

THE VALLICO ACADEMY LECTURE SERIES

LECTURE FIVE

NARROW BEAM AND OPEN FIELD

The Blindness that Cannot Detect Itself

Attention. Hemispheres. Convergence.

*The two ways of paying attention, and what happens when
one of them takes over.*



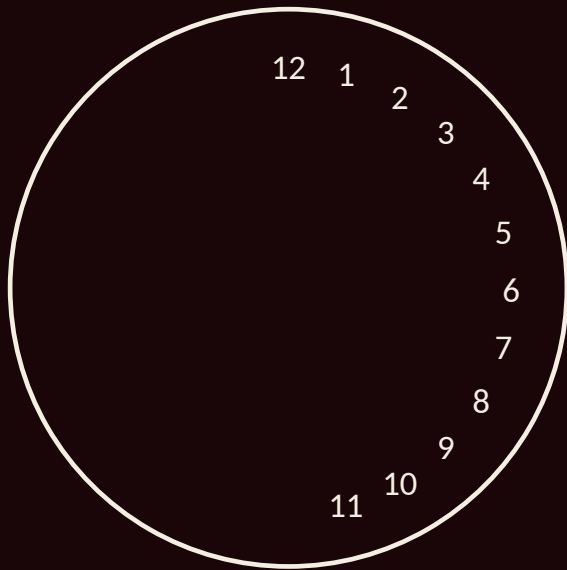
Half a World, and She Doesn't Miss It

Right-hemisphere stroke.

She eats the right half of the plate, and stops.

She disowns her own left hand.

Half the world is gone. She cannot miss it.



Asked to draw a clock: the left half of the dial an empty curve

Two Ways of Paying Attention

THE FIRST MODE

Narrow. Focused. Grasping.

The world in pieces: fixed, certain, usable.

The map.

THE SECOND MODE

Broad. Open. Vigilant.

The world whole: alive, connected, in flux.

The territory.

You have seen this slide three times. Tonight it gets its name.



Iain McGilchrist

b. 1953 - psychiatrist, Bethlem, Maudsley and Johns Hopkins hospitals.

The Master and His Emissary (2009)

The Matter with Things (2021)

The books behind every one of these lectures.

*“The brain’s left hemisphere is designed to help us **app**rehend - and thus manipulate - the world; the right hemisphere to **com**prehend it - see it all for what it is.”*

OXFORD

English literature • All Souls



AGAINST CRITICISM (1982)

analysis kills the living work



MEDICINE

the Bethlem & the Maudsley



JOHNS HOPKINS

brain imaging

The Literary Critic Who Left



His own book's argument: the dissecting attention murders the living whole: the corpse mistaken for the creature.

He believed it. He left literature to find, in the physical brain, the two attentions he had first met in poems.

The argument in miniature: walking around inside a single life.

ACT 0 • THE NAME

Channel McGilchrist The Scientific & Medical Network

CHANNEL MCGILCHRIST
THE SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL NETWORK
PRESENT

THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY

DR IAIN MCGILCHRIST

A HYBRID IN-PERSON AND ONLINE EVENT
THE ROYAL INSTITUTION, LONDON

Dr Iain McGilchrist Prof Mattias Desmet Elizabeth Oldfield David Lorimer

SATURDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2024 • 9:45 AM - 7 PM (UK)
TICKETS MUST BE PURCHASED IN ADVANCE FROM:
WWW.CHANNELMCGILCHRIST.COM

Eighty-Seventh in the Queue...

