

Muse Five

Reality

It is not uncommon for a young child to behave as if they have an unseen companion. This is most often perceived as an example of an imaginary process, ignoring the possibility of other options. The option acceptable to almost everyone would be that the child is knowingly pretending.

There are five other options which most will dismiss out of hand because they are beyond their experience, and therefore, beyond their perception and conception.

These are:

- The child is 'lonely' in the sense it does not feel a part of the family and or community in which it lives. This may have a psychological base that will resurface as the child matures in some form of psychosis.
- The more common reason is that the loneliness is being compensated for by mimicking a state of virtuality that is increasingly common in human existence. The following three examples are probably considered far-fetched: they are certainly less likely than the first two.
- The companion is a spirit form visible to the child, but not, to most others.
- The companion belongs to a parallel existence, to which the child has temporary access.
- The companion, while of this existence, has a form we are normally unable to perceive.

The enigma is that In the case of these three last options; if the child's psychological and physical responses are those we would accept, if the companion were visible; *we can never be certain - absolutely sure - that the companion is unreal.*

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An example worthy of comparison is that of Magic Eye Pictures. These offer a perception of a three dimensional vision which is totally unlike the 'picture' seen by the eye: the vision is generated by the brain from signals hidden in the original, seen, picture; it is a virtual picture.

Which is the Reality, the printed picture, the vision, or both.

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In contrast , the extremes of the process of Computer Graphics merges into Virtual Reality capable of generating real human response, even though they are unreal. We can no longer depend on our Senses to determine Reality unless we are aware the perceptions are false and are confined only to an imaginary existence. Even this is of little practical consolation if our long-term memory is unable to differentiate.

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A bizarre, possibly frightening, example was published in a Big Issue Magazine: an article by Jim McClellan describes the Internet Community called "LambdaMoo".

His article indicates the absence of limit to the 'Reality' of being a member of this Unreal Community; complete as it is with all the inter-relationships of a real community: political, commercial, ethical, sexual, and criminal complete with crime.

I have never been tempted to try this experience: probably a measure of my own inadequacies: however anyone interested may pursue the subject by reading 'My Tiny Life' by Julian Dibbell, published by Fourth Estate.

I do have the website address but I am loath to give it in this muse and be guilty of possibly corrupting the impressionable.

The historical Maxim, *"Do not believe anything you hear and only a half of what you see,"* has become an under-statement.

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My own experiences have been, on the whole, less dramatic; but the examples which follow show how we easily adapt to Unreality in the most mundane of lives.

Example One

I now live some 70 miles from my Home Town in which the families of both my wife and I still live.

We make regular visits: on one such visit we saw a man walking in the gutter, against the direction of traffic, holding a large steering wheel in front of himself as if he were driving a vehicle.

I mentioned it to my brother-in-law; he told me it was someone called David who believed he was driving a car. He was alleged to carry out all that was associated with driving a vehicle: with the evident exception of keeping to the gutter and 'driving' against the direction of traffic, in true pedestrian fashion: apparently he parks it neatly in marked parking spaces, and should anyone park their car in the same space, they find themselves subject to the same procedure as if they had been involved in a real motoring incident; complete with 'verbals', having to exchange details, sometimes even with the involvement of the law.

In consequence savants give his wheel a wide berth.

At his Local he had his personal reserved parking space, guarded by him, and equally by the other regulars. I was assured that his manner, and the content of his conversation, was no different to the other patrons! (I cannot vouch for these other patrons. However, in certain company, when relating this story, I embellish it by adding my own piece of unreality and saying that the proof of normality was that he was the captain of their quiz team)

Some time later I called at a Filling Station in the Town. I was leaving the 'Shop', after paying, when I noticed David standing alongside the shop doorway; he was making engine noises and his demeanour indicated he was having trouble starting 'his car'.

I returned to my car and waited for David to 'start' and 'drive away': I did not risk colliding with him.

On my next visit I related the story to my brother-in-law and commented it seemed we are all equally 'odd'. He then told me that David's wheel had been stolen; he had reported the

theft to the Police who, allegedly, had followed out the normal procedure; regretfully without recovering his 'wheel'.

The Regulars at his Pub collected a sum of money and purchased a replacement for him - it was a Steering Wheel for a Sports Car - David was overjoyed and, as my brother-in-law pointed out, the New Wheel was easier for David to drive.

Example Two

Before her death my mother was senile and resident in the section of a Nursing Home containing persons with like conditions.

Most of the residents in this section live in a world, of their own making, grafted on to the daily routine around them.

They share their lives with unseen - mostly deceased - members of their family.

When visiting it seemed impossible not to become involved in their world: typically, becoming involved in a three-way conversation with an elderly lady, who thought she was a young girl, and her long deceased mother.

Another resident, who spoke only gibberish, used to seek me out during each visit; he thought I was equally as fluent!

Reality went into suspension for the length of the visit.

These examples are associated with mental infirmity; *but they raise the question of the involuntary adjustments and responses of the supposedly Rational Participants.*

The next two examples involve Rational Beings only.

Example Three

While working in the South of France I was staying in a small family hotel; one evening I returned to the hotel to find an elderly gentleman - obviously English - wanting to book a room, but having difficulty making himself understood. I acted as an interpreter and he booked in for one night only.

Later that evening when I came down for dinner he was waiting for me and asked if he might join me. During the meal I gleaned he was a professional Artist and then recognised his name as that of the artist who had recently held an exhibition in the Local Gallery back home - The George Rooms in Stroud, Gloucestershire. The conversation was wide ranging and offered a pleasant interlude to what was usually an English-free stay. Again, the following evening, he was waiting for me, having decided to prolong his stay: this was repeated yet again on the third evening.

Before retiring that evening he told me he was returning, to the UK, the following morning: he thanked me for my kindness and added that his wife wished also to thank me. This was rather surprising because I had understood his wife had died some months earlier; his journey being the first he had taken without her. It became evident that not only did he believe that his wife was with him in spirit, but it was she who had requested that he stay longer to share my dinner table. At the time I found the experience e more weird, than touching: I am now better able to understand the reality of a strong shared bond.

Who am I to doubt the Reality of his wife's presence, even though I had had no inkling of a third presence?

Example Four

My next door neighbour called at my home looking upset; he explained he had been cleaning his car and had been using petrol to remove some stubborn stains from the wheels.

He had the petrol in a saucer and his cat had drunk from it, raced away, into the house, ran around in circles, chased up the stairs, it had then collapsed.

I asked if the cat was dead, “No”, he replied, “*He ran out of petrol.*”

I had been suckered!

Later that evening we were in the company of a second neighbour to whom the same story was told. He proved to be as gullible as I had been.

Some weeks later this neighbour told us he had attempted to tell the story to his deputy at work; he had reached the punch-line, but, before he could deliver it his deputy had interjected, “*Dead Mr Jones. Dead, how awful Mr Jones. You must have been distraught Mr Jones...etc.*”

He was so sincere with his concern that Mr Jones did not have the heart to deliver the punch line and disillusion him.

As he said, “*Charlie still thinks my cat died from drinking petrol.*”

As facetious as this story may seem it, in common with the others, illustrates our perceptions of reality can take on an existence of their own.

Can we be certain, ever, that we draw always, in our own lives, the correct demarcations?

How real are our own lives?

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I have pursued the subject of Virtual Reality in Society in my both my books – Books Four and Five: see Book Section.

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