

## Matter is such stuff as dreams are made on...

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If I were to start this presentation arguing that the subject is *the relationship between dreams and matter*, perhaps I'd kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, it would be intriguing because the everlasting confrontation between the human spirit and the actuality of bodily life can be considered one of the reasons why we dream. Furthermore, everyone has experienced at least once that the strict laws ruling the physical world appeared to have been violated, and dreams may have had an important role in forecasting or giving meaning to these experiences.

On the other hand, and in addition to its metaphysical and somewhat esoteric charm, such a beginning would also feel very reassuring to the reader, because the traditional neat distinction between the solid, demanding but predictable world of matter and the elusive, apparently illogical world of dreams would be fully maintained.

All in all it might be a good shot. Nevertheless, and considering that I don't like the idea of killing birds, what I propose in this presentation is:

*Dreams and matter are substantially the same, although they can be relatively differentiated to a higher or a lower degree.*

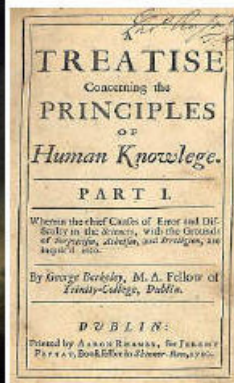
The conditions giving rise to this differentiation belong mainly to the *domain of relationships*: first of all, the relationships between the various kinds of *dreaming glances* involved in the process: human dreaming glances (both as individual and collective), living systems' dreaming glances, God's dreaming glance. (By the word "glance" I mean what I see if I look at someone else who, in turn, is looking at me.) Though I support ascribing a key role to God in the whole process, this is intended as a metaphysical and not as a religious claim. Taking full responsibility for my stand, I'll specify what I mean by my use of the word "God". Consistently with a constructivist position, I'll also claim that the interactions of

dreaming glances that give rise to dreams and matter are strictly connected to the *actions that are performed in waking life* and to *the very concrete relations* that we maintain in our social and affective lives.

It is almost useless to say that if we talk about “differentiation of a continuum” as well as “interactions and crossing” of glances, dreams and social relations, issues about the nature of *boundaries* are of primary importance. I claim that boundaries have fractal peculiarities as I will clarify below.

Ultimately the hypothesis I intend to sketch through this presentation can be synthesized with the help of a visual metaphor. I owe this image to the genius of the French philosopher Henri Bergson, who used it to illustrate how the complex theories of another philosopher, George Berkeley, could be developed from a simple visual intuition. This will be our starting point.

### ***George Berkeley (1685 – 1753)***



[George Berkeley](#) was a an Irish mathematician, a cutting-edge physicist in the field of optics, a philosopher and a very religious man, who took Holy Orders in the Church of Ireland at the age of 36, got married at 43 and became Bishop of Cloyne at 49. He was renowned as a good-hearted man, participating in the foundation of a home for abandoned children in London. As an ardent

opponent of materialism, he bravely put up with being ridiculed because of his theories, which seemed to lack common sense. Though he was undoubtedly a genius, he nonetheless also shared the prejudices and naiveties typical of his own times.

In his philosophical system Berkeley claims that a true science should be de-intellectualized, because our knowledge comes from perceptions, and not from generalizations or from abstract concepts that are afterwards unintentionally transmitted as if they were true. In Berkeley’s view, *matter* is just a word. Thus, the first step resides in de-conceptualizing human perceptions, so to return as much as possible to pure perception.

Berkeley's philosophy is summarized in the Latin words "Esse est percipi," which means "Being is to be perceived (and also to perceive)." Things come to existence because someone, individually and collectively, perceives them. Reality owes its steadiness to the fact that God is the ultimate source of any perception. Thus reality exists because God looks at it, not only indirectly through human perceptions but also directly through his own perception.

Well ahead of the spirit of his times, Berkeley brings up the idea of the natural world as a co-creation. In the meantime, despite his being a physicist, he tends to underestimate – even to deny – the autonomy of the natural world, reducing to two the number of protagonists of co-creation: God and men.

### ***Henri Bergson (1859 – 1941)***



In his essay "The philosophical intuition", found in the 1938 book "La pensée et le mouvant" (Thought and Motion), [Henri Bergson](#) takes into account George Berkeley's philosophical system, using it as an example in order to show how a complex system of ideas is generated from – and obeys – a simple, visual intuition of human spirit. In his arguments Bergson points out that in Berkeley's theory God is behind any manifestation of matter; God imprints perceptions in anyone, but "the beings" collecting these perceptions are characterized as being *wills*. The boundaries of these wills are unceasingly provided by *God's own will*. What Berkeley means is very clearly expressed in the mystical words of a pioneer of interfaith communion, [Thomas Merton](#):

*"A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying Him. It "consents," so to speak, to His creative love. It is expressing an idea which is in God and which is not distinct from the essence of God, and therefore a tree imitates God by being a tree. The more a tree is like itself, the more it is like Him."*  
(Merton, 1958)