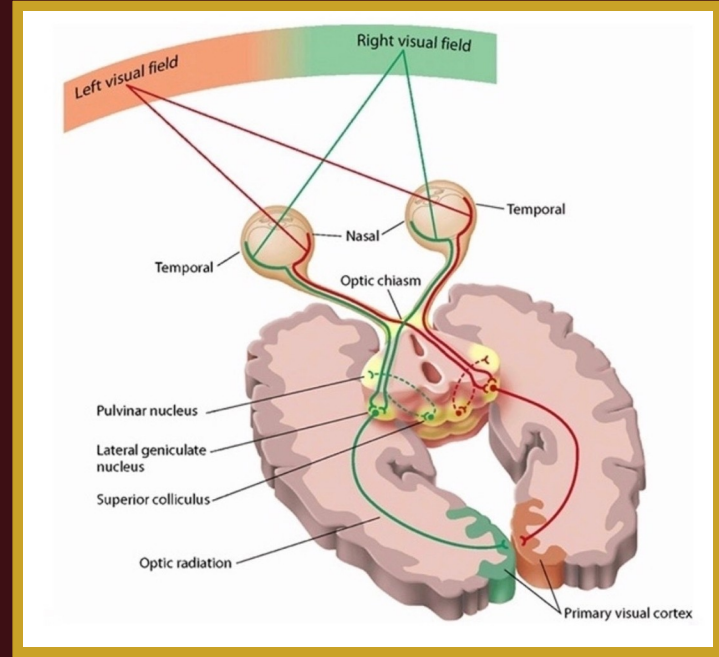
..to get McGilchrist to sign my copy of his book.

The others had ninety-nine pristine copies - an object, acquired, certified by a signature.

I had an old battered copy of Volume II - spine broken, coffee-stained, two hands commenting in the margins.

Without meaning to, I had performed the entire argument of the man I was queuing to meet.

Crossed Wires



Everything crosses. Except smell.

Two halves, cross-wired, and largely telling each other to be quiet.

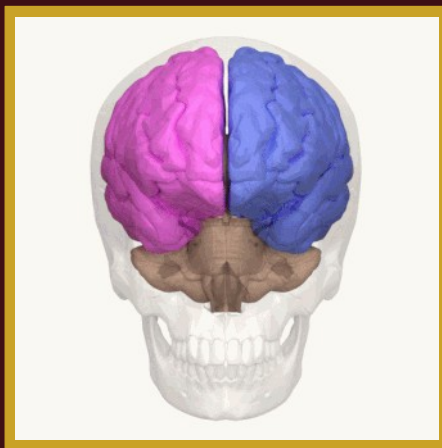
It's Not About Logic and Creativity

THE MYTH

Left brain = logic

Right brain = creativity

*Just enough truth to inoculate you
against the real thing.*



TRUE

Both hemispheres do everything.

Reason, emotion, language, music:
all served by both.

**The difference is not what they
do.**

It is how. The most important sentence in this series.

How, Not What

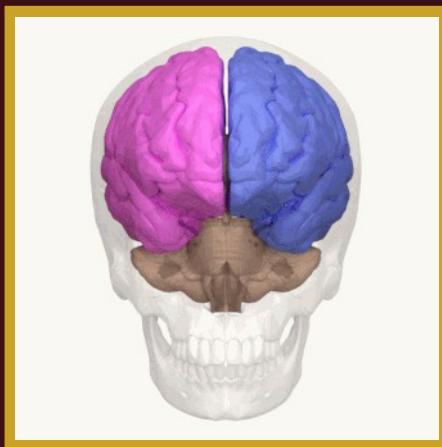
LEFT

A narrow, targeted beam: the spotlight.

Grasps: seizes, manipulates, uses.

Fixed • certain • categorised • mechanical.

The map.



RIGHT

Broad, open, vigilant: the whole scene at once.

Context, connection, flux: the living and the unique.

The thing itself, not its category.

The territory: the world you live in.

Attention is never passive: how you attend determines what you find.

The Bird That Needs Two Minds



THE WORM



Focus. Narrow, precise: pick it out from the grit, exactly, with the beak.

