control or understanding it (2001: 4). In this no-time and no-space, he recalls the importance of the only time-meter left: this one, right now, right here.

As I have already pointed out, I am curious about the hypothesis that our world arises from the recoding of the stimulation that reality/realities suppose for us individually; which in turns is held by communicative language and, therefore, making our world become somehow linguistic. This process, made possible by speech, generates distance between our configuration of what we sense and perceive and the source from which it originates. But further to critic the limits of this and from my intention of overcome the uncomfortable feelings I sometimes felt in class by over-talking about this, speaking more simply, perhaps we could say that this distance between my world and the world that is there is continuously operative in us and is what allows us to modify, reorient, renew the way we approach reality. And this is so rich in itself. If the reality was as we see it, this possibility of new vision could not occur.

Any reconfiguration, any new vision of our reality, is to be distanced from the configuration in which we are. So much more new will be the more we can detach ourselves from the constructions in which we reside, in other words, new possibilities arise when we succeed in detaching ourselves from the constructions in which we reside; and this happens through its silencing. It happens by giving more room and lead to our senses, honouring more the subjective experiences through all our senses.

The bifurcated reality is a fruit of speech and as such is the specific conditioner of the human. Maybe our condition of humans happens to operate with that bifurcated reality formed by our configuration and also by the background on which it is drawn. The background appears accompanying the objectified by the speech but it is not objectifiable because it is that which supports the reconfigured objectification from the stimulation but which is not limited by the subject-object relationship. Maybe this is our specificity as specie, maybe it is our specific quality to relate to the world. We do not have a concept of reality that is not part of a concrete web of meanings. But the remarkable point resides in the awareness of the possibility that reality may have another meaning than that given in a given context. Our world, even though it is a recoding of the stimulation, shows the background that supports it. Speech allows us to access reality no

longer because of its functionality with respect to stimulation but for its non-stimulative aspect. Proofs of this are art, religion, spirituality, philosophy, and even science.

And maybe this cannot be otherwise. Maybe conclusions or answers are not meant to arrive, or to arrive yet, or even not meant to be. Maybe the answer is not ready, or we are not ready for the answer. Maybe we just have to keep going with it. Maybe the universe itself hasn't got the answer and we have to go back to our world and purely live making ourselves comfortable in the uncertainty.

REFERENCES:

Abram, David. 1988. 'Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth'. *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 10. 2: 101-120.

Abram, David. 2009. 'The Air Aware'. *Orion Magazine*.

Dillard, Annie. 1974. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Harper Perennial, Chapter 2.

Duncan, William. *Dilation and Beauty: Towards a Goethean way of Perception*. USA, AZ: Prescott College.

Fleischner, Thomas Lowe. 2001. 'The Mindfulness of Natural History'. *The Way of Natural History*. San Antonio: Trinity University Press, pp. 3-15.

Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2017. 'Speaking of Nature'. *Orion Magazine*. Vol. 36. 2.

Sewall, Laura. 1995. 'The skill of ecological perception'. *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, pp. 201-215.

Sewall, Laura. 1999. 'Reversing the World'. *Orion Magazine*. Vol. 18. 4: 19-24.