In summary, where man's will and God's will meet through their perception, there *we have matter*. The image Bergson offers to explain how Berkeley perceived matter is that of

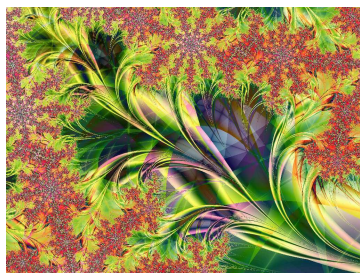
*"...a subtle, transparent film lying between man and God."* (Bergson, 1938)

Bergson points out that this visual image is not clearly present in Berkeley's original words. Instead, the Irish philosopher recurs to an auditory metaphor, by which matter is considered the *language* through which God talks to us. We should never mistake our abstract considerations of language (like grammar and syntax) for the language itself. What is most interesting for the purpose of this presentation is that, in Bergson's words, Berkeley claims that:

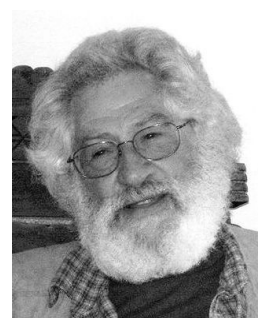
*“human spirit, matter, divine spirit, become terms that we only can express one in function of each other”* (Bergson, 1938). (Here Bergson uses the term “function” in a mathematical sense.)

Furthermore, because all these terms are pervasively tied to one another (at least to a certain extent), we have to discuss the nature of their boundaries.

### ***Fractals***



Following the classical definition, a fractal is “a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole.” (Mandelbrot, 1982). This property is called self-similarity. In nature many objects can be approximately represented by fractals to a certain degree, like coastlines, snow flakes, cauliflowers, leaves... We have to notice, anyway, that in nature fractals do not very often show a pure property of self-similarity. In Chapter Nine of the book “The Evolutionary Mind” (Sheldrake, Abraham, McKenna, 2005), the mathematician [Ralph Abraham](#) colloquially discusses fractals in the frame of chaos theory, with the help of visual examples. One is about islands: if we look at an island from high above, we see a very neat contour separating the land from the sea. The closer we get to the beach, the more we see sand in the water and water in the sand, and the distinction between the two becomes less and less. This transition has fractal characteristics.



In dynamic systems theory, both land and sea can be considered as attractors. The region where land prevails is the land's basin of attraction; where sea prevails we have instead the basin of attraction of the sea. Between the two regions we have the basin boundaries, composed by land and sea; these boundaries are fractal. In my opinion, this example is very

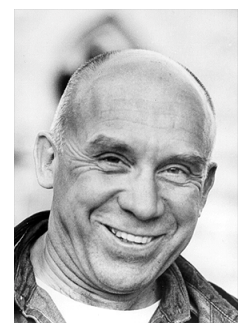
well chosen because of its ecological implications. It is very well known how human manipulation of these boundaries for economic or urban reasons (often by making them very thick, rigid and less chaotic, in other words less natural) may have disastrous long term consequences on whole ecosystems. Appropriateness of boundaries is vital for any living system. Anyway, just to remain connected to what we have discussed in the sections above, a “beach” is not an ultimate reality, but a more or less pertinent construct of our mind leading us to pay attention to reality. According to the capability and to the nature of our apparatus of observation, the “indistinct” beach may reveal itself as the result of more and more details and, most of all, intersection of orders (Bohm and Peat, 1987).

In this presentation I assume, as noted above, that human spirit, matter, and divine spirit can only be expressed each in conjunction with each other and that, in addition, *their boundaries are fractal*, and the appropriateness of these boundaries is a matter of *relationships*.

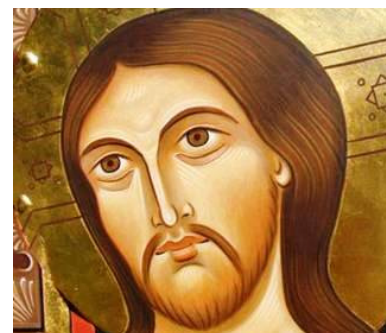
### ***About God***

In this presentation I refer to God in metaphysical terms, persuaded that no discourse about mind can ultimately stand without a foundation of this kind. Nonetheless, I have my own belief about God and I consider it more sincere, as well as useful for further discussion, to be open about that. So, when in my conceptual construction I mention “God,” I refer to He whom is best described by these words of Thomas Merton:

*“God is then the Seer and the Seeing and the Seen. God seeks Himself in us, and the aridity and the sorrow of our heart is the sorrow of God who is not known to us, who cannot yet find Himself in us because we do not dare to believe or trust the incredible truth that He could live in us, and live there out of choice, out of preference. But indeed we exist solely for this, to be the place He has chosen for his presence, His manifestation in the world, His epiphany.”* (Merton, 1967)



Though the following two images come from different religions, both are about Divinity and glance. In the “reclining Buddha” of Punnarowa, Sri Lanka, eyes are closed, and glance is turned inwardly.