THE CAT

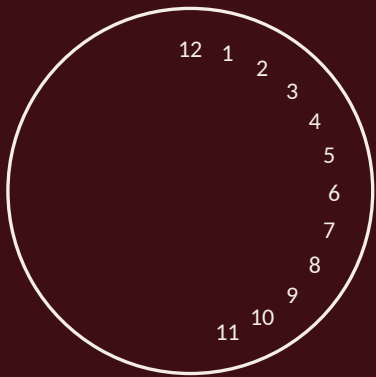


Vigilance. The whole field at once: the shadow, the movement, the thing it wasn't looking for.

Focus on the part. Attend to the whole. At once.

Two incompatible attentions → two hemispheres: hundreds of millions of years old.

The Hemisphere That Knows What It's Missing



remember her

Damage the LEFT: the person knows. They struggle, grieve, compensate.

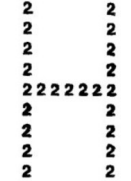
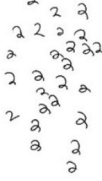
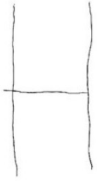
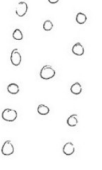
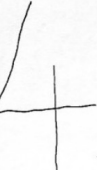
Damage the RIGHT: sail on in perfect contentment. Unable, in principle, to notice.

The left hemisphere does not know what it does not know.

Attention Is Not a Spotlight



Simons and Chabris, 1999.

Target stimulus	LH intact	RH intact
		
		

You see the H before you see the twos. In schizophrenia, that order reverses.

Attention is how a world comes into being. McGilchrist calls it a moral act.

ACT 2 • WHICH ONE IS RIGHT?

The Piazza del Duomo

Describe what you see.



The neglect is not in the eye. It is in the imagination.

Two Showers

RIGHT HEMISPHERE STROKE

**the drops hang
in the air**

Flow resolved into a row of still points, each one perfectly sharp. He reached, unprompted, for the bullets in The Matrix.

LEFT HEMISPHERE STROKE

**the roar of
the water**

Jill Bolte Taylor, neuroanatomist, reeling backwards from a sound that had become enormous.

Two strokes. Two showers. Opposite directions.

The Murders in the Welsh Village

THE OBJECTION

Imaging shows both hemispheres active in nearly every task. So the whole left-right story is overstated: at best a simplification, at worst a Victorian hangover in a lab coat.

THE ANSWER

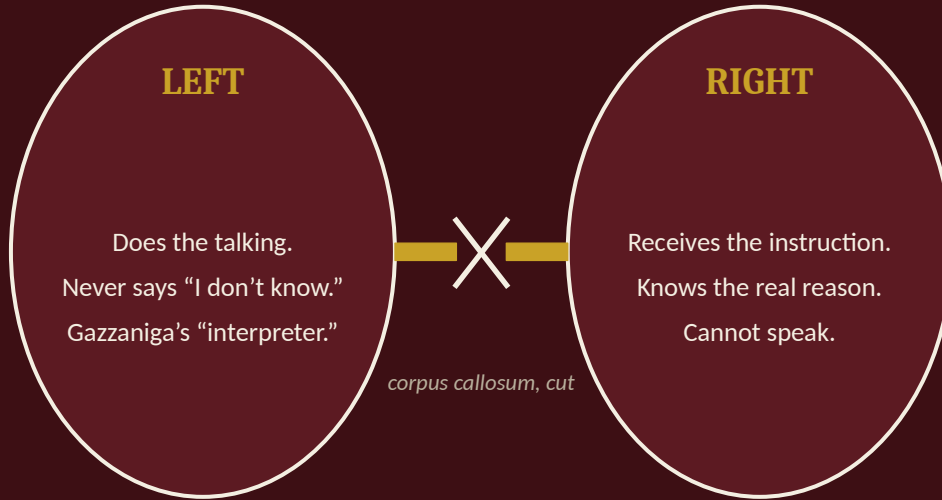
500 : 47

Murders in Britain last year, evenly scattered. Except for forty-seven in one small village in rural Wales.

You do not dismiss the cluster because the other four hundred and fifty-three happened somewhere else.

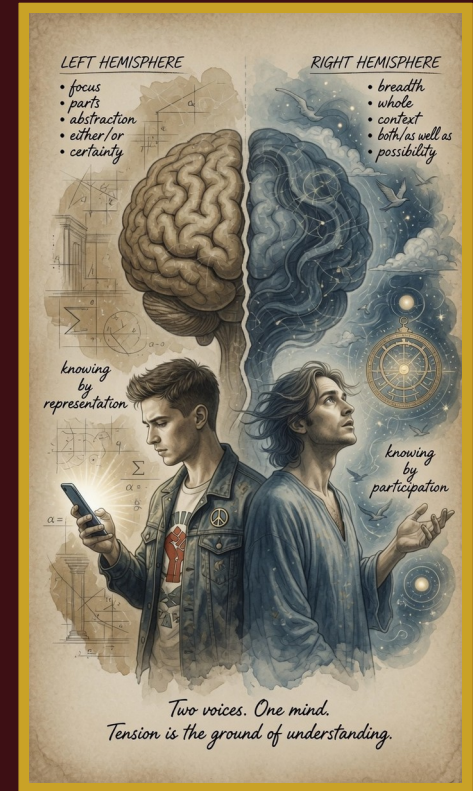
The question was never whether both are involved. Switch on a car engine and the fan whirs busily; the fan is not what propels the car.

Two People in One Head



Sperry & Gazzaniga: two centres of consciousness in one skull.

A brilliant spin doctor who is certain he is the president.



That Way Wokeness Lies



"I'm also concerned about [McGilchrist's book's] likely role in the current political culture, where it may be an easy tool for exploitation by unscrupulous operators on the right."

Robert M. Ellis, in a poisonous review.

The Master and His Emissary

A wise master ruled a flourishing domain. He trained emissaries to do the close, detailed work in service of his vision. The cleverest of them mistook the master's role for his own, usurped him, and the domain fell into ruin. Superb at the detail. Blind to the whole. Never once understanding what had gone wrong.

after Nietzsche

The master is your right hemisphere. The emissary is your left.

What if it has already happened, in us?



**What if a whole civilisation could do what
that emissary did?**

Not in a patient. In a person. In a culture. In all of us.

The Pendulum of History



ATHENS
balance

LATE ROME
it tips

RENAISSANCE
balance again

c. 1650
the last swing

The last swing is the largest, and it may not swing back.

Three and a Half Centuries

“One of the two ways of paying attention has been running our civilisation (and getting reality steadily wrong) for three and a half centuries.”

c. 1650 → now. The first civilisation run almost entirely by the emissary.

You've Watched This Twice Already

LECTURE 2

THE BURIED LIBRARY

Hermes • the Gnostics • Plotinus: a living cosmology,
bulldozed in two generations by the Scientific Revolution.



LECTURE 3

THE PHYSICISTS

Copenhagen: shut up and calculate. De Broglie and Bohm:
show me what is really there. The first mode in a lab coat.



Same takeover. Two windows. A new century.

Reader, Do You Recognise This World?

He looked upon his wife as if she were a fruit on the tablecloth.

I am quite mechanical. I have gone to pieces. I am like a marionette.

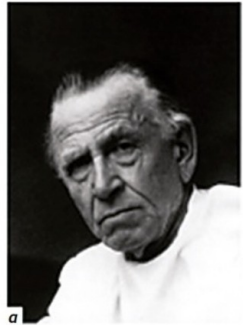
Once I was a man, with a soul and a living body. For me time no longer flows.

She had plans to make everything useful, including the sea, if necessary through tourism.

A culture cannot catch schizophrenia. That is not the claim.

Not an illness spreading. A description, from the inside, of a world we have built for the well.

Two Painters, Two Strokes



Otto Dix



Lovis Corinth

Before, above.
After, below.

Both right
hemisphere.

The hand is still
expert. What has
gone is the
person.