In the “Saint Damiano Crucifix”, Assisi, Italy, the eyes are wide open, looking outwardly. Both diffuse infinite compassion, peace and power.

### ***Dreaming a workable world***

As we have seen above, Bergson’s metaphor about Berkeley’s material world was that of a “subtle film” featuring the boundaries between man’s will and perception on one side, and God’s will and perception on the other side.

Let’s keep this metaphor in mind, but make some subtle changes in it.

First, assume that not only humans as individuals on one side and God, on the other side, are the participants to this game: we have also to take into account humans intended as groups, families, collectives, and all kinds of human systems. Then assume that we also have to take into account all living systems at their very different levels of complexity. Although for simple living systems we cannot talk of “will” and “perception” with the same meaning we use for human beings, modern biology (in particular biology of so-called autopoietic systems (Maturana & Varela, 1987)) states that, however simple it is, a living system masters the knowledge that it needs to remain alive and to reproduce itself. Furthermore, we should take into account the many other immaterial glances that inhabit our minds (Schinco, 2010).

Then again, the assumption that all the boundaries that we are considering have to a certain extent fractal properties might also give us a clue to addressing our speculation about a holographic view of the whole.

Finally, replace the words “will” and “perception” with the words “dream”, or “dreaming glance”.

The subtle and fractal film we get from the unceasing crossing, interfering, merging, clashing of dreams and dreaming glances is a *material world* which, in my opinion, is coherent with speculations and findings of other authors, especially with Henri Bergson in the domain of philosophy, and Jean Piaget in that of developmental psychology. It is a *workable world*, composed of relatively separated objects to manipulate and/or relate to, so as to develop logical and verbal thought. This kind of working and thinking in a material world is a diurnal

issue subjected to an aimed awareness. To prevent our diurnal aimed awareness from taking an improper role, leading to materialism, selfishness, violence and stupidity, and to obtain the opposite which could result in the further evolution of the whole living system, boundaries between our diurnal and nocturnal dreaming mind should be maintained as appropriately flexible and permeable. Without underrating any meditation or dreamworking techniques, I want to state here that this is basically an issue concerning relationships, primarily the relationships we entertain everyday among ourselves and with our environment. It ultimately implies that the way we deal both with dreams and matter has strictly to do with *ethics*.

### ***Conclusion #1***

Every day we experience the continuity existing between the material aspects of our life and the state of our individual and collective minds. One of the major obstacles to a full cultural and scientific acknowledgement of this reality is the lack of good theories that fit data coming not only from research, as Dean Radin (1997) shrewdly argued, but also from clinics, anecdotes, anthropological accounts, and popular traditions.

The pathway to such theories is still very long and can only be walked step by step by a community. I am fully aware that the hypothesis I've briefly sketched in this presentation is largely a speculation reflecting all my biases, beliefs and professional experiences.

The only way to discover if there is something good and useful in it is to share it in a community where it can be discussed, modified, rejected totally or in part, or simply considered an opportunity for other hints, clues and further reflections. Very valuable aid in developing my ideas has come from fully and seriously considering mind, individual as well as collective, as a "dreaming mind" (Van de Castle, 1994) whose boundaries have fractal peculiarities, two features that are reported from ancient times and cultures and that modern research and scholarship tend to confirm.

### ***Conclusion #2***

In this presentation I have used a lot of words. I'd like to finish following another path. Would you like to dream a little with me? Imagine first a collective of very bad will, together with a warped perception, dreaming and creating a horrible reality of torture and death: you'll

have a concentration camp. But other kinds of will and perception contribute to create the camp's reality. Imagine a mother protecting and rocking her baby child. With dreaming eyes, she looks into the eyes of her baby and sings a lullaby. Imagine now a young man of 24, a fine musician who sees it all, and within the depths of himself hears a melody rising. The melody is so lovely and full of compassion that even where apparently it should be absolutely impossible, one may sense, like George Berkley did, that "*the material world is the language of God.*" And if any of us would keep dreaming by listening to Gideon Klein's "Lullaby", composed on the 23rd of February, 1943, in the concentration camp of Terezin, here it is. Since in this rendition adapted for solo violin I am the performer, don't expect perfection (I'm just an amateur!).

[click here to play Gideon Klein's lullaby \(YouTube\)](#)

This music didn't create miracles, namely didn't save the bodily life of the children, nor of their mothers, nor the life of the musician himself, but it was able to make their lives much more beautiful, helping them to recover a meaning in their devastated lives, to smile, to love, to resist diseases and starvation. In the terms of our modern Evidence Based Medicine, it improved their health.

I hope I'll be able to answer your questions satisfactorily, and that we will carry on a meaningful dialogue. Thank you.

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