A world of things, not beings.

Everything you cannot measure (beauty, meaning, purpose, the sacred) quietly reclassified as unreal. Fantastically useful, and quietly dead.



What if the right hemisphere's world is the more true?



The Isle of Skye

Fifteen Hundred Pages from Skye

The Matter with Things (2021) • two volumes •
~1,500 pages

Written at the edge: in the presence of the living
world, in the second mode.

*He reached it through broken brains; I reached it
through the equations.*



Vol I • Vol II

What Is Actually in the Fifteen Hundred Pages

VOLUME ONE HOW WE COME TO KNOW ANYTHING

Attention • Perception • Judgment • Apprehension •
Emotional and social intelligence • Cognitive intelligence •
Creativity

THE FOUR PATHS: science • reason • intuition • imagination

VOLUME TWO WHAT THERE IS

The coincidence of opposites • The One and the many • Time
• Flow and movement • Space and matter • Matter and
consciousness • Value • Purpose • The sacred

**In every portal of access to knowledge, the right hemisphere is the more reliable.
In one thing only is the left superior: grasping something in order to use it.**

The Coincidence of Opposites

CONTRARIA SUNT COMPLEMENTA

Contraries complete one another. Bohr's coat of arms, 1947



*Light is a wave.
Light is a particle.
At once.*

Sameness is sterile: it makes nothing.

Delimitation is what makes a thing exist.

The division is the price of there being a world.

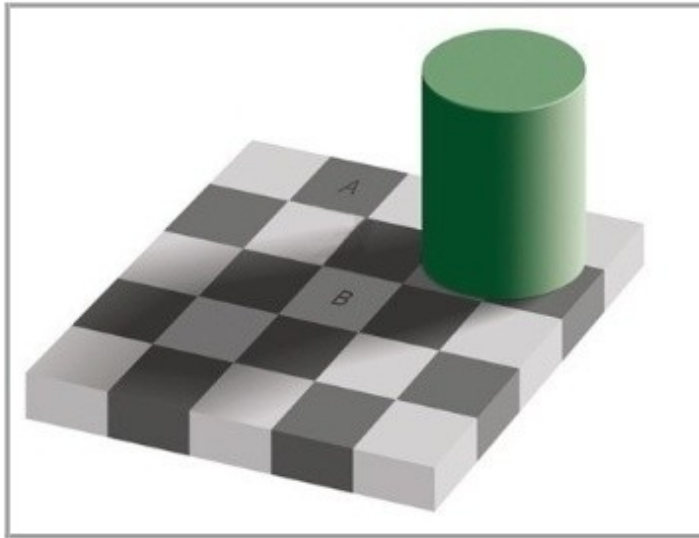


JACOB BÖHME

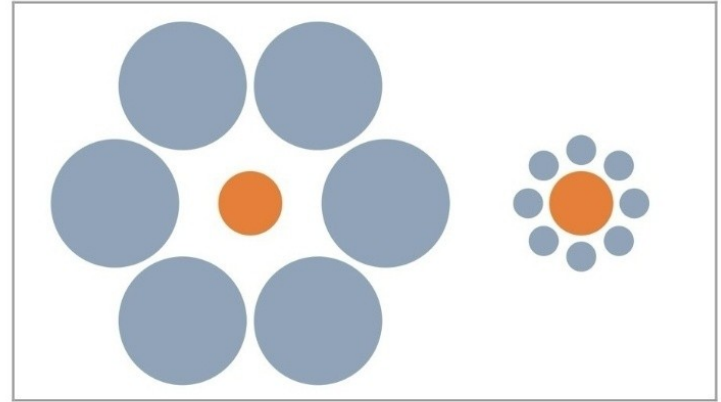
1575–1624

*the Ungrund, the groundless ground: the
One must divide itself in order to know
itself, to be at all.*

Two Things You Cannot Unsee

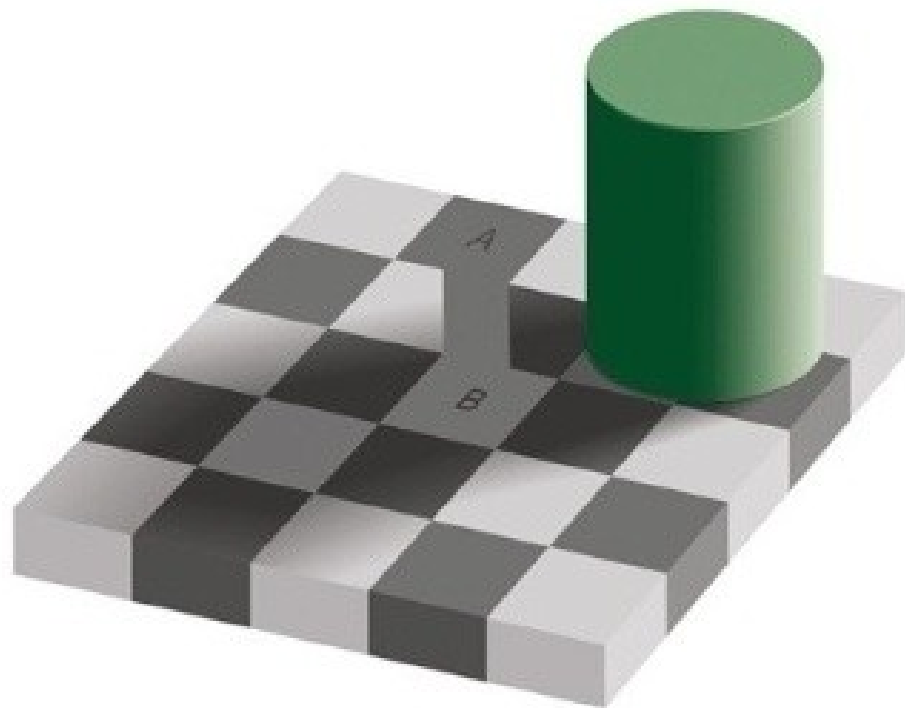


Which square is darker, A or B?



Which orange circle is bigger?

**Context is not decoration on top of the facts.
Context is where most of the information lives.**



The One and the Many, Again

The whole is prior to its parts; the parts are real, but never truly separable.

PHYSICS

One wave function, factorised into parts that cannot reach one another.

PLOTINUS

The One overflows into the many, without ever ceasing to be one.

NEUROLOGY

One living whole, within which the parts appear: distinct, never divided.

Three fields. One architecture. Hold it a little longer.

Time Is Not a Line

temps: clock time



durée: lived time



The line is not time. The line is time's corpse.

temps · durée, Henri Bergson

But Last Time I Told You Time Wasn't Real

PHYSICS • LAST TIME

“The equation with no time in it. $H\Psi = 0$. The undivided field is timeless.”

McGILCHRIST • TONIGHT

“Time is real. The flow is the most real thing there is.”

Both men can't be right. Hold that. Don't let me off the hook.

de Broglie: relativity was the last flowering of classical physics; quantum mechanics sides with the flow.

Both Were True



"Eternity is in love with the productions of time." William Blake

Same reality. Opposite ends of it.

The Brain Admits It

EMIT

the liver secretes bile

the generator

TRANSMIT

*a radio passes on a broadcast it
didn't compose*

the window

PERMIT

a lens: a constraint that is creative

shapes what it lets through

The brain does not make consciousness. It admits it, and shapes what it admits.

Planck • Schrödinger • Eddington • Jeans • Pauli • Wigner • Wheeler • Penrose: "*consciousness was here first.*"

The People Who Took Matter Apart

PLANCK

I regard consciousness as fundamental, and matter as derivative from it.

SCHRÖDINGER

Consciousness is absolutely fundamental, and cannot be accounted for in terms of anything else.

JEANS

The universe begins to look less like a great machine and more like a great thought.



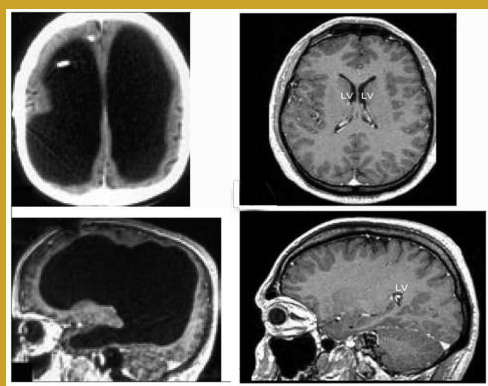
A radio passes on a broadcast it did not compose.

Consciousness is not made by the brain. It is prior to matter.

Is Your Brain Really Necessary?

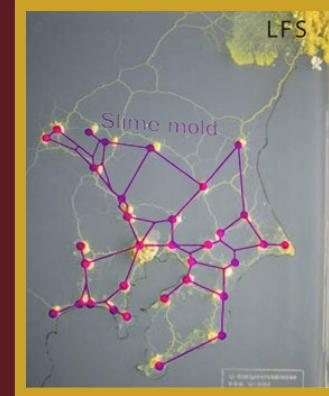
“Is your brain really necessary?” Science, 1980 • the Lorber cases

IQ 126



First-class honours degree in mathematics.
Almost no cortex: a thin skin lining the skull.

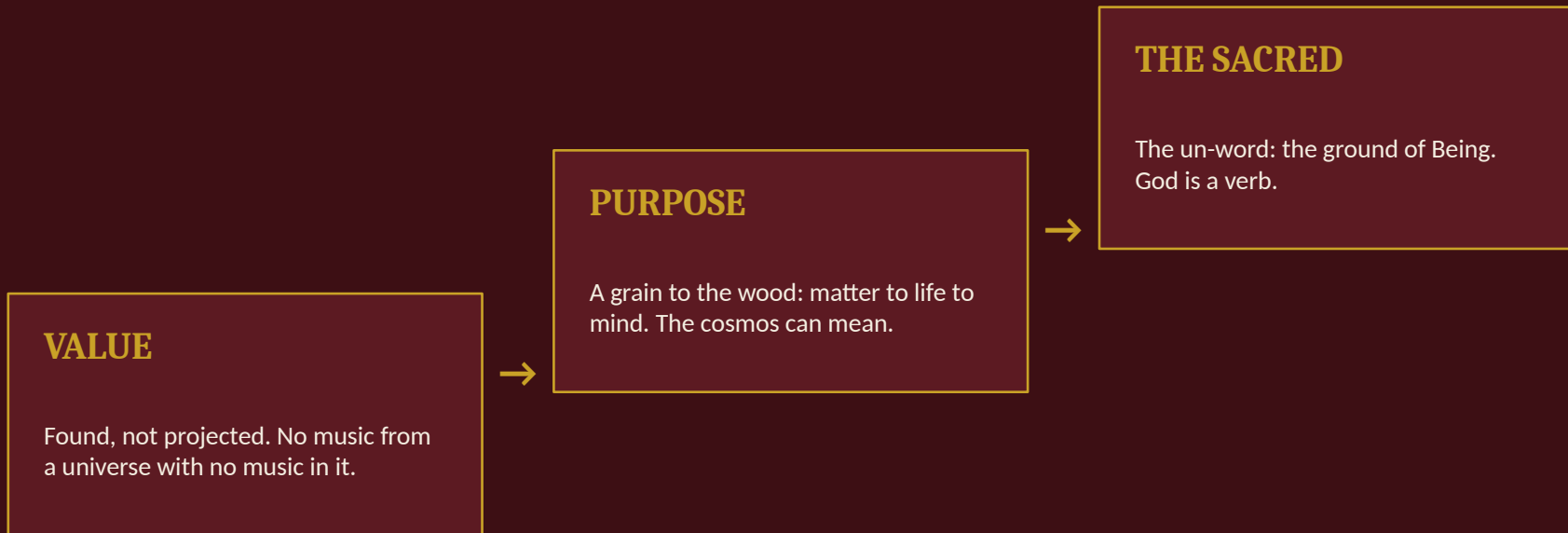
NO NEURONS



A slime mould solves the maze,
and redraws the Tokyo rail network.

Contested, hold it loosely. Not proof: a question that will not go away.

Value, Purpose, and the Sacred



“Not that all things are God, but that all things are in God, and God in all things.”

panentheism, after Whitehead

The Sacred

God is a verb.

logos

Greek

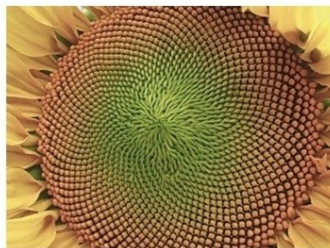
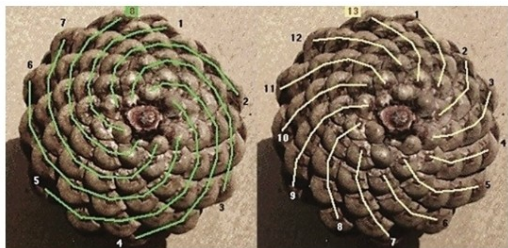
tao

Chinese

ṛta

Sanskrit

Not a thing. A flow.



Phyllotaxis: 8 spirals one way, 13 the other. The sunflower does it too.



The Fourth Column

BOHM

A universal wave field guides matter; particles are local, matter is secondary

PLOTINUS

The One overflows into Nous and Soul; embodied things are a partial descent from a prior unity

BOEHME

The Ungrund must self-differentiate to know itself; matter is how that self-knowing becomes visible

McGILCHRIST

Consciousness is ontologically prior to matter; the brain is an aperture onto it, not a generator of it

*Four roads. Physics. Late antiquity. 17th-century mysticism. 21st-century neurology.
None of them talked to each other.*

Convergence Is Not Proof

Convergence is not proof. But it is not nothing,
and the honest response is not to look away.

I stood a chorus of Nobel-calibre physicists in front of you, all agreeing a thing was impossible: all wrong.

I used that argument when it served me. Honesty says it cuts this way too.

The Question We Started With

Is the mind a small thing the brain does,
or is the brain a small thing the mind does?

Culture said yes. Life experience said yes. Science stopped saying no.

Not a proof: an invitation. After three and a half centuries, the question is open again.

The Glove Factory

*“a dynamic system which can’t be seen, but is
inescapably felt.”*

Samantha Keil



Keil Space • Viale Michelangiolo 5, Florence



A house for the right hemisphere.

Down a ramp that seems to lead underground: exactly the right way in.

Two hours away - make an appointment!

YOU ALREADY DO THIS

A world of things to be used.

A world of beings to be met.

That is the second mode: archaeologists do it to potsherds without even trying.

Go and do it to everything else.

THE QUESTION HAD A NAME

What is it that is paying attention?

Not the modes of attention: the attender.

What Could Actually Be Done

MEASURE THE SHIFT

Immersion in a language. A long poem learned by heart. A household rebuilt from a rim of pot. Watch people do these, and take measurements while they do.

THE HOLES I KNOW ABOUT

Which divisions of one field make a mind, and which make nothing? Does moving the hard problem into a field change its logic, or only its address?

TEST THE BUILDING

Nearly 1,000 through the doors, one at a time. Over 800 interviewed; the themes independently mapped. The descriptive phase is done. The measuring has not been started.

THE PLACE YOU ARE SITTING IN

Scholars, terraces, alpacas, a path to the waterfall. Work that includes everyone. Does building for open attention change how people think?



None of this waits on my physics being right.

Keil Space visitors, interviewed one at a time.